

Catholic League Calls for Boycott of Disney

The movie "Priest," produced by the BBC and released by Miramax, a subsidiary of the Walt Disney Company, provoked the Catholic League to lead a storm of protest against the film and Disney (see "[Something Stinks in the Magic Kingdom: 'PRIEST'](#)" for an analysis of the movie). The movie is arguably the most anti-Catholic movie ever made; that, at least, is the position of film critic Michael Medved, the nation's leading authority on the subject of Hollywood and religion. Catholic League president William Donohue, and board member William Lindner previewed the movie before it was released to the public. They, too, were appalled by what they had seen.

The movie opened on March 24 in New York and Los Angeles and was scheduled to open on April 14 nationwide. April 14 just happened to be Good Friday. Timing the opening to fall on Good Friday made it all but certain that the Catholic League would register a protest.

On March 23, the Catholic League held a press conference in the headquarters of the Archdiocese of New York. It was very well attended by the media; officials from Miramax were also there. Posted all over the wall that formed the backdrop to Dr. Donohue's presentation were the familiar Disney characters: Mickey Mouse, Minny Mouse, Donald Duck, Goofy, Beauty and the Beast, Aladdin, Snow White, the Dalmatians and, of course, various stars from the Lion King. On the table by the podium was a large stuffed version of the Lion King himself, Mufasa. Given this imagery, there was no mistaking the target of the League's attack.

Denied the right to speak at the Catholic League's press conference, Miramax representatives spoke to the media on the sidewalk in front of the Catholic Center; the next day they

staged their own press conference at their headquarters in Manhattan. The media blitz that accompanied the Catholic League's press conference, coupled with a favorable response from the public, put pressure on Miramax to change its nationwide release date from Good Friday to April 19; it was slated to open in ten cities on April 7.

The Catholic League treated as "a positive step" the decision not to release the movie on Good Friday, but it also said that more concessions were needed. If Michael Eisner, chairman of Disney, could legally stop Miramax from distributing "Priest" nationwide, then that is what the League wanted. Short of that, the League demanded a public statement from Disney dissociating itself from the film, making clear its reasons for doing so. Disney, however, chose to do nothing. Returning a phone call for Mr. Eisner, John Dryer, Vice President of Corporate Communications for Disney, told Dr. Donohue that the reason Disney would not dissociate itself from the Miramax-distributed movie was because "the only association between Disney and Miramax is the one that you've created in the mind of the public." Dryer denied a rift between Disney and Miramax and said there was nothing to the rumor that Miramax was testing Disney's will by pledging to release a soft-porn movie, "Kids." Dr. Donohue informed Mr. Dryer that he was now free to live with the consequences of his decision.

Two days after the phone conversation, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that there was a growing conflict between Disney and Miramax over the movie "Kids," quoting a Disney spokesperson as saying that whatever policy Disney ascribes to "is by association their [Miramax's] policy." More embarrassing for Disney was the *Associated Press* story of April 3 which reported that Disney told Miramax that it must "sell 'Kids' or form a separate company to release it, reimbursing the \$3.5 million to Miramax." *Time* and *Newsweek* ran a similar story, demonstrating quite conclusively that Disney can get Miramax to do exactly what it wants, when it wants.

Disney's decision not to dissociate itself from the movie triggered another news release from the Catholic League. This time the League made specific its course of action. "Having stonewalled the Catholic League-and by extension many Catholics-we are embarking on a nationwide campaign aimed at Disney. We are calling for a boycott of all Disney products, a boycott of vacations to Disney World and Disneyland and a boycott of the Disney cable television channel. We are also asking the public to call Disney and tie up the lines by making a complaint." In the wake of this call for action, Disney's lines were so overloaded that their famous 1-800-W-DISNEY number was disconnected; other lines were similarly disabled.

The Catholic League said it would mobilize its members, asking them to sell their Disney stock and send postcards to Michael Eisner registering their outrage. Pledging to work with other organizations in this initiative, the League promised it would submit a resolution at the next Disney stockholders meeting. An expert in the field, Tom Strobhar, has agreed to write the resolution; having previously tackled K-Mart, Strobhar is just the man to do the job on Disney.

On April 10, the Catholic League went on the attack again, this time in the form of an ad placed on the Op-Ed page of the *New York Times* (click [here](#)). The ad is just one more example of the Catholic League's determination to reeducate the public as to the new status and the new face of the Walt Disney Company.

AP Responds to League Complaint

On March 10, the Associated Press (AP), in a story on a court ruling upholding a law barring doctors from engaging in assisted suicide, disclosed that federal appeals court judge John T. Noonan was a Catholic. Dr. Donohue sent a letter to AP executives asking, "Why does AP think it important for the public to learn of a judge's religion if he is a Catholic? Does AP find it necessary to disclose the religion of all judges, or just Catholic ones? I do not remember seeing Jewish judges identified as such. I wonder why."

Dr. Donohue requested a copy of the AP policy on the matter. "In the event AP policy allows reporters to designate the religion of public persons in stories that have little, if anything, to do with religion, then we would like to see recent examples," said a press release issued by the League. "If there is no anti-Catholic bigotry to worry about, we expect full and immediate disclosure."

In response to Dr. Donohue's letter and the League's press release, Darrell Christian, AP's Managing Editor, wrote, "Our policy on religion, as it is on race, is to mention it when it's relevant and omit it when it's not. In the specific story, we did not establish, as we should have done, why his past writings and scholarship were relevant to the case at hand. I can see why that would lead you to think we (were) making an unfair point of his religion."

The League is satisfied with AP's quick response, and expects that it will not have to call attention to such errors in the future.

There's Anger in the Land

The founder of the Catholic League, Father Virgil Blum, was fond of saying how Catholics lacked the courage that was needed to combat bigotry. Unfortunately, Father Blum's observation, made during the 1970s and 1980s, had a certain ring of truth to it. But these are the 1990s and the organization he launched is now in the throes of what he always wanted, namely, the Catholic League is taking the high road against those that defame and discriminate against the Catholic religion. Judging from the tidal wave that we've started in response to "Priest," it seems that a new day has arisen. There's anger in the land. Especially among Catholics.

Why the anger? There's no one reason, but surely much of the anger is traceable to the coexistence of increased Catholic-bashing at a time when increased tolerance for the heritage of others is evident in government, the media and the classroom. Catholics are rightly wondering, "Why makes us fair game in this much-vaunted culture of compassion"?

The furor over "Priest" began when I learned that a controversial movie was being previewed by a select group of priests, chosen by the movie's distributor, Miramax. On March 8, the day before Miramax allowed me to see the movie, I met with Catholic League board member Chuck Mansfield. Chuck supplied me with valuable information showing the relationship between Disney and Miramax. Prior to our meeting, I had no idea that Disney was the parent of Miramax, but when I learned of this, I knew that if the movie was offensive, we had to act.

As a sociologist, what struck me most about the movie was the way the script was angled to show that it was the Catholic

Church, as an institution, that was responsible for the plight of the priests. This was Disney versus Catholicism, the establishment against the Catholic Church. And that meant, ineluctably, that another battle would take place, this time pitting the Catholic League against Disney.

Just before our press conference, I got word that Miramax officials were coming. That was fine by me, but what was not okay was the audacity that Miramax showed by advertising to the press that this would be a joint press conference between Miramax and the Catholic League. Consequently, before I opened the floor to the press for questions and answers, I said that this was our press conference and that Miramax officials were "in my house." I further stated that they would not be allowed to speak and that if they wanted to have a press conference of their own, they should "do it in the street."

Stunned, they picked up their belongings and hit the road.

Our side did such a good job of jamming Disney's phone lines that Barbara Reynolds of *USA Today* commented that "Blacks and women who are tired of being ignored or exploited by the entertainment industry should watch carefully the moves of William Donohue and his fighting Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights." That's a nice compliment, and the kudos belong to many who are reading this column.

In addition to joining a boycott of everything that has the Disney label on it, we are asking everyone to sell their Disney stock. It would also send a message if everyone mailed Disney chairman Michael Eisner some old Disney toys or videos. If every Catholic League member sent even one box to Mr. Eisner (see the postcard for his address), it would make an indelible impression on him.

I have written to Congressional leaders, Senators Daschle and Dole and Representatives Gephardt and Gingrich, asking them to make a public statement expressing their concerns over a movie

that defames Catholicism. As I indicated to them, I would publish their response in *Catalyst*.

I am happy to report that we are not in this battle by ourselves. Cardinal John O'Connor had the courage to speak out against this scurrilous portrayal of the priesthood, and for that I am most grateful (See, "From My Viewpoint"). On nationwide TV, Mother Angelica and Father Benedict Groeschel encouraged the faithful to become mobilized against Disney, netting spectacular results. Former New York Mayor Ed Koch came to the defense of Catholics, labeling "Priest" an exercise in "Catholic-bashing."

Many thanks, too, to the American Life League for taking such a strong position against "Priest." Morality in Media, Catholics Against Bias, Family Defense Council, American Family Association, as well as many other organizations, should also be commended for their unsolicited support. And I won't forget the spirited response that we received from Rabbi Abraham Hecht of the Rabbinical Alliance of America, or from Rabbi Joseph Potasnik, a prominent New York religious leader and radio spokesman.

Finally, thanks to everyone for their prayers and their financial contributions to the Catholic League. Now don't forget to sign the petition and mail the postcard.

From My Viewpoint

John Cardinal O'Connor Archbishop of New York

Every once in a while a movie reminds you of how lucky you are, especially if you don't even have to go see it. Michael Medved's reviews are usually good enough for me. When he calls

a movie blatantly anti-Catholic, I usually don't bother checking further. This time, out of curiosity, I read Anthony Lane's review in *The New Yorker*, Don Feder's in the *Boston Herald*, Jack Garner's in the *Gannett News Service* and Barbara Reynolds' remarks, in passing, in *USA Today*.

No doubt whatsoever. The movie "Priest" has to be as viciously anti-Catholic as anything that has ever rotted on the silver screen.

So why feel lucky? Because I'm the Archbishop of New York. Five out of five of the priests in the "Priest" is twisted in his own way, a thoroughly unsavory character, with fewer redeeming features than a black beetle in a bowl of black bean soup. In the Archdiocese of New York, we have so many good, well-balanced, faithful priests to the square inch that any single one gone wrong gets headlines, big, black, lurid.

But let me not be chauvinistic. In a life getting longer by the minute, I have traveled the world more than somewhat, and seen the world's priests at work in mudholes and cathedrals, in classrooms and soup kitchens, in confessionals and hospitals and leprosariums. For every nasty caricature of a "Priest" kind of priest, I have met a hundred, a thousand, God knows how many, celibate, loyal, self-sacrificing men of Christ. They are not gods, they are human beings, tempted at times, slipping on occasion, never pretending to be perfect, never blaming the Church because they are imperfect. The overwhelming number of priests I have known in almost fifty years of being one are realists. They are at ease with their priesthood, they accept the celibacy that goes with it, they accept life as it is.

Every priest knows he's a volunteer. Nobody forced him to be ordained. Nobody has a gun in his back to keep him "in the league." He's not a whiner.

He knows that married men and women have their problems, their

temptations, their hard knocks, their agonies often far worse than any priest celibate, as do many single people in the world.

I have known rogue priests, too. Some have been very evil characters, really evil. Some have simply been weak. Some have wreaked havoc on other human beings. Some have been walking tragedies. Anybody who knows one of them knows that he's an aberration. To paint him as the norm is ludicrous.

"Priest" is ludicrous. "Sister" Maria Monk was infinitely more convincing in her day, when she illicitly told the world the sordid story of life behind convent walls. Maria's main problem was that she had never been behind convent walls, primarily because she had never been a nun.

I'm disappointed by Disney, of course, owner, I'm told, of Miramax, distributor of "Priest." As to Miramax itself, and everyone who had anything to do with this basically childish pout at the Church, what can be said but, "Grow up"? Your movie is little more than the kind of thing kids used to take delight in scrawling on the walls in men's rooms. Call it art, go into ecstasy over its sophistication, exult in exposing the "horrors" of Catholicism, ladies and gentlemen of Disneymax, if you will, but what you have done is cheap and odorous. You may attract enough curiosity seekers to the box office to pay for the movie, but what you make in the bananas you will almost certainly lose in the coconuts, and far, far more.

It's hard to wash your hands of this kind of thing, Disney and company. Pilate has been trying unsuccessfully for two thousand years.

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Something Stinks in the Magic Kingdom: “PRIEST”

By William A. Donohue

The movie “Priest” is a cruel caricature of Roman Catholic priests, one that is so blatantly unrepresentative of most priests as to qualify as an invidious stereotype of the Catholic clergy. Worse, the movie invites the audience to see the Catholic Church as the causative agent of priestly despair.

There are five priests in the movie and every one of them is a thoroughly tortured individual. Indeed the priests are either living a life that directly contravenes Church teachings or they are mean, even psychotic, individuals. Two of the priests are having affairs, one with the female housekeeper and the other with his newly acquired male friend. Another priest is a drunk, the country pastor is obviously a madman and the bishop is simply wicked. In short, there is not a single priest who is well-adjusted and faithful to the Church.

Perhaps most alarming, the depraved state of the priests is not cast as a manifestation of aberrant behavior, rather it is directly attributed to the warped nature of Catholicism. For example, the priests who have violated their vow of celibacy are portrayed in a most sympathetic fashion, the real villain being the celibacy requirement itself. In the case of the gay priest, he carries the additional burden of not being allowed to disclose what he has heard in the confessional, namely that a 14 year-old girl is an incest victim. True to form, the priest calls Christ a “bastard” for bequeathing the Catholic Church and its horrid rules.

Sympathy is also afforded the drunkard priest: we learn that it’s too late in life for this unhappy priest to leave the

order, albeit it is not too late for him to counsel the gay priest to "get out" while he's still young. Our sympathy deepens for the gay priest when his sexual orientation is made public (he is caught having sex in a car by a police officer). However, our sympathy quickly turns to hate when we see how harshly he is greeted by the country pastor and the bishop. Make no mistake about it, the viciousness of these two clergymen is a function of their role as enforcement agents of the Catholic Church. The bottom line, then, is that the institution of the Catholic Church is responsible for the twisted lives of the priests.

At the end of the movie, the straight priest who is sleeping with the housekeeper defends the gay priest in front of the congregation, lecturing the parishioners on the wrongness of the Church's teachings on sexuality. Using vulgar language, he asks the faithful at Mass whether God cares what men do with their sex organ, beckoning them to focus their attention instead on such real outrages as war, famine and disaster. This concluding statement is most revealing: the Catholic Church is seen as oppressive because it does not accept the philosophy of freedom as entertained by sexual libertines.

There will be those who will say that the only movie about Catholicism that the Catholic League would approve of is one that paints all priests in a favorable light. That view, however, is just plain wrong. We do not expect that every movie on the Catholic Church will, or should, resemble "The Bells of St. Mary's," nor do we flinch from honest criticism of the Catholic Church, no matter how tough. But when a movie, or any other medium of communication, presents the Catholic Church as an institution to be reviled, it should be expected that the Catholic League, and, we believe, most Catholics, will greet such characterizations with disdain. Our fundamental complaint is not with the way the flawed priests are portrayed, but with the way their flaws are all pinned on the Catholic Church.

Had "Priest" included even one priest who was well-adjusted, content with his vocation, honorably serving the Church, it would have been an anomaly. The reason there is no such priest in the movie is because the point of the film is to convince the public of the Catholic Church's malevolence; to show a normal priest might have confused the message. Indeed, the appearance of a normal priest would have made inexplicable the movie's theme of blaming the institution of the Church for the maladies of its priests.

We know that there will be some people who will tout the artistic merits of the movie to the exclusion of its central message. That is regrettable. By way of analogy, if a Disney-owned enterprise made a powerful movie entitled "Rabbi" that nonetheless did violence to the honorable heritage of Judaism, surely we would expect a vigorous response from the Jewish community. Similarly, high creative drama could be sustained in a movie that portrayed African Americans as a morally destitute people. Or a movie called "Gays" could be well-done and at the same time depict homosexuals as depraved human beings. And Hollywood could certainly show these Jews, African Americans and gays as victims of their own heritage or lifestyle.

Now ask yourself, in the unlikely event that these movies were made, would there not be an outcry from the various civil rights organizations established to combat defamation in these communities? If the answer is yes, then it should be readily understood why the Catholic League objects to "Priest."

Those who cannot see past the movie's artistic merits might benefit by knowing what the director and the writer of "Priest" have had to say about Catholicism; it might prove to be a much needed reality check. For example, director Antonia Bird told *US* magazine that the movie is "a celebration of Catholicism but questions its rules and regulations." I asked Gina Gardini of Miramax what element of Catholicism was

“celebrated” and she was speechless. Appropriately, I might add.

Bird was more revealing when she commented to *Premiere* magazine that her goal was to make a statement about celibacy. “I met a lot of priests from the inner city,” said the non-Catholic. “You could just see these guys repressing a whole positive energy that they could be putting into their work.” Having subjected the Catholic priests to her Freudian microscope, Bird was in a position to tell the *Los Angeles Times* that the movie is “against a hierarchy adhering to old-fashioned rules without looking at the way the world’s changed.” Such hubris makes intelligible Bird’s approach to the movie.

It is instructive to note that Bird was “seething with rage” when in 1993 she heard again of the Pope’s opposition to condoms. That her rage has informed her work is not to be disputed. Indeed, her hatred of the Catholic Church as depicted in “Priest” is a manifestation of her deep-seated rage against Catholicism.

The writer, Jimmy McGovern, is fond of dubbing the priests of his youth “reactionary bastards.” In doing so, McGovern affords us the insight we need to understand his sentiments. Moreover, as the *Los Angeles Times* reports, McGovern takes great delight in his “ability to dissect people’s motives, even apparently altruistic ones, and to debase them by finding elements of selfishness in them.” It is obvious that McGovern found in Catholic priests much to debase, but in doing so he exposed his own character as well.

If there is one aspect of Catholicism that is driving the hostility of both Bird and McGovern, it is the conviction that the Catholic Church plays by two sets of rules when dealing with straight and gay priests. For example, in the pages of the *New York Times*, McGovern says that “There’s very little comment made on the relationship between the older priest and

the housekeeper.” And that is because, as McGovern contends, “The community can co-exist alongside that priest. It’s heterosexual, it’s indoors, and he handles it well. But a gay affair, that’s different.” Director Bird is of the same opinion. She told the *Los Angeles Times* that “There’s also no doubt the [Catholic] church draws a veil over heterosexual relationships, but if gay priests attempt monogamous relationships with other men, they’re out.”

This appalling ignorance of Catholicism is symbolic of the bias that is evident in the movie. Let it be said one more time: the Catholic Church teaches that celibacy is the proper discipline for the priesthood. It follows that priests who have sexual relations, either with women or with men, are in violation of their vows. In addition, fornication, sodomy and adultery are proscribed for lay Catholics. Individuals are free to disagree with these teachings, but they have no right to distort them.

It is not just the Catholic League that has seen in this movie an animus against Catholicism. For example, there is no one who is more knowledgeable about the way Hollywood views religion than movie critic Michael Medved. He told me personally that the film “displays the most profound hostility to the Catholic Church that I have seen in the last 15 years of reviewing movies.” It is not without significance that the *Los Angeles Times* noted that “Priest” is “an angry piece of invective directed at the Catholic church’s hierarchy.”

Nor should it go unnoticed that *Premiere* said of director Antonia Bird that she “is basking in her blasphemy.”

That the movie has a political agenda was not lost on some reviewers. *Newsweek* commented on how “mechanical” the film is, noting that “the issues are dictating the drama.” Anthony Lane in *The New Yorker* stated that the Catholic Church is treated like a “dysfunctional family” and wondered “what the system did to deserve all this.” He added that “The sole purpose of

its existence [the Catholic Church], apparently, is to hang there like a punching bag and get pummelled." Similarly, it is worth citing *Newsday* columnist Liz Smith's observation that "Miramax is obviously looking to push Catholic sensibilities-bruised already-to the limit."

The remark by Liz Smith deserves comment. She notes, quite correctly, that the movie was originally scheduled for nationwide release on April 14, which just happened to be Good Friday. Now if there is anyone so naive as to wonder whether the timing is a coincidence, just ponder this. In her interview with the *Los Angeles Times*, Antonia Bird said to reporter David Gritten, "Did I tell you when 'Priest' opens wide in the States? Good Friday. Sort of appropriate, wouldn't you say?"

This remark by director Bird settles the issue. The movie is designed to stick it to the Catholic Church and the timing of the release was designed to add salt to the wounds. It was the decision to release the movie on Good Friday-and with apparent glee-that was the final straw: any fair-minded person will admit that this crosses the line of decency. It is precisely this kind of "in-your-face" attitude that warrants a strong and unconditional reaction from non-Catholics as well as Catholics. Had it not been for the League's strong condemnation of the planned release date, "Priest" would have opened on Good Friday.

Finally, a word about Miramax and Disney. Miramax, as "Entertainment Tonight" said, "is no stranger to controversy." According to the *Wall Street Journal*, Miramax is most popular with "the art-house crowd" and the "cappuccino-sipping audience." It makes sense, then, that the persons behind these films, namely Miramax co-presidents Bob and Harvey Weinstein, have earned a reputation "as sometimes-abrasive entrepreneurs."

But when all is said and done, it is Disney that is

responsible for “Priest.”

It is a matter of record that Disney has leaned on Miramax when it was felt that Miramax’s battle with the Motion Picture Association of America was going too far. As the parent company, and as the quintessential producer of family-based entertainment, Disney holds a very special place in American life. It will not do, therefore, for Disney to wash its hands of being held accountable for “Priest.”

The Catholic League is proud to lead a nationwide revolt against Disney. The Disney we once knew no longer exists, and its new face is not very pretty. We hope that all of our members join with us in sending Disney a message, one that might cause it to think twice the next time it is tempted to make a ideological statement about Catholicism. We liked Disney so much better when it confined itself to Mickey Mouse. Unfortunately, those days are gone. Fortunately, the days when Catholics took it on the chin are also gone.

PETITION AGAINST DISNEY

We, the undersigned, have a message to Disney: you bit off more than you can chew when you offended Catholics with the release of “Priest.” Your decision to defiantly stand behind Miramax is going to cost you dearly, both in terms of money and in terms of goodwill.

We will boycott Disney products, sell Disney stock, cancel subscriptions to the Disney channel and refuse to go to Disneyland and Disney World. Perhaps most damaging, we will pass the word that Disney is not what it used to be.

We grew up with Disney. Disney was synonymous with family

values. We've always loved Disney. But no more. Disney has changed and what it has become is not a pretty sight.

You cannot have it both ways. You cannot put the Disney label on "The Lion King" and then give Miramax your blessings for releasing "Priest" and expect that your reputation will go unaffected. You have chosen to align yourself with the trendy types at Miramax, feeding their ability to make politically correct statements. In short, you are bankrolling an outfit that delights in challenging the traditional moral order.

The officials at Disney did not count on this kind of reaction. It is true that in the past Catholics were willing to ignore the kinds of insults that "Priest" delivers. But just as Disney has changed, so, too, have Catholics. We are prepared to defend our religion-which is too often portrayed unfairly-and we are prepared to register our outrage in a myriad of ways. We will see to it that Disney becomes a textbook case of expressing our outrage.

We hope that everyone at Disney thinks twice before offending Catholics again. Sadly, appeals to your goodwill mean nothing anymore. That is why we are hitting you in the pocketbook. And remember, the long-term damage to your Snow White image is something that no one can put a price tag on. The Catholic League has already tarnished your image and we have pledged to blacken it a little more.

Church Catches Hell In "Priest"

By Don Feder

If an institution is known by the enemies it makes, the Catholic Church should feel honored by Hollywood's entrenched hostility, which is manifest in the new movie "Priest."

"Priest," which opened in New York and Los Angeles last Friday, is so warped that it could only come from an entertainment industry at war with traditional religion.

There are five priests in the movie, set in Liverpool, all dysfunctional. The central character is a theologically conservative young priest who tells the older priest with whom he shares a parish to get rid of his mistress, then sneaks out to gay bars.

There's also an alcoholic priest, a bitter, disillusioned priest and a bishop who exudes the warmth of a cathedral's stone facade.

Not only are all of the priests aberrant, but, as William Donohue of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights points out, their problems are "directly attributed to the depraved nature of Catholicism"-particularly the church's insistence on priestly celibacy and opposition to homosexual conduct.

Hollywood's anti-Catholicism is pervasive. The Bells of St. Mary's are ringing a tocsin for clerical character assassination. "Monsignor" (1982) gave us Christopher Reeve as a priest in league with the Mafia who's sleeping with a nun. "The Godfather Part III" (1990) also fantasized a Vatican-Mafia connection.

"Household Saints" (1993) has a novice nun driven crazy by religious fervor-to the point where she has delusions of playing pinochle with the Trinity. For sheer malice, nothing surpasses 1985's "Agnes of God" in which a nun murders the child she gave birth to in a convent.

As an atheist psychiatrist, Jane Fonda (notorious for her

real-life attacks on the Vatican) does battle with the order's mother superior, Anne Bancroft, for the soul of the young sister. The theme is unmistakable when Fonda shouts at Bancroft, "poverty, chastity, and ignorance is what you live by," or when she tells the infanticidal nun that it's "all right to hate God."

"Priest" is equally subtle. Director Antonia Bird told the *Los Angeles Times* that she "seethes with rage" over the pope's opposition to artificial birth control and that the movie's central message is opposition to "a hierarchy adhering to old-fashioned rules without looking at the way the world's changed."

Screenwriter Jimmy McGovern rails at the priests of his childhood as "reactionary bastards."

If the five tarnished clerics weren't enough, Bird and McGovern drag in incest in the form of a 14-year old girl who confesses to the gay priest that her father is molesting her. The priest is in agony, being unable to protect the child due to yet another antiquated church doctrine-the sanctity of the confessional.

In a video he narrates ("Hollywood vs. Religion," distributed by Focus on the Family), movie critic Michael Medved notes: "The Catholic Church is the most visible religious institution in the world so Hollywood views it as a particularly juicy target."

The entertainment community knows where the danger lies to its values: Live for the moment, trust your instincts, and always let your hormones be your guide.

Some religions it will tolerate. Catholics and Amish share a biblical morality. Yet the Amish, who've isolated themselves from society, don't challenge the dominant culture. This affords Hollywood the luxury of viewing them as quaint and charming, a la "Witness."

The Roman Catholic hierarchy is inclined to activism and unapologetically articulates its views on a broad range of issues. Catholics march in front of abortion clinics. Various bishops have come out strongly against homosexual marriage and adoption.

Hence the need to portray church-going Catholics as superstitious, priests as fornicating hypocrites and the hierarchy as money-grubbing, power-lusting fanatics.

Toward the end of "Priest," the father with the mistress comes to the aid of the recently disgraced father with the male lover, asking his congregation if God really cares what men do with their sexual organs.

If this is indeed a matter of supreme indifference to the Supreme Being, then why should God care what a man does with that same organ to his teen-age daughter?

Bird and McGovern would reply that we all know that incest is wrong. But that knowledge is inseparable from the Judea-Christian ethic whose other applications by the church "Priest" decries.

Produced by the BBC, "Priest" is being distributed by Disney-owned Miramax. There are 59 million Catholics in this country. If a tiny fraction of them boycott Disney videos, disconnect the Disney Channel and cancel vacations to Disney World, the message to CEO Michael Eisner would come through as clearly as the message in "Priest."

This column appeared in the Boston Herald, March 29, 1995, p. 27. It is reprinted with permis- swn.

What's Happening to Disney?

To see the Catholic League's op-ed page ad which appeared in the April 10, 1995 issue of the *New York Times* click [[here](#)].