

HOLLYWOOD EYES RELIGION

Nothing scares Hollywood more than religion. To cite one example, when the Christian-themed movie, "A Walk to Remember," opened earlier this year, the Los Angeles Times reported that "The risky subject matter has the movie's executives and religious leaders eagerly awaiting the box-office results." Only in Hollywood would a movie with Christian appeal be seen as "risky."

As it turned out, everyone was pleased. The film did very well: it grossed \$40 million for Warner Bros. It is interesting to note, however, that no one was shown praying in the movie. According to one Hollywood director, Mitch Davis, they "never dared" to do so "because they were afraid to." We now know what unnerves Hollywood: prayer. Showing unmarried men and women jumping from one bed to another is not something Hollywood is afraid of. But showing people praying is enough to scare the daylights out of them.

Though there was a positive portrayal of Christianity in "A Walk to Remember," the lead actress was not depicted as Catholic. She was shown as the daughter of a Baptist preacher. To get an idea of how Hollywood treats Catholicism, just consider the ratings that "Catholic" films get.

The 1995 movie, "Priest," was rated R for "sex and adult language." "Dogma," which opened in 2000, received an R rating for "rough swearwords, bloody violence, controversial religious themes." Last year's Showtime flick, "Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All," won an R rating for "adult language and controversial religious themes." In short, when it comes to Catholicism, Hollywood likes to dabble in filth.

Judaism, by contrast, comes off well. "Stolen Summer" opened in March. According to the Boston Globe, "it is the story of two boys—one Catholic, one Jewish—and the families who must confront their own longstanding prejudices." The plot revolves around the Catholic boy who is told by a nun that he had better clean up his act or risk the wrath of God. In order to prove that he is worthy of heaven, he decides to convert non-believers. He befriends a Jewish boy who is dying of leukemia and comes up with a list of ten deeds that would guarantee the Jewish boy goes to heaven.

The rabbi, according to one review, "does not mind the little missionary selling lemonade and Christian love outside his synagogue, but the rest of the congregation does." Then there is the "stereotypical Irish-American father" who "would just as soon his son not get mixed up in those moneygrubbing beanie wearers." The father is shown with "eight kids and beer in each hand."

To top it off, the kid who plays the Irish kid is not Irish in real life. He's Jewish. His father is a rabbi. And as reported in the Bergen Record, the New Jersey rabbi "helped ensure that the film's Jewish family was portrayed accurately." There was no report stating who ensured that Catholicism was portrayed accurately. Which is exactly par for the course.

By the way, "Stolen Summer" was released by the Disney-owned production house, Miramax. It was Miramax that previously gave us "Priest" and "Dogma." Nothing risky about those movies—Catholic bashing is hardly taboo in Hollywood.

TEMPER TANTRUMS IN TAMPA

Public access television has too often been a home for off-the-wall types to vent their anger and obscenities. In Tampa, Florida, it has gotten so bad that the Catholic League was summoned to act.

There is an outfit there called Speak Up Tampa Bay that puts on a program called "The Happy Show." In one of the shows a young man was shown dressed in a nun's habit mouthing off about all kinds of things. In another show they featured a woman showering offering closeups of her genitals. The Catholic League protested the Speak Up Tampa Bay, a not-for-profit group, and its show.

In a letter to the Hillsborough Board of County Commissioners, William Donohue asked whether Speak Up Tampa Bay had violated its contract with the Board of Commissioners. Donohue noted that a county staff attorney had rendered an opinion charging the group with a breach of contract.

As a result of the Catholic League's action, the Board voted 5-2 to force Speak Up Tampa Bay to provide documentation that it is not in violation of its contract. The group is now threatening a lawsuit if the county doesn't withdraw its breach of contract claim. We will keep league members abreast of the outcome.

CBS CUTS STALLONE'S "FATHER

LEFTY”

n May 16, it was reported that CBS will not air this fall a controversial show about a Catholic priest. Produced by Sylvester Stallone, “Father Lefty” did not make the midseason lineup either. As recently as May 8, it was reported that Stallone was confident that CBS president Leslie Moonves would not let him down. An AP story said Stallone believed that Moonves “would have been blunt if the show didn’t have a chance.”

The Catholic League has been monitoring this show for some time, as far back as when it was originally called “The Priest.” And it let Mr. Moonves know of its concerns. William Donohue, president of the league, issued the following news release on May 16:

“Yo, Sly, what happened? Has Moonves been playing rope-a-dope with the Italian Stallion?

“On November 2, 2001, I wrote a letter to Leslie Moonves stating that I had read in the *Hollywood Reporter* that CBS was planning on doing a show about ‘a nonconformist priest in a big city, who helps both homeless and rich people with their problems, while struggling with personal problems of his own, including fidelity.’

“Being a bit coy, I then asked Moonves the following: ‘Could you tell me if the show is about an Episcopal priest (that certainly would be virgin territory for TV) or a Roman Catholic one (ABC had a show about a nonconformist priest in ‘Nothing Sacred’ that was so loaded with propaganda that it motivated the Catholic League to conduct a boycott against the show’s sponsors; the boycott worked).’

“On December 17, 2001, a woman from his office called. I spoke to her the next day. She confirmed that the priest was indeed cast as a Roman Catholic. To which I confessed my utter lack

of astonishment.

“Yo, Sly, ever think about getting out of the ring once and for all?”

CATHOLIC-BAITING CONTEST

One of the most exploitative incidents in the media over the sexual abuse scandal in the Church was triggered by the *Courier-Post*, a South New Jersey newspaper. “The alleged abuse of minors by priests in the Catholic Church is the subject of May’s Student Voices essay and editorial cartoon contest.”

We issued a news release denouncing this contest as Catholic baiting at its worst.

VICTORY FOR RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

On May 16, the California Supreme Court unanimously ruled that a Catholic hospital, CHW Medical Foundation, was protected under the First Amendment for firing an employee who engaged in anti-Catholic proselytizing.

Terrence Silo, the offending employee, said he was just speaking his mind and thus asserted his First Amendment right to free speech. At stake was the autonomy of religious institutions to determine their own strictures independent of government oversight.

The court ruled that “Although there is a clear, constitutionally based state policy against religious discrimination in employment, there is also a countervailing policy rooted in the free exercise of religion clause of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution, as well as the comparable California constitutional right.”

Score this a victory for religious liberty.

CELEBRATING CELIBACY

A recent editorial in the *Forward*, a Jewish weekly newspaper in the New York area, caught the attention of William Donohue. We are pleased that the *Forward* ran Donohue’s missive as the lead letter in its May 10 edition. It is reprinted below.

“While the May 3 editorial on the Catholic church’s sex abuse scandal was respectfully written, some of the commentary needs a response.

“The editorialist writes that ‘Catholicism celebrates celibacy and views carnal relations at best as necessary for the preservation of the species. Judaism, by contrast, traditionally sanctifies the sex act as an expression of godliness.’

“It would be more accurate to say Catholicism celebrates celibacy as a gift for those ordained to the priesthood. Catholicism also sees sexual relations between a man and a woman in the institution of marriage as an expression of godliness. Moreover, I know quite a few Jews who would take umbrage at the idea that Judaism, without qualification, sanctifies the sex act as an expression of godliness. If true, this would seem to justify adultery.

“More contentious is the statement that ‘American Catholics have been clamoring for a liberalization of church attitudes toward sex and reproductive rights.’ Not true. Some surveys might suggest this, but what is being registered are preferences, not demands.

“Only those Catholics on the fringe are agitating for the church to change its profoundly countercultural teachings on sexuality. Most Catholics admire the church’s emphasis on sexual reticence. Now if all our priests had subscribed to this position—both theologically and behaviorally—we would have been spared the scandal.

“In short, now is not the time to lower the bar simply because some can’t jump over it.”

CHIMP ENVY

It is okay to kill a baby who is 80 percent born (it’s called partial-birth abortion). But what if the baby is a chimp? For some savants, that’s a heart-wrenching question.

Steven Wise wrote a book two years ago, *Rattling the Cage*, that argued the merits of treating chimpanzees as humans. His book went over so big that Jane Goodall, the famous gorilla expert, dubbed it “the animal rights’ Magna Carta.” He thinks the courts should award chimps the status of legal personhood. Wise also brands the use of animals in medical research as “genocide.”

The father of animal rights is Peter Singer. Singer is pro-abortion. He also thinks it’s okay for parents to kill their infants in certain cases. More recently, he wrote a piece asking us to rethink our objections to men having sex with

animals. But he maintains it is immoral to eat a steak.

Wise teaches a course in animal rights at Harvard Law School and is founder and president of Harvard's Center for the Expansion of Fundamental Rights. Singer teaches at Princeton University's Center for the Study of Human Values. They have now won the support of another leading scholar, Laurence Tribe, the famous Harvard lawyer.

Tribe recently discovered the merits of animal rights. It was his fondness for chimps that pushed him over the edge. Indeed, he is now committed to the proposition that chimpanzees deserve legal standing. However, he remains pro-choice on the subject of human abortion.

So the moral of the story is: if we can get our Ivy League wonderbrains to think of kids in the womb as if they were chimps, we'd be home free. Call it Chimp Envy.

Look for an anti-extinator movement to begin before the decade is.

MAHER 'FESSES UP

Bill Maher, the Catholic-bashing comic of TV's "Politically Incorrect," recently spoke the truth when he admitted, "I have hated the church way before anyone else. I have been pounding religion for nine years on this show."

His first comment was more honest—it is the Catholic Church he hates. Indeed, we don't recall him pounding any religion but Catholicism for the last nine years. In any event, his show is going off the air in January.

WHY DO WE NEED MORE SAINTS?

by Father Benedict J. Groeschel, C.F.R.

This question is one that is often heard by those involved in proposing the causes of Servants of God for beatification or canonization. It is asked even more frequently since Pope John Paul II has become known as the pope who has canonized the most saints in history.

Because I am the promoter of the cause of the Servant of God Cardinal Terrence Cooke, the beloved Archbishop of New York who died in 1983, I am vitally interested in this question: "Why more saints?" November, the month of All Saints, is a good time to consider this question.

Holiness and the Spirit

The first reason that we have saints is because the Holy Spirit has guided the Church since its earliest days to identify among its members those who can serve as models in following the path of Christ. The saints are guides to holiness. They illustrate how the grace of God takes hold in the life of a poor sinner and turns that person into—well—a saint.

Since the very early days of the Church, Christians have been advised to pray to the martyrs and other saints and not for them—to use the words of Saint Augustine. All Christian Churches which existed before the Protestant Reformation always invoked the saints and still call upon them today asking for their intercession.

Holy Example

For example, in the case of Cardinal Cooke there are many reports of assistance that people believe they have received

from God through his intercession. In some cases of physical cure these reports may eventually be examined as part of the process of evaluating miraculous favors through his intercession. Some of these cases are astonishing. Although this aspect of the process of beatification is the one that receives the most popular attention, it is, in fact, the good example of living the Christian life by the Servant of God in his particular time in history that is really most important. For instance, in a time of theological upheaval and social unrest, Cardinal Cooke gave an example of humble, patient, and faithful commitment to the Gospel and to all the people of the flock that he served and, in fact, to all the people of New York. For this reason the whole city appeared to go into mourning during his final days and at his funeral. One particular incident comes to mind. I was recovering from heart surgery and took a taxi to the Cardinal's funeral. The Jewish taxi driver spoke very directly to me as I got out of the cab. He said, "My wife and I knew the Cardinal. It made no difference to him that we were Jewish. Everyone was the same to him. Mark my words, Father—the Cardinal was a saint."

That simple remark sums up a heroic life of suffering terminal cancer in silence for years, of patience with severe and unjustified criticism, of prayer and a deep devotion to Christ and Our Lady at a time of great disedification when many lost their way. Amazingly, Cardinal Cooke worked at least sixteen hours a day, seven days a week for nine years with terminal cancer. He never complained. In fact, a bishop close to him said, "He never even yawned."

Holy Heroes

Here was an ordinary though talented man who accepted an extraordinary responsibility and did his very best. When I first spoke to the members of the congregation, or office, in Rome that oversees the causes of the Servants of God, they reminded me that we are not seeking to prove that Cardinal Cooke was perfect but rather that he was heroic. He was. I've

been privileged to know three or four people who are likely to be canonized. I can say that the example of the heroic virtue of Father Solanus Casey O.F.M. CAP., Mother Teresa, Father Walter Ciszek, S.J., and Cardinal Cooke taught me more than anything I ever studied in books. To know the saints and Servants of God is to see the Gospel come alive in one's own time. Our times certainly need this example and that is the answer to the question, "Why do we need more saints?"

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