

REPORT FROM HOLLYWOOD

by William A. Donohue

My trip to Hollywood proved to be productive. First I met with Jeffrey Katzenberg of DreamWorks and then I participated in a conference sponsored by the American Cinema Foundation and the UCLA Center for Communication Policy.

I liked Katzenberg. He is an extraordinary bright and affable person, the kind of no-nonsense, yet friendly, person that I resonate with best. He asked me to see a portion of the yet unfinished animated movie, Prince of Egypt. The film is a contemporary adaptation of the Biblical story of Moses and the exodus from Egypt

From what I was able to see, the movie should be received well by Catholics and many others: it is respectful, serious and entertaining.

What impressed me most about Katzenberg (he is the one who gave us The Lion King when he was with Disney) was his genuine interest in appealing to leaders in various faith communities. After all, it is not commonplace that Catholics are asked to give their input to anything Hollywood does these days. And Katzenberg isn't blowing smoke: he has hired a very dedicated and talented woman, Tzivia Schwartz-Getzug, to concentrate solely on reaching out to religious leaders.

Katzenberg has invited me to come back in the fall to preview the movie in its entirety. I will do that. Assuming the movie stands up to what I've been exposed to already, I would hope that Catholics would support it. If it is right for us to complain when a complaint is necessary, it is only right that we give kudos to those who deserve it. Katzenberg, and producer Penney Finkelman Cox, are worthy of our praise.

My experience at the conference was, well, different. Hundreds

of Hollywood executives were present, the purpose of which was to exchange views with a handful of persons drawn from various advocacy groups.

I'm glad that the panel I was on wasn't scheduled until the afternoon. By that time I had had enough. If there is one thing I can't stand is hypocrisy and that explains why my blood was boiling when it came time to speak. Here's why.

The day began with some past executive from ABC rambling on about this and that. What caught my attention was his statement that the "truth is relative." What also caught my attention is that no one seemed to cringe, save me.

Now if the truth is relative, then nothing matters—there is no such thing as right or wrong. This, in a nutshell, is what's wrong with Hollywood (and with much of the country), yet the shame of it is that those who believe in such nonsense aren't ashamed to believe in it.

One person who knows that the truth isn't relative is Terry Jonas, president of Warner Bros. Television. Speaking to us at lunch, he said that he would put anything on TV except Nazis. "So he doesn't like Nazis," I said sarcastically. Those at my table stared at me, and then I exclaimed, "Well, neither do I. In fact, I think Nazis should be shot. But why is it that he isn't bothered by anything else that's on TV?" No one spoke.

Mr. Jonas also told us that he is a family man that whenever he checks into a hotel with his family, he has the porno channel yanked. This admission came after two other men, one from ABC and the other from Columbia TriStar, stated that they never allow their kids to watch what's on TV at 8:00. In fact, they both said that they watch nothing but Nickelodeon. One of them said the TV is always turned to the Nickelodeon channel in his house.

Then I got a chance to sound off. I began by telling the crowd that they were a bunch of hypocrites, bordering on being

liars. How dare they tell us that what they are producing isn't good enough for their kids. Precisely which kids is it good for, I asked. Isn't it nice to know that while other kids are getting their minds polluted with the rot that's on TV, the sons and daughters of those who make this garbage are watching "I Love Lucy."

Obviously, I also told the crowd to lay off the Church. When asked what could be done to please me, I said they could all learn from Jeffrey Katzenberg. They could begin by employing someone like Tzivia to reach out to us.

I can say this much. The Catholic League is well-known in Hollywood, and even after my talk, I had the chance to speak to many executives who are trying to do the right thing. So there is good and bad in Hollywood, just like any place else.

And yes, I was spared the goat cheese and white wine. Jeff Katzenberg told me he wouldn't think of having anything but pizza and beer. My kind of guy.