

ANOTHER IRREVERENT CARTOON

For sheer coarseness, it would be hard for any cartoon to top TV's "South Park." That is why we don't think that the new NBC cartoon, "God, the Devil and Bob" will reach that level. But it certainly doesn't promise to be the cartoon analogue of "Touched by an Angel," either.

Before the show debuted on March 9, six NBC affiliates stated they would not run the program. As it turned out, the opening show wasn't blatantly offensive, though it did trivialize religion and had a number of tasteless moments. There were a few unfair swipes at evangelicals, but there were none against Catholicism.

Bill Donohue and Pat Scully were interviewed by the press about the show. They said they would monitor the program and see how it develops. There is an upcoming episode where God has a girlfriend, voiced by Elizabeth Taylor. One of the consultants to the show, Rabbi Harold Schulweis, advised the producer, Matthew Carlson, that such a concept was "out of line, even for a cartoon."

Carlson is a former Catholic seminary student and one of his advisers is Father Bud Keiser, a priest who loved "Nothing Sacred." There was no report that Father Keiser objected the way the rabbi did to the upcoming episode.

FODOR'S RECONSIDERS

In the last edition of *Catalyst*, we published a story on the Catholic bashing that appears in *Fodor's Exploring Italy* book. We have since heard from the publisher, Bonnie Ammer. She

agreed that “some of the material in these passages is inappropriate,” and pledged that “all the inappropriate references will be removed at the earliest possible publishing opportunity.”

We trust that the offensive material will be deleted.

SUSTAINABLE CHARGE OR CALUMNY?

There is much to admire about Dr. David Bennett. As superintendent of schools in Sarasota County, Florida, he is an outspoken proponent of school choice who wants the Sarasota school district to be one of the first charter districts in the state, indeed in the nation. But in the course of a recent interview he gave in *Sarasota* magazine, he attributed to the Catholic Church a legacy which calls into question his charge and reason for doing so.

Dr. Bennett wants us to believe that his early interest in civil rights came from hearing racist stories about the Catholic Church in Chicago in the 1950s and 1960s. At the dinner table, he says, there was much chatter regarding the Church’s alleged practice of buying up local homes so that blacks couldn’t purchase them. He provided no independent evidence for this charge, though he did offer specifics when referring to other chapters of his life growing up, chapters which had nothing to do with the Church.

We asked Dr. Bennett to supply us with independent verification. A charge like this should be relatively easy to demonstrate. If it isn’t, it’s called a calumny against the Catholic Church.

KEEPING THEM HONEST

There is a book called “The Dangerous Lives of Altar Boys” that contains some offensive references to Catholicism that is cause for concern. The cover of the novel looks like a comic book with all the trappings of *Mad* magazine. We wouldn’t bother mentioning this except that actress Jodie Foster is producing a movie based on the book and is featured in the film playing a one-legged nun.

The movie, which is just getting started, carries the same name of the book. It is about a gang of Catholic school friends who are caught drawing an obscene comic book and plan on rebelling by planning a heist designed to make them local legends.

Maybe there’s nothing to worry about. Just in case, we wrote to Foster and to Graham King at Initial Entertainment Group letting them know we will be keeping tabs on things. “We hope it will not be a vehicle for bashing the Catholic Church,” we said. Time will tell.

DONOHUE ROASTED IN ESQUIRE

On the last page of the March edition of *Esquire* magazine, Larry Doyle roasted Bill Donohue in his piece, “An Open Letter to All Academy Members, Creative Artists, and Anyone Else Who Still Believes in Freedom of Expression.”

Doyle took some literary liberties by charging that Donohue

was vehemently complaining about a new movie, "christblood." Claiming that Donohue had labeled the movie "a zombie picture with Jesus as an undead killing machine," Doyle took the Catholic League president to task for choosing to condemn the film "WITHOUT HAVING SEEN A SINGLE FOOT OF THE COMPLETED FILM."

Donohue tried valiantly to even the score by writing back: "What Larry doesn't know is that I never even saw an early screening of the flick—I simply heard some foul-mouthed film critic brag how he liked it while downing a few pints at Joe's Bar and Grill. Once I discovered that the critic was bankrolled by Condě Nast, I knew the movie had to be anti-Catholic. So that saved me from having to see it."

BOB JONES JUST CAN'T GIVE IT UP

On March 14, it was reported that Bob Jones University had dropped from its website the charge that Catholicism is a cult. The next day president Bob Jones III explained it was "totally misleading" to conclude that this was done "for suspect reasons or because of embarrassment or cowardice." He added that "In order to leave no doubt in anyone's mind of the university's integrity and absolute commitment to its biblical principles, the article in question has been reposted."

We countered by saying that "In order to leave no doubt in anyone's mind of the Catholic League's integrity and absolute commitment to its Catholic principles, our previous accusation that Bob Jones University is anti-Catholic has been reaffirmed by the president's latest decision."

ANTI-CATHOLICISM IN AMERICAN CULTURE

“Anti-Catholicism arrived in America with the Pilgrims in 1620. While it is a prejudice that has existed in every decade of the American experience, anti-Catholicism is in many ways stronger now than it has ever been. It is a powerful force in art, business, academics, entertainment, politics, commentary and news reporting. It is not only America’s most persistent prejudice but also its most accepted. It remains the last refuge of legitimate bigotry, understood as not only correct in its assumptions, but also normative to enlightened thought.”

That straightforward statement is from the introduction to *Anti-Catholicism in American Culture*, published by Our Sunday Visitor (Our Sunday Visitor, 200 Noll Plaza, Hunting, IN 46804. 1-800-348-2440. Hardcover, \$19.95). Edited by Robert P. Lockwood, former president and publisher of Our Sunday Visitor and new member of the staff of the Catholic League, the book contains the full text of the Center for Media and Public Affairs latest analysis of media coverage of the Catholic Church. Also included are essays on anti-Catholicism from, among others, Lockwood, Russell Shaw, and a vital chapter by Catholic League president Bill Donohue on combating anti-Catholicism in media.

The study by The Center for Media and Public Affairs was jointly sponsored by Our Sunday Visitor and the Catholic League. Written by Linda S. Lichter, S. Robert Lichter and Dan Amundson, this represents an updating of CMPA’s groundbreaking 1991 study, *Media Coverage of the Catholic Church*.

The new study confirms that anti-Catholicism remains a potent force in American journalism. Among its findings on media coverage of the Catholic Church in the 1990s, the CMPA study reports:

- One-sided reports on the role of women in the Church were the leading source of controversial coverage of the Catholic Church.
- Three out of four sources criticized the alleged treatment by the Church of women, with fully 90 percent of sources on television news critical of the Church on this issue.
- Criminal charges against Catholic clerics accounted for one out of 12 discussions about the Catholic Church. Seven out of 10 sources criticized the Church for its handling of these charges.
- Nine out of 10 sources criticized the Church's ecumenical efforts, with particular emphasis on Catholic-Jewish relations.
- Debate was more balanced on Church-State issues and sexual morality, but there were significant differences among media outlets. Television news paid the most attention to sexual issues and was highly critical of the Church in this area.
- In comparison to the 1991 study, which surveyed Catholic Church coverage in media going back to 1963, the CMPA found that coverage of the Catholic Church in media had declined by over 50 percent from the 1960s to the 1990s. Criminal allegations against clergy dominated 1990s coverage. Debate over issues of power within the Church grew in the 1990s, while coverage of internal Church issues on doctrine and sexual morality declined.

Overall, the CMPA study found that media calls for reform of Church authority structures rose to all-time highs and that Church teachings and practices received less support in the

media in the 1990s than in any previous decade.

Anti-Catholicism in American Culture presents powerful statistical proof on the persistence of bigotry toward the Catholic Church in America as seen in the news media. It also includes solid presentations on the history of anti-Catholicism in the United States and in American journalism, as well as its contemporary strength in both media and society. Shaw provides an analysis of how the media allies itself with internal dissent from the Church, as well as an intriguing look at how the Church has dealt with media relations.

Anti-Catholic in American Culture is a must-read for anyone interested in the phenomenon of the oldest – and also the most current – religious bigotry in the United States.

BUT BETTER NEVER LATE

In the pages of the *New York Times* magazine (March 12), Andrew Sullivan made a fine contribution discussing the current wave of anti-Catholicism. But he was wrong to say that the Catholic League “essentially” gave George W. Bush “a pass” for his Bob Jones University visit. In fact, we lambasted the Texas governor several times in both the print and electronic media; the fact that we accepted his apology hardly qualifies as giving him “a pass.”

Perhaps most important, Sullivan said that the double standard of tolerating anti-Catholicism while not tolerating other forms of bigotry constitutes a “new” double standard. But there is nothing new about it. Indeed, in 1996, in the pages of Sullivan’s own journal, the *New Republic*, an editorial accused the Catholic League of “paranoia” for issuing our

annual report on anti-Catholicism.

That Sullivan is just now waking up to the problem of anti-Catholicism proves the veracity of the adage “better late than never.” But “better never late” is preferable still.

BIGOTED RHETORIC TARS “ABORTION PROVIDER DAY”

On March 10, pro-abortion groups around the country celebrated a “National Day of Appreciation for Abortion Providers.” The day was organized by a radical group called Refuse and Resist!

In its website, the organizing group speaks of a “Christian fascist, fundamentalist morality” that has allegedly overtaken the country. It also talks of the “Christian fascists” who are waging war on women and abortion clinics. Joining the coalition were organizations ranging from the ACLU to Catholics for a Free Choice, an anti-Catholic front group sponsored in large part by the Ford Foundation.

The Catholic League made public its concerns:

“Abortion is a human tragedy, not an event to celebrate. That the pro-abortion industry thinks otherwise is evident in its support for a ‘National Day of Appreciation for Abortion Providers.’ Moreover, to label Christians who oppose abortion as being fascists is to inflame passions and sponsor bigotry. Surely there are those who support abortion as birth control who find such language reprehensible. It is important that they speak up lest we Christians think that Refuse and Resist! speaks for all of them.”