

SELECTIVE USE OF RED FLAGS

We're always complaining how some in the media love to red flag the Catholic status of an accused offender even though his religious affiliation is unrelated to the story (e.g., ex-altar boy arrested for drugs). Similarly, we object when Catholic priests are identified as miscreants in movies. But now we have something altogether different: the failure to note the Catholicity of a hero.

TNT recently aired a movie entitled, "Passing Glory," that put a relatively positive spin on a priest who sought to break the race barrier while working in a sports program at a Louisiana Catholic High School. In the film, the priest is shown wearing his collar, but in the promotional ad for the movie, the collar is missing.

One media source that did not miss an opportunity to red flag the Catholicity of a newsworthy individual was the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. Not too long ago it ran a story on seven teenagers implicated in a murder. Readers learned that one of the accused, Jessica Holtmeyer, had been "an altar server at St. Francis Catholic Church." We wrote to the newspaper noting that this girl's status "stood in marked contrast to your failure to refer to the religious background of *any* of the six other persons implicated in this horrendous crime."

How, then, to account for this contrary behavior? TNT should have identified the heroic priest as a priest, but didn't. The *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* shouldn't have identified the girl as a Catholic, but did. So let's take a stab at what's going on.

As for TNT, they assume that if viewers know in advance that a movie features a good-guy priest, few will watch. So better to spring the bad news on them after they've gotten into the plot. What this says, of course, is that there are so many

bigots out there that ratings will drop and advertisers will run away if a priest is portrayed as a priest and not as a monster.

As for the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, they assume that if they didn't identify the accused murderer as an ex-altar server, then they'd be open to the charge of sexism. After all, since it's routine in journalism to mention that some guy thugs have been altar boys, why should girl thugs who have been altar servers not be identified? It's one thing to tolerate anti-Catholicism (a plus), quite another to tolerate sexism (a minus).

While these two anecdotes prove nothing, when combined with similar episodes, they reveal a persistent bias.