

SEE NO EVIL

In last month's *Catalyst*, we stated our objections to the scene in the Neil Jordan movie, "The Butcher Boy," which has Sinead O'Connor voicing the "F-word" while playing the Virgin Mary. Readers might like to know that the *Irish Voice* wasn't at all upset with this, though it did get bent out of shape observing that the Catholic League and the Ancient Order of Hibernians raised objections over it. The newspaper explained away its objections to the scene by saying "it's important to note that 'The Butcher Boy' is not a film about Our Lady or the Holy Family but rather about a troubled young boy...." Okay, we get the point: blasphemy and vulgarity are okay just as long as its expression is incidental to the flick.

Neil Jordan's comment was priceless: "I can't imagine anyone could get too upset about it if they actually saw the film for themselves." Well, Mr. Jordan, meet Rick Hinshaw. He saw it and felt repelled. So would most people, save those who see no evil.

Readers should know that a film critic for the U.S. Catholic Conference Office for Film and Broadcasting said that "some Catholics may understandably be offended" by this scene, but she made it clear that she wasn't among them. Indeed, she argued that the scene "can be seen in a positive light as she [Our Blessed Lady] is a loving and calming figure in the midst of all of Francie's [the young boy who experiences the apparition] horrific imaginings." How compassionate.

CATHOLIC T-SHIRT GETS OK

Students in Sante Fe, New Mexico who wear a T-shirt with the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe on it can wear them again without fear of punishment. The hero in this debate proved to be Archbishop Michael Sheehan.

This spring, public school officials in Sante Fe apologized for prohibiting students from wearing the Catholic T-shirt and have more recently put the issue behind them by discussing what happened with Archbishop Sheehan. School authorities initially banned the shirts because some gang members had incorporated their gang insignia on the religious symbol. But not all who wore a T-shirt with the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe on it were gang members.

All sides agreed that school officials must draw distinctions between the legitimate use of religious symbols on clothing and the illegitimate appropriation of them by gang members. Archbishop Sheehan spoke for many when he said, "It's singling out a religious symbol in a negative way and I do protest that."

POLITICAL CARTOONS

Some of the cartoons that we object to are at least marginally funny. Not so with recent contributions from *Esquire*, *Phi Delta Kappan*, and *American Libraries*.

The April issue of *Esquire* showed Clinton nailing himself to the cross. Coming as it did during the Easter season, we found it offensive. "It ought to have been possible to have made whatever point the accompanying article was addressing," wrote

Rick Hinshaw, “without resorting to such a trivialization of this sacred event.”

Hinshaw also lambasted *American Libraries* for posting in its April edition a caricature of a Catholic bishop in full regalia running a library gift shop. That sounds harmless until the reader learns that the article that it embellishes poses the question whether a nun in full habit should have a First Amendment right to volunteer in a public library (readers are asked to vote their preference). “That this is even considered controversy,” Hinshaw said, “is a sad commentary on the current state of academic life in America.”

In another elite publication, Hinshaw took after *Phi Delta Kappan* for depicting in its April edition Catholic parents as snobbish phonies who send their kids to high-brow prep schools. He reminded the readers of who the typical Catholic school serves, making the case for vouchers.

What these three publications have in common is a well-schooled staff pitching to well-schooled readers. Shame they’re not well-educated.

DON'T PULL THE PLUG

Christopher Reeves, the “Superman” character who wound up paralyzed after being thrown from a horse, is lucky his mother didn’t get her way. Had she done so, he wouldn’t be alive today.

Reeves explains in his book, *Still Me*, that his mother wanted him dead rather than suffer pain. “She became distraught and began arguing strenuously that the doctors should pull the plug,” Reeves said. The doctors told her to calm down, but she

wouldn't. She didn't even inform Reeves' wife, Dana, of her plans to have her son killed. "At one point, in a moment of real despair," the actor says, "my mother told Dana's father, 'Tomorrow, we're going to do it.'"

Those who champion the virtue of doctor assisted-suicide should talk to Reeves before they give themselves anymore humanitarian awards.

PRIEST BASHING

KSF0 radio in San Francisco recently featured a segment by hosts John and Ken that viciously attacked Roman Catholic priests. Sweeping statements were made casting priests as child molesters, drunks or sex addicts. The operations manager was asked to explain the irresponsibility of his hosts but refused to do so. So why not let Jack Swanson know what's on your mind? Write to him about these two sages at KSF0, 900 Front Street, San Francisco, CA 94111.

OBSESSED WITH "NOTHING"

They just can't get over it. "Nothing Sacred" has been officially cancelled by ABC and its fans, few though they are, are having cardiac arrest.

USA Today is in a tailspin over the matter, and that is why long after the show was booted, it continues to publicize its

lament. The newspaper took a poll to see which shows its readers think should not have gotten the gate, and "Nothing" topped the list for ABC shows. The paper said that the show "seemed to generate the most impassioned pleas by viewers." No doubt it did: when "Nothing" died, so did a part of its fans. That's because they lived vicariously through "Nothing," fantasizing about a church they'd love to see exist. In your dreams, we say.

What's striking about the Catholic League's victory is that ABC is getting it from all sides. It offended most Catholics by airing the show and it offended dissident Catholics when it was pulled. Celeste Mills of Ingalls, Michigan was quoted as saying, "They ripped it around the schedule like a dirty rag, then canceled it with no warning. ABC never gave it a chance." Robert Bianco of *USA Today* said the same thing, complaining that "most viewers were scared away from *Sacred* [sic] by deadly time slots on Thursday and Saturday, and a botched marketing job by ABC, which allowed the show to be cast as some dirt-digging expose of the Catholic Church."

Time for a reality check. Had "Nothing" been just another TV show, it would have been dropped after the first few episodes. But because the show was political propaganda disguised as entertainment, ABC had too much invested in it—ideologically, that is—to kick it in the can. So it searched in vain for a new night and new time slot. But that didn't work either, making it plain that it's hard to make something out of "Nothing."

Bianco is so upset that he thinks the end of "Nothing" might foretell the end of TV! No kidding, here's what he said: "If there's no room for that kind of sacredness on TV (the kind 'Nothing' dished out), then perhaps the medium truly is a lost cause." Taps, anyone?

National Catholic Reporter can't give it up, either. In a recent editorial, it urged the Odyssey channel to invest in

“Nothing,” but warned that the channel had better toughen up a bit. It was disturbed to learn that Odyssey “has a policy that says it will not air anything that offends any faith tradition.” The *Reporter* was furious with such civility, lecturing the channel to realize that “good television” means “raising questions and giving voice to opinions that some find uncomfortable.” It concluded by saying that “If Odyssey really wants to become indispensable, it will have to allow some room for material that pushes the envelope.” That’s called showing your hand.

Whatever one thinks about “Nothing,” there is no doubting that the Catholic League made ABC pay a big price for its politics. Executive producer David Manson doesn’t think that the league’s protest made a difference in terms of viewership, but with advertisers, it did. “I think it was fairly effective. It doesn’t take much to scare them off. I think ABC took a bath on the show.”

We’re still getting letters condemning us for what we did. Our favorite was a letter in the *Evangelist*, the diocesan newspaper of Albany. E.P. Martinek of Round Lake said that William Donohue “should be disbarred.” He, she or it didn’t say from what, but we liked the headline that the newspaper put on the letter so much—“*Impeach William Donohue*”—that we had it framed. It’s proudly and prominently displayed in Donohue’s office.

CATHOLIC CHURCHES VANDALIZED

When parishioners at Holy Family Cathedral in Tulsa, Oklahoma recently went to Mass, they found profanity, swastikas and anti-Catholic messages deeply embedded on the front door.

Vandals also wreaked havoc at cemeteries and churches in three small western Kansas communities near Hays. Figures of Christ were smashed to smithereens, headstones were broken, crucifixes were pulled from an altar and destroyed and a memorial to unborn children was vandalized. Police are investigating the incidents as hate crimes.

In a related story, Catholic League members may recall that last summer (see the July-August *Catalyst*) we reported that a statue of Our Blessed Mother was beheaded at St. Philomena Catholic Church in the Little Havana section of Miami. The incident took place at a time when a local minister was appearing on TV smashing Catholic statues. Well, as fate would have it, the minister is now behind bars. But not for vandalism. On April 20, Rev. Daniel Garnicki pleaded guilty of forcing a 16-year-old girl to have sex with him in a hotel. The girl was a learning-disabled member of his congregation.