

SOME WARS NEVER END

To some, being mistakenly identified as a Catholic is the most serious sin in the world. This is one conclusion the Catholic League can reach with ease, what with the evidence that continues to pour into our office.

Every time the Catholic League solicits new members via a direct mail campaign, we get hit with a barrage of anti-Catholic mail. This happened to us again in February. Here's how it works.

We begin by buying a mailing list from some Catholic publications and organizations. We then mail a letter to those on the list asking them to join the league. Some of the lists are "sloppy," i.e., they contain numerous errors: the person may be deceased, the name or address may be wrong, the person may not be a Catholic, etc. With regards to the latter group, some who get our mail send it back to us complete with the most vicious anti-Catholic scribblings, pamphlets, tapes and books imaginable. From what we have seen, the pope and Our Blessed Mother are the two most common targets of the bigots.

It's not just the Catholic League's office that is being deluged with this stuff, it's certain communities, especially in suburbia, that are being hit. Things got so bad in a Jewish neighborhood near Trenton, New Jersey that many residents contacted the police: they were being blanketed with really coarse literature blaming the Catholic Church for the Holocaust. The source of the hate mail was, not surprisingly, Chick Publications.

The league was only too happy to inform reporters at the *Trenton Times* of Chick's track record. We are grateful to those Jewish men and women who protested this bigotry.

HOLLYWOOD'S BELIEVERS

From the work of Robert Lichter and Stanley Rothman in the 1980s, we know that the majority of those who make our movies are agnostics or atheists (55% believe in nothing, compared to 6% in the general population). What we know less about is the thinking of those in Hollywood who are believers. Recent interviews with Martha Williamson and Martin Scorsese give us some idea, and it is not one that most Catholics will be pleased to hear.

Martha Williamson is the creator of the CBS hit, "Touched by an Angel." Since its debut in 1994, it has been one of the most popular shows on TV. Williamson, who is a born-again Christian, was asked by the *Los Angeles Times* "How accepting is Hollywood of devout Christians?" Williamson answered by saying, "It has to do with how Christians behave. I don't make a big deal about being a Christian. I don't impose my Christianity on anybody."

Now that is strange. Imagine if Williamson were gay and she said that how Hollywood receives gays has to do with the way they behave. Imagine if she said that she doesn't make a big deal out of being gay and doesn't try to impose her sexual preference on anyone. Keep imagining because that's as close to reality as you're likely to get. It simply wouldn't happen. Only Christians would adopt such a defensive posture.

Here's another revealing comment on Williamson's thinking. "Nothing Sacred," she was asked, "has been attacked by some Catholics who feel it's anti-Catholic. Do you feel any kinship with this show?" She replied, "Yes. I think it's a very well-done show. I just couldn't connect with the character [the indubitable Father Ray]."

Isn't it nice to know that Williamson feels kinship with a show that some Catholics have labeled anti-Catholic? What would really be nice to know is whether she feels any kinship with a show that African-Americans feel is racist (Buckwheat's role in the "Little Rascals" comes to mind). Or how about a show that gays feel is homophobic?

Just as incredible is Martin Scorsese. When interviewed by *USA Today*, he admitted that "My whole life has been movies and religion. That's it. Nothing else." This is the same Martin Scorsese that made the blasphemous movie, "The Last Temptation of Christ," and has now given us the pro-Buddhist film, "Kundun."

When Scorsese says that his whole life has been movies and religion, he elides: it would be more accurate to say that his whole life has been animated by a hostility to Western religions and an embrace of Eastern religions. But to admit that would be to admit prejudice, and that is not something the ever-sensitive types in Hollywood want to do.

If Williamson and Scorsese are any indication of what the minority in Hollywood who believe in religion think about Catholicism, perhaps we'd be better off looking to the atheists for a fair shake.

PIUS XII VINDICATED—AGAIN!

In a new book by a history professor at the University of Wales-Aberystwyth, William Rubinstein supports the claim made by Sister Margherita and others that Pius XII has been the object of unfair attacks. The book, *The Myth of Rescue: Why the Democracies Could Not Have Saved More Jews from the Nazis* (Routledge Press), attempts to show just how baseless

the charge is that the Allies could have done much more to save the Jews during the Holocaust. Here is his conclusion on Pius XII:

“In all likelihood—a likelihood probably amounting to a near-certainty—Hitler would have paid no heed whatever to any pronouncement on the Jews made by the Vatican (which had denounced Nazi anti-semitism before the war began). Theoretically, and in hindsight, the Pope might have excommunicated all Catholic members of the SS (or the Nazi Party) although the only likely effect of such a pronouncement would have been that the Nazis denounced the Pope as an agent of ‘Judeo-Bolshevism’ and an imposter. The Vatican had more influence on Catholic satellite states such as Hungary, which it used to good effect whenever it could.”

Rubinstein’s previous books include *A History of the Jews in the English-speaking World*.

WE “COLLABORATED” WITH THE NAZIS?

As we approach the new millennium, Pope John Paul II has made many comments asking for forgiveness; he recognizes that the Church has erred in the past and should have done more to promote justice. But he has also wondered aloud why it is that no one other than the Church apologizes for past deeds. In this regard, the role of the Church during the Holocaust is particularly germane.

The pope has acknowledged that certain Christian thinkers have contributed to the defamation, and ultimate persecution, of Jews, but he has also defended Pope Pius XII from the charge

that he was “silent” while Jews perished. “Those who do not limit themselves to cheap polemics,” the Holy Father has said, “know very well what Pius XII thought about the Nazi regime, and how much he did to help the countless victims persecuted by that regime.” Given statements like this, it is shocking to read that some are now saying that the pope has admitted that the Church “collaborated” with the Nazis.

In a brief comment on page 20 of the January 26 edition of *Time* magazine, the following was written under the banner “Mea Culpa”: **“THE LATEST IN BELATED APOLOGIES** In 1997 the Roman Catholic Church finally said it was sorry for collaborating with the Nazis during World War II.” The verb “collaborating” is the key word.

Knowing that this statement was not true, William Donohue called *Time* to ask for the evidence that the reporter used to come to this conclusion. He was immediately told that he could write a letter asking for a retraction (which he has done), but that wasn’t satisfactory. Donohue still wanted to know what the source was in the first place. Despite several phone calls, no one was able to find the source in question. With good reason: there isn’t any—the word “collaborating” was made up—for reasons which can only be labeled political.

“YOUR AVERAGE CATHOLIC SCHOOLGIRL”?

In one of the most brazenly anti-Catholic remarks to be voiced by a journalist that we’ve seen in some time, *New York Post* columnist Andrea Peyser wrote on January 24 that President Clinton’s denial that oral sex qualifies as sex is

shared by “your average Catholic schoolgirl.”

William Donohue’s letter objecting to this article was printed in the *Post*, along with several other letters of protest (we are happy to note that league members like Peter Duffy of The Bronx also had their letters published). Donohue asked for an apology and felt uncharacteristically wimpish when he read Duffy’s demand that Peyser be canned.

MARY IN JEANS

Some might think it was cute. We didn’t. A new ad by the Denim Division of Diesel shows four young women wearing jeans, all draped in a habit headpiece praying the rosary; in a grotto behind them is a statue of Mary, also wearing jeans. Alongside the picture was the following: “Pure virginal 100% cotton. Soft and yet miraculously strong.” It ends by saying, “This is our mission.” Moreover, when we tapped into Diesel’s website, we found a picture of a man in jeans praying the rosary.

Diesel, which is based in the Netherlands, has a New York office. We wrote to them explaining our concerns over misusing images of Catholic nuns and of the Virgin Mary. The ad appeared in the March issue of *Marie Claire*.

EASTER SURPRISE BY FAMILIAR

SOURCES

Ever since a group of “doubting Thomas theologians” formed the Jesus Seminar, it has become commonplace for pundits to subvert the meaning of Easter. This year the attack will be led by ABC, PBS, BBC and Twentieth Century FOX.

ABC anchorman Peter Jennings promises that he will offer “a reasonably controversial broadcast” on the historical life of Jesus. Though he hopes that the program will air near Easter, he congratulates himself for allowing us to celebrate our sacred holiday without his propaganda: “Therefore, we’re not going to stick it down anybody’s throat on Easter Sunday.” How considerate. Sounds like some kind of self-imposed media Blue law: it’s okay to stick it down the throat of Christians but not on Sundays.

On April 6 and 7, the PBS program, FRONTLINE will do a four-hour long show, “From Jesus to Christ: The First Christians.” David Fanning, the senior executive producer, boasts that “FRONTLINE presents the real story of the rise of Christianity, challenging and upsetting conventional ideas.” So comforting to know that we can simply junk everything we’ve learned about Jesus by just tuning into FRONTLINE.

Among the great revelations that the show offers is the stunning conclusion that “Jesus did not identify himself as a Christian. He was born, lived, and died a Jew.” Now how about that for scholarship! It could also be said that the term Christian comes from Christ.

It is telling that the scholars who contributed to this program deliberately refuse to use the standard A.D. when writing about history after Christ. Their preference is to use the politically correct C.E., or Common Era. But who cares, especially when we know that we’re going to be treated to “the real story.”

The BBC is also doing a special on Jesus, just in time for Easter. We don't know much about it other than that it bears a strong relationship to the myth-busting theme as explored by the American networks.

The worst script that we've seen, by far, is "These Are the Days: The Easter Story." It is loaded with sick humor aimed at the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ, as well as at the Catholic Church. In it, a character named Kieran says, "Hey, wouldn't it be cool if this bread had actually been transformed into 'the body.' Y'know, like we're actually eating flesh." Kieran adds, "I really like the idea of eating 'the body.' And then washing it down with a big goblet of blood."

Forgive us for feeling suspicious, but ABC is owned by Disney, the company that owns Miramax, which distributed the movie "Priest." The BBC produced "Priest," PBS' FRONTLINE indicted the Catholic Church's work in Africa just last year and Twentieth Century FOX is the major producer of "Nothing Sacred."

Perhaps it's time for "60 Minutes" to vet ABC, BBC, PBS and FOX with an eye towards unmasking their religious agenda. The only problem is they may need more than 60 minutes to do justice to the report.

DESIGNER DRAWS FIRE

Dolce & Gabbana, the famous women's designer, is advertising a skirt for its spring collection that the league finds highly objectionable. The apparel is a long silk skirt with an big embroidery of Madonna and Child; Mary's head provocatively appears in the pelvic area.

The league has asked Dolce & Gabbana to rethink its decision to market this skirt. We did so, in part, because the designer appears to be taking a certain delight in offending Christians. For example, it featured the skirt in a fashion show of spring collections, drawing predictable responses.

When the model who wore the skirt passed by actor Robert Sean Leonard, he commented: "What is that on her genitalia, some kind of religious figure? It's a little too frightening for me. Is that Mary? It's a little intimidating. Visual birth control. I think it's kind of interesting and pretty, but I'd lose the religious figures between the legs."

Don Cheadle of "Boogie Nights" fame remarked, "FINALLY, Vatican-Approved Casual Wear!" The most offensive statement was made by Michael Douglas: "Appropriate place for the Madonna's head. Jesus, talk about an Immaculate Conception."

Why not let Donna Faircloth, Director of Advertising and Marketing at Dolce & Gabbana, know how you feel? Write to her at 532 Broadway, New York, New York 10012.

NOTHING CAN SAVE "NOTHING SACRED"

Some things never change. The ratings for "Nothing Sacred" continue to plummet and the advertisers continue to flee. It has become increasingly obvious that nothing can save "Nothing Sacred."

Throughout the fall, Kevin Anderson, a.k.a. Father Ray, kept complaining that the reason the show is a bomb is because it is up against the NBC Thursday night lineup, which includes

"Friends." Here is how he put it: "The biggest reason it hasn't reached a wider audience is that it has been on at 8 o'clock Thursday night."

ABC yielded to Anderson and moved the show to Saturday night. And guess what happened? The show broke its own record, pulling the smallest audience all season. This is no small feat, considering what it was up against: CBS offered a new cowboy show; NBC provided another one of those stupid "blooper" shows; and FOX aired a cop show that is broken into two parts. With all this going for it—to say nothing of the free hype it got from *TV Guide* the week before it aired (it flagged this episode three times)—Father Ray still couldn't command an obedient flock.

Anderson then complained that 8 o'clock is too early for the show to be televised. Why? Because people are still frying eggs at that time. Think we're kidding? Honest, here is what he said: "This is the kind of show where you've got to put the kids to bed [boy, is that telling!], you've got to have the dishes washed, you've got to sit back on the couch. You can't be frying eggs looking over your shoulder and watching this show!"

So when "Nothing" fails in its new time slot on Saturday at 9:00 p.m. in March (ABC threw it off the air in February because of Sweeps month—it can't afford to lose everything!), we'll hear that viewers are too bombed at that hour, having fallen asleep on the couch. He'll be right in that assessment, but for reasons he'll never figure out.

It was announced in January that the show that follows "Nothing Sacred" on ABC, "Cracker," has been canceled. But Father Ray survives even though "Nothing's" ratings are almost identical to those that "Cracker" pulled. The difference is that Disney/ABC has no agenda at work in promoting "Cracker."

More bad news for "Nothing" fans: three more companies have

withdrawn sponsorship of the show, bringing to 37 the number that have gone south. Add International Home Foods, Levitz and Van de Kamp to the list of sponsors that have quit.

Things are so bad that ABC made a last minute decision to cancel the January 31 episode of the show. That means that between the middle of December and the beginning of March, only two episodes were aired. None of this, however, has stopped the critics from raving about the show. Indeed, Kevin Anderson was nominated for best actor in a drama series in the annual Golden Globe Awards (when the camera was put on him, he blessed himself with two fingers). More telling was the fact that when it came to the People's Choice Award (nominees are chosen by the public), Anderson didn't make the cut. The league had something to say about this in a news release:

"Tony Danza was recognized by the public for a People's Choice Award (notwithstanding NBC's decision to cut the show) while Kevin Anderson wasn't even nominated. Yet the critics love Anderson and not Danza. Now had Danza played Father Ray, he would have kept his job though he would have lost the award (Danza's abilities are not good enough to override the show's lousy scriptwriting). On the other hand, had Anderson done a comedy show of his own, he would have lost both the award and his job. Anderson should count his blessings: were it not for the Disney/ABC policy of preferential treatment, he'd be joining Danza on the unemployment line, minus the award. Then he'd really be suffering a loss of faith."

The beating that "Nothing" has taken has led to an internal quarrel among its backers and supporters. Originally, ABC scheduled as its second episode a show about a gay priest who has AIDS. But fearing controversy, they put the episode on ice; they have since said that they aren't sure whether it will ever be aired. This ignited a firestorm of protest.

Richard Kramer, once a co-executive producer and now a

consulting producer, went crazy: "ABC's decision to bury it was based on cowardice, cruelty and co-option of the religious right's agenda." The TV reviewer for the *Los Angeles Times*, Howard Rosenberg, also went ballistic, blaming the Catholic League for what happened. Twentieth Century FOX, which produces the show, got into a huff with ABC over this. FOX president Sandy Grushow told ABC that he would ask FOX to buy unsold commercial time for the episode, but ABC wouldn't budge. To top it off, Disney chief Michael Eisner was blasted for backing away from his pledge not to cave into "interest groups" (he made the pledge just days before the controversial episode was nixed).

In response, the Catholic League offered the following comment to the press: "There's never been anything like it. The specter of the big boys at Disney, ABC and Twentieth Century FOX all scurrying around pointing fingers at each other, emptying their wallets, baring their ideological agenda—all because Catholics caught on to their game."

The two shows that aired in January were vintage "Nothing Sacred." The show of January 17 was about a black youth who is thinking about becoming a Baptist. Providing his usual counseling, Father Ray tells him "It doesn't matter what religion you belong to." Moreover, Ray comments that "The Baptist church down the street has more spirit than any ten Catholic churches put together." Perhaps that's because it doesn't welcome transvestites and drug dealers in its rest rooms.

The boy wants to convert but his mother wants him to stay (Father Ray, loyal as ever, gives the kid no resistance). In anger, the boy gets a can of black spray paint and redoes the statues in Ray's church. True to form, Ray is unfazed (just another day in an "inner city" parish). What does excite Ray is the news that the associate pastor has restored the statues to their original color. Ray will have none of it and that is why he vandalizes the statues himself, painting them black

again. And remember, this is the kind of priest that Father Andrew Greeley says is an inspiration for young men contemplating the priesthood!

In the January 24 episode, the new associate pastor, Father Martin, makes it clear to Sister Mo that he doesn't take kindly to her disobedience (she likes to say Mass). The parish staff stands behind her, treating Father Martin with utter contempt for wanting to abide by the Church's teachings. Father Ray even goes so far as to say to Father Martin, "Mo goes. We all go." To which the Catholic League says, "that is why we can't wait for her to go." Finally, for those who didn't see this episode, they missed the flashback scene that showed what Mo was like before she took her vows: she was shown lying in bed with her naked boyfriend.

The show fails not only because it offends, but because it is downright depressing. Most people work all week and few want to sulk in front of their TV watching dysfunctional priests and nuns. It is no wonder that little watched cable shows are sporting higher ratings than "Nothing Sacred." But as long as it is still on the air—whatever the time and day—the Catholic League will continue to monitor it, depressing though the thought may be.

DONOHUE ACCEPTS APOLOGY

In a Pasadena press conference on January 14, "Nothing Sacred" writer Rev. Bill Cain, S.J. suggested that William Donohue was anti-Semitic. He said the Catholic League president questioned "the right of David Manson and Richard Kramer [the show's co-executive producers] to work on the show because they were Jewish, and the smear then appeared in the *New York*

Post calling both of them atheists, and questioning their right to write." This comment was picked up by newspapers throughout the country.

Donohue immediately confronted Father Cain demanding an apology for this untruth. Father Cain offered the apology without delay. The matter is now closed.