

ABC AFFILIATES TARGETED OVER “NOTHING SACRED”

The Catholic League announced today that it is asking every ABC affiliate to preempt “Nothing Sacred” this fall with another show.

Commenting on this decision is league president William Donohue:

“It is our hope that at least some ABC affiliates will act responsibly and preempt “Nothing Sacred” with some other show. Not to do so would be to sanction what is obviously a highly politicized and patently unfair portrayal of Catholic priests.

“It is a telling commentary that the executive producers, David Manson and Richard Kramer, are non-Catholics who don’t believe in God. It is also revealing that the actor who plays the lead priest, Kevin Anderson, is proud of his lapsed Catholic status and boasts of not going to church for 18 years, he also doesn’t believe in God. Yet when it comes to doing shows about other segments of society, these same Hollywood phonies are ever so sensitive to make certain that only a genuinely politically-correct picture is offered.

“All this talk by the producers that they are trying to “humanize” priests in “Nothing Sacred” is insulting: do they think that most Catholics look at their parish priests as though they were made of wood? No, the goal here is to market the only kind of priest that the Disney crowd can stomach, namely a priest who is as far from resembling the Holy Father as they are from resembling decency.

“We are presently considering a range of options for dealing with this assault on Catholicism. In the meantime, it is our hope that the affiliates will exercise their autonomy by sending a message to Michael Eisner.”

PILOT FOR “NOTHING SACRED” WORSE THAN EXPECTED

On July 10, the Catholic League protested the ABC show “Nothing Sacred.” Our protest was largely based on the incendiary promotional material that ABC released. Now that the staff has reviewed the pilot, we are in a position to comment more authoritatively on the show.

William Donohue explained the league’s position as follows:

“There are two major objections to ‘Nothing Sacred’: a) the show promotes the most positive stereotype of Catholics who dissent from Church teachings while fostering the most negative stereotype of those who remain loyal to the Church and b) the show deliberately denigrates the official teachings of the Church by unfavorably contrasting them to the trendy positions of dissenting Catholics.

“The leading priest, Father Ray, comes from a dysfunctional family, thinks of his vocation as merely a job, admits that he isn’t sure of the existence of God, violates his duty as a confessor and rejects the Church’s teachings on sexuality. But he loves the homeless, ponders a love affair with an old flame and tells his adversaries to ‘go fax yourself.’ Quite naturally, those Catholics who accept the teachings of the Magisterium are portrayed as cold-hearted, selfish and tyrannical persons.

“It is amazing to hear Father Ray tell his parishioners that it’s time to ‘call a moratorium on the sins of the flesh’; he then says that the Church’s teachings on homosexuality, promiscuity, abortion and contraception can be ignored because the Bible says little or nothing about them. He boasts that he

will no longer be a 'sexual traffic cop' and advises those who want such a priest to go elsewhere.

"This Disney/ABC show is nothing more than a political statement against the Catholic Church. The goal is to put a positive spin on Catholic priests who prefer Hollywood's libertine vision of sexuality to the moral teachings of the Church. This propaganda is fodder for dissenting Catholics and anti-Catholic bigots alike. We hope that others will join with us in what is only the beginning of our protest.

"Disney/ABC would never put a positive spin on a priest who rejected the Church's teachings on welfare reform, nuclear war, immigration and the death penalty, for to do so would be to undermine their own politics. On the other hand, if they really believe that Father Ray is not offensive, then why not make him a black minister or a Jewish rabbi?"

MTV'S "THE REAL WORLD" SLAMS CATHOLICISM

The sixth season premiere of MTV's "The Real World" opened July 16 with an attack on Catholicism. The show features a group of strangers from various backgrounds who come to work and live together. Two of the seven characters are identified as Catholics; curiously, we learn nothing of the religious affiliation of the other five. What we do learn is that Catholicism is viewed with disdain. Here is a sample:

- The roommate of a Catholic woman says that discussions about the Catholic Church make her "scared."
- The same person admits that she is proudly anti-Christian because the Church is "really bad for women."

- A “Virgin Mary night light” is dubbed “kind of funny” by the owner.
- Catholicism is labeled “dogmatic Christianity.”
- The Catholic woman is accused of trying to bring her values into the bedroom; she is also targeted by the group as a candidate that “we’re gonna corrupt.”

William Donohue commented on the show today:

“MTV has often been criticized for showing bad taste, but its latest venture into Catholic bashing surpasses its previous decadence. None of the attacks on Catholicism can be seen as merely controversial commentary, for if that were the case then other groups would be selected for ridicule as well. No, this is calculated old-fashioned anti-Catholicism.

“No doubt the reason that Catholicism is made the butt of such derision has to do with the contrasting values that MTV and the Church have: MTV’s hedonistic message is constantly being challenged by the Roman Catholic Church and that is not something the trendy-types can stand.

“It is our hope that TV media critics take due note of MTV’s latest foray against elementary standards of decency. The more the public learns of MTV’s bigotry, the less likely they will be to support it. We hope to do our part by contacting the program’s sponsors.”

NOTHING SACRED ABOUT DISNEY’S “NOTHING SACRED”

ABC’s fall schedule includes “Nothing Sacred,” a drama about a Catholic priest that few Catholics would recognize as one of

their own. Slotted for prime time on Thursday evenings (8 p.m. ET), the show stars Kevin Anderson as Father Ray. The character is described by *Entertainment Weekly* as an "irreverent priest who questions the existence of God, feels lust in his heart, and touches people's souls." The *Tampa Tribune* says that the priest "faces a corrupt parish and self-doubt." From the *Orange County Register*, we learn that the show stars an "iconoclastic priest with a prodigiously sinning parish."

ABC, which is owned by Disney, describes the show as follows: "It's tough being a priest in the '90s, just ask Father Ray (Kevin Anderson). In one morning alone, he has nearly been fired for advising a pregnant teenager to follow her own instincts. He has had to turn down a bribe in the confessional, even though he's desperate for money to keep his church afloat. His college flame has just walked back into his life and reignited old passions. And now his mentor is asking him to deliver a sermon proving the existence of God. How should he know if God exists?...he hasn't even read the book yet!"

William Donohue commented on the show today:

"The last time Disney portrayed the Catholic clergy was in its Miramax production 'Priest,' and now it appears that it is picking up where it left off by providing viewers with another sick look at priests. For some reason, Disney seems to bear an animus against Catholicism, and that is why it is bent on fostering the most negative stereotype of priests that it can offer.

"On March 28, 1995, the Catholic League was the first organization in the nation to call for a boycott of Disney. It is great news to know that so many others have now followed suit. What 'Nothing Sacred' demonstrates is that the culture war will continue and that is why we will do all we can to rally the public against Disney for its latest outrage."

NPR DELIGHTS IN OFFENDING CATHOLICS

The Weekend Edition of National Public Radio (NPR) for July 5 aired a segment with host Scott Simon and musical satirist, Tom Lehrer, that was as insulting as it was unwarranted. Lehrer sang "The Vatican Rag," a song that disparages Catholicism by ridiculing the Eucharist ("Try playing it safer, Drink the wine and chew the wafer") the doctrine of Transubstantiation (Two, four, six, eight, Time to transubstantiate) and other Catholic teachings. He sang the song after first admitting that the last time he sang it he encountered "a lot of reaction."

After the song was finished, Lehrer said that he did not think it was sacrilegious because "it just makes fun of rituals, not the doctrines." In fact, just the opposite is true. It should be noted that Simon praised Lehrer.

William Donohue outlined the league's objections:

"When Catholics object to the insults of a Howard Stern, it is with the understanding that the marketplace allows for such abuse. But when Catholics object to the insults of NPR, the situation is much more serious because it is government that allows for the abuse. As a publicly-funded entity, NPR is entrusted with public responsibilities, and surely among them is the duty not to unwarrantedly offend the sensibilities of any segment of society.

"One of the lyrics says something about being a good 'Ave Maria,' which is striking: it is not likely that NPR would air the singing of the 'Ave Maria' because that might offend some listeners and might transgress church and state lines.

However, these same sages think nothing of airing a song that blasphemes Catholicism. The lesson seems to be that if it is Catholics who are offended, too bad, and if it is the state that is crossing church and state lines, then that's okay. We say tell it to the Congressional Appropriations Committees."

SONY WITHDRAWS OFFENSIVE CD

Last Christmas, Columbia Records, which is owned by Sony, released a CD entitled ***O Come All Ye Faithful: Rock for Choice***. Proceeds from this "Christmas" album were earmarked to promote legal abortion and were distributed to Rock for Choice, a group of pro-abortion musicians; Rock for Choice was founded by the pro-abortion organization, the Feminist Majority. In the promotional material accompanying this CD, legal abortion was dubbed "the most spiritual of gifts."

After the CD was released, many influential Catholic leaders and organizations (including the Catholic League) registered their outrage at Sony President, Thomas Mottola. The response that was provided by the Senior Vice President for Communications, Patricia Kiel, was uniformly obnoxious: we were told that Sony "regrets" that the album has caused us "such concern and discomfort."

The next person that leading Catholics, and Protestants, contacted was Norio Ohga, Chairman and CEO of Sony in Japan. He didn't even have the courtesy to reply. So in June, the Catholic League contacted Mr. Mottola outlining its new strategy. William Donohue explains what followed:

"Last month I informed Sony President Mottola that unless he retired the offending CD, I would publish an Op-Ed page ad in the *New York Times* calling for a boycott of all Sony products;

the ad would appear just as the Christmas shopping spree begins, the week before Thanksgiving. In addition, I pledged to garner the support of dozens of Christian, Jewish and Muslim organizations, as well as many pro-life groups, denouncing Sony in a press conference for its irresponsibility.

“I am happy to report that today I received a letter from Mr. Mottola stating that ‘We have no plans of re-releasing this album or another similar album this Christmas.’ He wants us to believe that ‘the sales cycle of this album has run its course.’ Let him say what he wants—we are only too glad he got the message.”