

SECULAR ELITES LIKE HBO'S "THE NEW POPE"

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on the HBO film, "The New Pope," which starts tonight:

HBO previously treated us to "The Young Pope," and tonight it is ready to roll out its new mini-series, "The New Pope."

We have been tracking what the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* have been saying about the Catholic Church for decades, and it will shock no one to learn that they are not exactly our biggest fans. More proof was offered today with the reviews of the first episode of "The New Pope." What they said tells us as much about them as it does HBO, another media outlet that likes to stick it to the Church.

Here are some excerpts from Mike Hale's review in the *New York Times*:

- "The initial series ended with Pius XIII, the beautiful young pope [Jude] Law embodies, collapsing just as he appeared to find his faith."
- "'The New Pope' begins nine months later with Pius in a coma....Our first sight is a naked Pius receiving a sponge bath from a trembling young nun. She gazes at the small cloth covering the papal package, then lies down while the camera pulls in on her Vermeer-like visage."
- The film deals with "the real-world issues that dog the church—pedophilia scandals, retrograde attitudes toward homosexuality, lousy treatment of women."
- "Opening credits play over recurring scenes of cloistered nuns shrugging off their shapeless smocks and dancing before a towering neon cross."
- "[Cécile] De France, as the church's image director, and [Ludivine] Sagnier, as a woman closely connected to

Pius, are consigned to subsidiary and often half-clothed roles. In a particularly risible conjuration of the virgin-whore paradigm, Sagnier's Esther slides into prostitution to the sound of 'Ave Maria.'"

- "Among the men, Law's Pius is a silent presence through much of the season and [John] Malkovich's John Paul is mostly sad-eyed and mopey. Malkovich makes the ennui pretty consistently amusing, especially in a scene in which a star-struck John Paul gets to meet Sharon Stone (playing herself), complete with sophomoric 'Basic Instinct' joke."
- "And the real theme of 'The New Pope,' as it tracks the machinations of the small circle of cardinals and laypeople who operate behind the papal skirts, is not philosophy or God but the exercise of power. It has strong elements of workplace sitcom, but it even more closely resembles another venerable genre: the Mafia movie."

Here are some excerpts of Hank Stuever's review in the *Washington Post*:

- The film is "filled with forbidden delights, such as the sight of young nuns disrobing and dancing to this season's throbbing new theme song ('Good Time Girl' by Sofi Tukker featuring Charlie Barker, one of many ace picks on the show's playlist) as their cloister house pulses with colorful strobes. Their superior—a cigar-chomping little person in full habit—dances her own jig."
- "The director is similarly committed to conveying church corruption as something one senses rather than reveals, picking up on visual cues that range from the awkward to the sinfully repugnant to outright garnish and menacing, all set against extravagant interiors and exquisite exteriors."
- "Though [Cardinal Angelo] Voiello aspires to be the next

pope, the college of cardinals elects an easily intimidated Franciscan, who names himself Francis II and immediately goes on a power trip, bringing in a troop of enforcer monks to liquidate the Vatican's wealth and give it all to the poor. Small wonder, then, that he mysteriously drops dead."

- "John Paul muddles through an agenda that seems primarily focused on meeting his favorite celebrities. These include Marilyn Manson, playing himself, a rock star so out of touch he has no idea who or what the pope is, and Sharon Stone, also appearing in a brief cameo as herself. (Stone tells the pope that it's time for the church to approve same-sex marriage. 'Can't the Bible be upgraded?' she asks.")

No one at the Catholic League will be watching. That's because we'll be tuned in to the LSU-Clemson game. No doubt the giddy crowd will be watching.