

THE POLITICS AND PREJUDICE OF “60 MINUTES”

The “60 Minutes” show of January 22, 1995 contained a segment on the Catholic dissident group Call to Action. The segment covered a Call to Action conference held in Chicago last November, treating viewers to comments from the most alienated and embittered portions of the Catholic community, such as the group Rent A Priest. Yet according to Executive Producer Barry Lando, the segment was supposed to provide a look “at the state of the Catholic Church in the U.S. today.”

No attempt was made to balance the piece with a more informed and representative voice from the Catholic community, though “60 Minutes” had on tape an interview with two lay authorities on the Catholic Church, interviews that had been commissioned by “60 Minutes” for the express purpose of responding to the Call to Action segment. Harvard Law Professor Mary Ann Glendon and Ethics and Public Policy Center President George Weigel were summoned to New York on December 4, 1994 for the interview. However, within a few days, Mike Wallace called to tell them that their interview had been dropped because “the chemistry just wasn’t right.”

Catholic League president William Donohue had this to say about the event:

“The entire Call to Action segment was, from beginning to end, an exercise in intellectual dishonesty and journalistic malpractice. The decision to give high profile to the Catholic Church’s radical fringe was pure politics, and it is nothing short of outrageous that Barry Lando and Mike Wallace solicited, and then rejected, views that would have provided for some semblance of fairness. Allowing extremists an uncontested opportunity to rail against the Catholic Church distorts the sentiments of most Catholics and provides succor

for bigots.

“There is a difference between reporting dissent, and promoting it. By refusing to air the interviews with Mary Ann Glendon and George Weigel, ‘60 Minutes’ made clear its preference, extending to the disaffected a platform that they have never earned within the Catholic community. It is not hard to orchestrate any result, not when there is a determined effort to manipulate and steer the outcome. This is propaganda at work, not journalism.”

The Catholic League is the nation’s largest Catholic civil rights organization. It defends the right of Catholics—lay and clergy alike—to participate in American life without defamation or discrimination.