

DISNEY STONEWALLS CATHOLICS, TRIGGERING REVOLT

Speaking for Walt Disney Company Chairman Michael Eisner, John Dreyer, Vice President of Corporate Communications, said today that Disney would take absolutely no responsibility for the Miramax-released movie "Priest." In a conversation with Catholic League president William Donohue, Mr. Dreyer contended that there is no association between Disney and the movie, and that therefore there was no need for Disney to dissociate itself from Miramax on this matter.

Dr. Donohue made the following statement on this subject today:

"I told Mr. Dreyer that if he wants to take the position that Disney has nothing to dissociate itself from, then he should tell that to the public, but not to me. The public, I said, will decide whether that is a convincing position for the parent company to take. I inquired of Mr. Dreyer whether he thought that Disney's relationship with Miramax was identical to that of Disney's relationship with, say, McDonald's, or with Thom McAn's, and his response was merely to restate the position that, other than ownership, Disney has no association with Miramax. His testiness to this line of inquiry was itself most revealing.

"Having stonewalled the Catholic League-and by extension many Catholics-we are embarking on a nationwide campaign aimed at Disney. We are calling for a boycott of all Disney products, a boycott of vacations to Disney World and Disneyland and a boycott of the Disney cable television channel. We are also asking the public to call Disney and tie up the lines by making a complaint. This is not something that might happen, rather it is something that is already underway. Indeed, Disney has already disabled one of its phone numbers due to

the public's response.

"In our May *Catalyst*, the journal of the Catholic League, we will provide postcards for our members to register their outrage at Disney. We will take out ads in nationwide newspapers targeting Disney. We will work in concert with those organizations that have already come forward, and will seek the cooperation of others. We will call on all Catholic organizations to sell Disney stock and we will submit a resolution at the next stockholders' meeting (sponsoring stockholders have already come forth) that will effectively register our concerns. Perhaps most damaging, we will use every means of communication to reeducate the public as to the new face and the new status of the Walt Disney Company."

DISNEY TARGETS CATHOLICS WITH "PRIEST"

On March 24, Miramax, which is owned by Disney, will release the movie "Priest" in New York and Los Angeles; it is scheduled for release nationwide on April 14, which just happens to be Good Friday. The movie portrays five priests, all of whom live tortured lives. One is having an affair with the housekeeper and another is having sex with a male friend. There is a priest who is a drunkard, a country priest who is a madman and a bishop who is simply wicked. The point of the movie is to show that all of the priests-whether victim or villain-find themselves in their depraved condition as a direct consequence of Church teachings.

Those members of the media who would like to see the full ten-page statement that the Catholic League presented at its March

23 news conference in New York should contact the League at once.

Commenting on the movie is Catholic League president William A. Donohue:

"The movie 'Priest' is an invidious portrait of Catholic priests and the religion to which they belong. The fact that not one priest is depicted as well-adjusted and faithful to the Church is not without meaning. Indeed, had such a priest appeared in the movie, it would have made inexplicable the film's theme of blaming the institution of the Church for the maladies of its priests.

"The comments that director Antonia Bird and writer Jimmy McGovern have made to the press about the Catholic Church make it unmistakably clear that they have an animus against the Catholic Church, and it certainly finds expression in the movie.

"It is not for nothing that the film is scheduled to be released nationwide on Good Friday. This in-your-face move is intended to put salt in the wounds of Catholics and that is why the Catholic League will not take this lying down.

"If it is legally possible for the chairman of Disney, Michael Eisner, to stop the release of 'Priest' after its New York and Los Angeles showings, that is what should be done. At the very least, we would like to see a statement from Disney dissociating itself from this movie. To do nothing is to invite a protracted battle, one that risks blackening Disney's 'Snow White' reputation, to say nothing of triggering a stockholder revolt."

CATHOLICS FOR A FREE CHOICE CHALLENGED BY HOLY SEE AT U.N.

On March 15, the Holy See challenged the right of Catholics for a Free Choice to participate as a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) at the U.N. Preparatory Committee for the Fourth World Conference on Women. In a move that seconded the 1993 position of the National Catholic Conference of Bishops, the Holy See publicly disputed the right of Catholics for a Free Choice to declare itself a Catholic organization. Importantly, the Holy See sought its ouster as an NGO as well.

Dr. William A. Donohue, president of the Catholic League, offered the following statement in support of the Holy See:

"Catholics for a Free Choice has never been a legitimate voice of Catholics, either in the United States or abroad. Indeed, it is nothing but a well-funded anti-Catholic front group, one that is devoid of membership and without standing in the Catholic community. It is scandalous that the Ford Foundation and other establishment centers of power continue to fund this outfit. The Holy See has every right to expose worldwide the fraudulent status of Catholics for a Free Choice.

"We find it deeply troubling that bona fide Catholic organizations, such as the Catholic League, have not gotten a response from the NGO Accreditation panel as to whether it has been granted NGO status, and yet Catholics for a Free Choice is allowed to participate. We filed on time and have been rebuffed by the U.N. authorities every time we seek to determine what our status is. We will now ask that a list of all those organizations that were refused NGO status be made public. We also want to know the criteria that were established to make such determinations."

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.

ASSOCIATED PRESS RED FLAGS JUDGE'S CATHOLICISM

In a story on assisted suicide that ran nationwide on March 10, the Associated Press cited the religion of a federal judge who voted to uphold a Washington law barring doctors from engaging in assisted suicide. The judge in question is Judge John T. Noonan of the Ninth Circuit, and the sentence in question is the following: "Judge Noonan was an anti-abortion legal theoretician and Catholic scholar before his appointment to the bench by President Reagan in 1986."

Commenting on this is Catholic League president William Donohue:

"Why does AP think it important for the public to learn of a judge's religion if he is a Catholic? Does AP find it necessary to disclose the religion of all judges, or just Catholic ones? I do not remember seeing Jewish judges identified as such. I wonder why.

"I have written to the president and CEO of AP, Louis D. Boccardi, and to vice president and executive editor William E. Ahearn, asking for a copy of the AP policy on this matter. Assuming that the policy does not counsel a double standard, I have asked that steps be taken to discipline the reporter who red flagged Judge Noonan's religion. This kind of subtle, but nonetheless blatant, form of bigotry should never be

tolerated in the profession of journalism.

“In the event AP policy allows reporters to designate the religion of public persons in stories that have little, if anything, to do with religion, then we would like to see recent examples of this practice. If there is no anti-Catholic bigotry to worry about, we expect full and immediate disclosure. We will be sure to share our findings with interested parties in the media.”

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GEORGE WENDT SHOW OFFENDS CATHOLICS

The March 8 premier of the “George Wendt Show” was a crude portrayal of the Catholic religious and clergy. It stereotyped nuns and priests in a most negative fashion, it repeatedly trotted out the old canard about “Catholic guilt” and it took liberties with statues of Catholic saints. But most disturbing was the way the Irish priest was characterized: he was not only cruel, he was fundamentally dishonest. From beginning to end, the show seemed designed to insult Catholics.

Dr. William A. Donohue, president of the Catholic League, issued this remark about the show:

“It is no wonder that *Variety* labeled the script of the ‘George Wendt Show’ as a ‘mean, even vicious’ attack on the

Catholic Church. It was surely that. But it was also one more example of the duplicity of CBS. This is the same network that would not dare offend African Americans with negative stereotypes, and that is why CBS refuses to show the reruns of 'Amos and Andy.'

"We will notify our 200,000 members and every bishop in the United States about this show. And we won't forget to contact the sponsors as well. If the producers of the 'George Wendt Show' think that this program was just fun and games, then I would ask that they persuade the officials at CBS to bring back 'Amos and Andy.' If this is unacceptable, we would surely want to know why."

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