

# TIME ADMITS ERROR

In last month's *Catalyst*, we ran a story on how *Time* magazine gave the impression to readers that the Church had apologized for "collaborating" with the Nazis during World War II. It has now admitted that this was an error, though it refuses to run William Donohue's letter and refuses to publish a retraction.

Here is what *Time* said on January 26: "In 1997 the Roman Catholic Church finally said it was sorry for collaborating with the Nazis during World War II." Donohue called the magazine asking for the evidence and was quickly told that *Time* would publish a retraction. When a letter from Amy Musher of the Editorial Offices arrived, it said the following:

"A review of the record shows that while French bishops recently apologized for silence and inaction during the Holocaust, and the Pope expressed remorse for certain teachings that contributed to Jewish persecution, we indeed erred in referring to a Roman Catholic Church apology for 'collaborating' with the Nazis. We regret the error and, although your letter was not published, we have circulated it among the appropriate editors so that they may correct their files."

Musher's letter of February 19 is not satisfactory. For *Time* to admit that it erred in making such an invidious comparison, and then not to print a retraction, is scurrilous. This was not a small error: millions of people read this magazine and will now falsely conclude that the Catholic Church worked hand in hand with Hitler. The timing is also bad, coming as it did just before the Vatican published its long-awaited document on the Holocaust.

It just goes to show how seriously some in the business take the whole concept of journalistic ethics. It also goes to show

how rumors get started and how injustice gets triggered.

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## RETURN OF SINEAD

The new Neil Jordan movie, "The Butcher Boy," scheduled to open in select theaters on April 3, features Irish lout Sinead O'Connor. The singer-actress-bigot plays the role of the Virgin Mary, making a spectacle of herself for uttering vulgarities. She recently told reporters, "I tend to think that if Mary was around now she might say something like f-!" That's one good reason why she shouldn't try to think.

Playing Mary as a foul-mouthed troublemaker is vintage Sinead. She is the same person who tore up a picture of the pope on "Saturday Night Live" in 1990. Her role in "The Butcher Boy" adds to her resume: in a vision seen by a teen-ager, Sinead appears as the Virgin Mary, instructing the kid to go on a murder spree, complete with four-letter words.

One internet movie reviewer, "Frank's 500," said the film "is bizarre, often splendidly surreal, steeped in cynicism and anti-clericalism." That's why he likes it. He even praises Neil Jordan for "casting Sinead O'Connor as the Virgin Mary whose use of the 'F-word' might well, I would have thought, land him in even more trouble with the Catholic Church..." Then, in a sentence that is as dishonest as it is revealing, he writes, "Regrettably, however, the line works perfectly in context of the narrative and is one of the many elements that help make this bizarre and often splendidly surreal fable superbly entertaining."

We await the day when a movie that disparages Catholicism will be beaten up by the reviewers. But from the looks of things, it'll take a miracle of sorts before this happens.

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# **“FOUR CORNERS” WAS NO “NOTHING SACRED”**

The CBS show, “Four Corners,” was cut after just two shows. The drama featured a Catholic priest who was pursued by an attractive young woman.

In its debut, “Four Corners” ranked 65<sup>th</sup> in program households for the week of Feb. 23-March 1, posting a modest 6.9/11 ratings/share split; the second show lost 45% of its audience from the week before. In contrast, the ABC show, “Nothing Sacred,” which features a dissenting priest who doubts the existence of God, has averaged 107<sup>th</sup> place in the rankings. Moreover, in 13 of its first 14 episodes (the lone exception being its much-hyped debut), “Nothing” pulled much smaller audiences than “Four Corners” did, yet it survives.

The league compared the two shows in a news release:

“Some were surprised that the Catholic League didn’t complain about ‘Four Corners,’ and no one was more astonished than *Los Angeles Times* critic, Howard Rosenberg. But these critics miss the point: we never criticized ‘Four Corners’ because, unlike ‘Nothing Sacred,’ there was nothing offensive about it.

“That in the CBS show Father Tomas was the subject of sexual advances is of no consequence; he resisted all of them and was never portrayed in a manner that denigrated his role as a priest. For the same reason, the Catholic League never criticized Father Ray for being tempted by an old flame. Our singular criticism of ‘Nothing Sacred’ has been that it is pure propaganda for those who want to put a positive spin on dissenting priests and a negative spin on those who are loyal

to the Church.

“It seems plain that ‘Four Corners’ and ‘Nothing Sacred’ have failed because they exploit Catholic themes without satisfying the hunger that viewers have for religious-based drama programs. The remaining difference is that ABC has an agenda and CBS does not. But it’s only a matter of time before ‘Nothing Sacred’ gets kicked in the can.”

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## MEDIA BIAS IN OHIO CRIME STORY

It happens all the time. Someone who commits a crime and attends a Catholic school has his religion gratuitously cited. Only this time, the reference was more than unnecessary, it was inaccurate.

Audrey Iacona is a 17 year-old Ohio girl convicted of involuntary manslaughter in the death of her newborn baby boy. While she formerly attended Holy Name High School near Cleveland, the school she was enrolled in at the time of her trial was a public school, Highland High. Yet it was her Catholic school affiliation that the media flagged.

The Associated Press carried the story nationwide stating that Iacona was “a former student at Holy Name High School near Cleveland”; it never cited her current status at Highland. Similarly, WTAM radio in Cleveland reported that the girl was a product of a “Catholic high school.” Worst of all was the Cleveland *Plain Dealer*, which not only never mentioned Iacona’s attendance at a public school, but actually opened its story with “Catholic schoolgirl Audrey Iacona...”

The league wrote to all three media sources explaining its concerns. So far, we are relatively pleased with what we've heard.

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## NOT FOR NOTHING IS "NOTHING" LAST

They said it couldn't be done. No one believed it was possible. But they did it. They broke their own record: on March 7, "Nothing Sacred" posted ratings so bad—only 6% of the available audience watched it—that one TV insider said this represents "reverse appointment viewing," meaning, he said, that 94% made plans *not* to watch the show.

The March 7 show scored 3.1 in the ratings when aired at 9:00 p.m., EST. As the *New York Post* put it, "That's worse than many of the series on mini-networks WB and UPN—which is why industry insiders yesterday were buzzing that ABC will pull the priest drama from the lineup as soon as this week."

The league wasted no time informing the media of what it thought about the news:

"The handwriting has been on the wall from last September, but the politically brazen writers, producers and directors of 'Nothing' refuse to listen to the voice of grassroots Catholics. However, they can't buck the market and that's the beauty of a democracy.

"The apologists for 'Nothing' have said for months that the reason the show is a bomb is because it is forced to compete with NBC's star-studded Thursday night lineup. So ABC switched the show to Saturday night. When that didn't work, actor Kevin

Anderson complained that too many people were 'frying eggs' at 8:00 p.m. So ABC switched the show to 9:00 p.m. And now the show has broken its own lousy record, making the Nielsen auditors wonder if the only Catholics left watching the show are those too comatose to know what they're watching.

"Maybe they should put the show on at 3:00 a.m., that way they wouldn't have to fight the competition or worry about people flipping eggs. But it seems their minds are too scrambled to figure that one out."

The *Washington Post* gave "Nothing" fans more bad news when it said that the show was tied for 107<sup>th</sup> place after the first 11 episodes. Indeed, ABC has already announced that it is canceling the last two shows. There's a reason for this: the last two episodes would mean that "Nothing" would run during the beginning of the May Sweeps and ABC can't let that happen.

The March 14 episode of "Nothing" explains why the show is a loser. When Father Ray's mother calls him "Father Ray," he objects, saying "Please don't call me that." On this one, we have to agree: social workers are not priests. Indeed, even one of the cops (this "religious" show loves violence) says to Ray's family, "You don't need a cop, you need a social worker." It would be more accurate to say that the family needs a priest.

In the same show, Father Leo exclaims from the pulpit, "I stopped preaching when I lost my faith in the Resurrection." League members should know that this show was hailed by the *Tidings*, the newspaper of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, as worthy of a "Lenten reflection." Also in this episode, when Ray's status as a priest is noted, he snaps "it's not a compliment," thus baring his soul yet again. Most interesting, too, was his quip that he wants his dysfunctional family to love one another, "without the drinking, the religion," etc. Now that's worth at least a half-dozen Lenten reflections.

Disney's in a jam over more than "Nothing." When Michael Eisner of Disney took over ABC in 1995, the network was in first place. In 1997 it slipped to third place, prompting Eisner to remark that he never would allow ABC to finish third again. He was right: in March it was announced that ABC had slipped to fourth place. This was the first time in television history that a new network, in this case FOX, actually captured more viewers than one of the original big three.

The Disney/ABC gang have only themselves to blame. They put on shows like "Soul Man," which is a smash, and spend virtually nothing to promote it, all because ABC Entertainment president Jamie Tarses doesn't like it. According to one TV executive, "ABC is embarrassed that the show ['Soul Man'] is a success because it goes against their plan to yuppify the network." But Tarses likes "Nothing" and sticks with it even when its ratings plummet.

One of the reasons why Tarses is failing is because she's listening to the wrong people. For example, we now have the spectacle of Father Andrew Greeley pointing his finger at ABC claiming that the network is anti-Catholic because it's having second thoughts about airing a "Nothing" episode about a gay priest dying of AIDS. Not for nothing, we say, is "Nothing" in last place. And not for nothing is the last laugh on them.