

“RELIGULOUS” IS MORE ABSURD THAN HATEFUL

Catholic League director of communications Susan A. Fani attended a preview of the Bill Maher movie, “Religulous,” in New York City. In her report to Bill Donohue, it was clear that the documentary was more absurd than hateful.

Bill Maher has been on a crusade smearing Catholicism for many years, sometimes viciously doing so. It was therefore expected that “Religulous” would offer more of the same. But in fairness, this did not happen. As we already knew, Maher’s movie was not going to single out Catholicism for derision—Protestantism, Judaism, Islam and other religions were afforded cheap shots—but what we didn’t know is that he wouldn’t succumb to the kind of slanderous assaults on priests, for instance, that he has made in the past. Nor did we know that he would resist making vile comments about core religious beliefs.

We weren’t the only ones who thought the film was juvenile and poorly done. Rafar Guzman of *Newsday* called the film, “a nasty, condescending, small-minded film, self-amused and ultimately self-defeating,” full of “cheap shots and vulgar humor.” The AP’s Christine Lemire saw the movie as Maher “preaching to the choir,” and wouldn’t resonate with most people.

But Maher did pack more in his punch against Christianity while holding back a bit on members of the Jewish and Muslim faiths. Roger Moore of the *Orlando Sentinel* said of Maher, “He’s not quite an equal-opportunity offender. Maher travels to the Wailing Wall but goes awfully easy on the Chosen People...and limits himself to religions with apocalyptic leanings.”

Stephen Holden of the *New York Times* picked up on Maher's tip-toeing around the questions surrounding Jews and Muslims: "When 'Religulous' turns from evangelical Christianity to Judaism and Islam, its tone becomes uncertain and its rhythm choppy. An attitude of glib condescension is inadequate to address clashing religions that have turned the Middle East into an ideological cauldron. Jihadism and Orthodox Judaism are red-hot topics that Mr. Maher addresses too sketchily to convey the same authority he brings to Christianity."

It looks like the public didn't care too much for the movie either. The film came in 10th after its first weekend out, and dropped to 13th the next weekend.

We took note of what Maher said to Jay Leno on October 8. When asked about all of the fuss the film has caused, Maher said he was told backstage that Bill Donohue wants to fight him. That's true. Regrettably, Maher still shows no interest.

In any event, it seems that Maher produced a dud, not that we were worried; the Catholic Church has survived far worse.