

PETITIONS AND BOYCOTT STIR DISNEY

The Catholic League turned up the heat against those responsible for "Nothing Sacred" by flooding Disney with petitions and launching a boycott against the show's sponsors. The response to both drives was spectacular.

When the league asked its members to sign a petition against Disney for promoting the ABC show, "Nothing Sacred," they reacted with characteristic zeal. Hundreds of thousands of petitions were signed and delivered to Disney chairman Michael Eisner. In addition to Catholic League members, the petition was signed by bishops, priests, religious, nuns and those of other faiths. Entire parishes signed on, as did orders of nuns. Most touching were the sixth grade students from Holy Name School in Ebensburg, Pennsylvania; they each wrote their own letter to Mr. Eisner.

Getting to Eisner was one thing, but it was quite another when the league decided to warn prospective sponsors of the price they would pay for supporting "Nothing Sacred." In an ad that was paid for by league members in a special appeal, the Catholic League published a statement in *Advertising Age*, the flagship trade house publication in the advertising industry. The ad was published in the September 8 edition, just ten days before the show premiered; it is printed on p. 2.

The league sought the support of many other organizations in its boycott against the sponsors. Here is a list of those groups that signed the boycott at press time: American Catholic Lawyers Association; American Family Association; American Life League; Americans United for the Pope; Ancient Order of Hibernians (Division #4, New York County); Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation; Cardinal Newman Society; Catholic Answers, Inc.; Catholic Coalition of Westchester; Catholic

Defense League of Minnesota; Chinese Catholic Information Center; Concerned Women for America; Focus on the Family; League of Catholic Voters; Legatus; Jewish Action Alliance; Jews for Morality; Morality in Media; Muslim Coalition/Peace Press Association; Pro-Life Action League; Sons of Italy, Commission for Social Justice; Women for Faith and Family.

Just as we promised in the ad, the league would garner support from Protestant, Jewish and Muslim organizations, as well as from Catholic ones. It is now up to everyone to follow through with the boycott. A list of those advertisers who sponsored the premiere edition of “Nothing Sacred” appears on

MOTHER TERESA, R.I.P.

When the Catholic League learned of the death of Mother Teresa, it immediately issued the following comment to the media:

“In an age when superlatives are used with abandon to describe the contributions of public figures, it is testimony to Mother Teresa’s greatness that no sane person would deny her the status as the world’s most giving human being. She was a model for men and women, Catholic and non-Catholic alike. There was no human life, born or unborn, that she was not willing to sacrifice for and there was no human condition so debased that she did not seek to remedy. But perhaps most of all she will be remembered as someone who never sought the honor she so sincerely earned.”

As soon as Mother Teresa’s death was announced, Fox News Network called William Donohue to discuss her work. He made the point that in addition to her service to the poor, Mother Teresa was a principled and courageous woman who wasn’t afraid

to go against the grain. In particular, he cited her statement at the National Prayer Breakfast in 1994. In front of President Clinton and his wife, Mother Teresa called abortion “the greatest destroyer of peace in the world.”

WHY SOME CATHOLICS LIKE “NOTHING SACRED”

William A. Donohue

Catholics are not a monolithic entity and it is therefore not surprising that the Catholic reaction to “Nothing Sacred” has been anything but uniform. On the one hand, we have bishops, priests, nuns, religious and lay persons who have signed our petition against Disney and are incensed about the show. On the other hand, we have bishops, priests, nuns, religious and lay persons who like the show and wouldn’t think of signing our petition. This column is dedicated to those in the latter category.

Forget about what the Catholic League says about the show. Here’s how ABC advertises “Nothing Sacred” on its website: “He just cursed out an obnoxious guy on the street, came pretty close to accepting a bribe and almost got fired. Some might say he ‘needs church.’ But then, he’s already a priest. Blessed with a God-given talent of touching people’s souls, Father Ray could use some soul saving soothing of his own.” Of course it might help if Father Ray actually believed in God (he is depicted as being uncertain), because then he would need less “soul saving soothing.”

US, one of those trendy magazines that wouldn’t exist without the paparazzi (you’ve seen it in your dentist’s office), gave

an even better account of "Nothing Sacred" in its October edition. After chiding the Catholic League to lighten up, *US* came clean. Father Ray is described as "leftist, horny, combative and prone to telling female confessors unsure about abortion that it's their choice." And this is the kind of priest that some Catholics want to see on TV, and perhaps in real life as well.

A master of sarcasm, *US* tells us that "like Superman, when he puts on his cassock he performs miracles. In the clinch with God or an ex-girlfriend, Father Ray is sometimes a bit sanctimonious, but this demystifying drama about the priesthood truly pushes the TV envelope." But not far enough to satisfy the curious appetite of some Catholics. Indeed, this is their kind of priest, a refreshing contrast to the Bing Crosby-Barry Fitzgerald types that have been the source of so much embarrassment to them over the years.

Some Catholics are exuberant over the mere fact that this show is actually addressing the theme of religion. But listen to the names of other "religion" shows on TV these days: "7th Heaven"; "Soul Man"; "Good News"; "Touched by an Angel"; "Promised Land," etc. And for Catholics, we are awarded with a program whose message is accurately conveyed in its title, "Nothing Sacred."

So why do some Catholics like "Nothing Sacred"? At root, their admiration stems from their uneasiness with hierarchy. What they want is a clergy who are just like the rest of us, namely, flawed human beings who just happen to be priests. They think it is a mistake for the laity to look up to priests and they deplore the hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church. Intoxicated with equality, they delight in seeing priests portrayed as social workers in robes.

The nineteenth century Frenchman, Alexis de Tocqueville, commented that "men cannot do without dogmatic beliefs" and that the most desirable of them all were "religious dogmas."

He looked to priests to provide answers to such first questions as “why am I here?” and “who put me here?” The answers to these primordial questions, he stressed, “must be clear, precise, intelligible to the crowd, and very durable.” It is not easy to see how this can be done when there are no status distinctions between priests and the laity.

Father Ray, of course, does not believe in giving answers that are clear, precise, intelligible or durable, and that is why he can’t find it within himself to counsel a young woman in the confessional against abortion. Those who like Father Ray aren’t offended by this because the last thing they want to be tagged is judgmental, at least when the subject is abortion (it’s okay to be judgmental about the death penalty). What they like is that Father Ray shows compassion, and that’s all that counts.

In the end, the most interesting aspect of “Nothing Sacred” is not the show itself, it is the reaction to it in Catholic quarters. It says a lot about what where we’re at. Where we wind up depends on us.

THE MERCHANDISING OF THE HOLOCAUST

Richard C. Lukas, Ph.D.

The Holocaust is a hot topic. State legislatures have voted to have it taught in schools. Holocaust museums mushroom across the country. Publishers indiscriminately print anything relating to the subject to boost their profits. The media regularly commemorate Holocaust anniversaries. Even Steven Spielberg, after making millions of dollars on “Jurassic Park”

and "E.T." , entered the field with "Schindler's List."

The negative side of this frenetic preoccupation with the Holocaust is that the historical context of the tragedy is lost. To be sure, the Holocaust was important but it was not the only tragedy or even the only example of genocide during the Second World War. The Gypsies, who have few spokesmen in this country, were also slated for complete annihilation by the Germans. But who even mentions that fact today? And who would deny that the loss of 3 million Polish Catholic lives was the result of a German genocidal policy that considered Poles sub-human? And what about the millions of White Russian and Ukrainian civilians who perished as a result of German racism? As Nobel Laureate Elie Wiesel said, "All Jews were victims but not all victims were Jews."

The tragedy of non-Jews during the Second World War—Gypsies, Poles and other Slavs—is usually ignored or distorted. Publishers rarely print anything about these people. Holocaust museums obscure or trivialize their tragedies. Even the U.S. Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C. conspicuously omitted Catholic Poles among Hitler's victim's in one of its fund raising letters. Anniversaries of non-Jewish events such as the German invasion of Poland in 1939 and the Warsaw Uprising of 1944, not to be confused with the Jewish Ghetto Uprising in 1943 which was a much smaller event, passed virtually unnoticed in the mainstream media.

By focusing exclusively on what happened to the Jews during World War II, the magnitude of the evil of Nazism is reduced. The Jewish story is important but it is only part of the history of World War II. When the facts concerning the tragedy of non-Jews during World War II are trivialized, obscured, ignored or distorted, the history of the Second World War is historically and morally compromised and degrades the memory of all the victims of the Germans.

The "us" and "them" mentality that often befouls discussions

of the Holocaust and the related genocides of non-Jews underscores the desperate need for balance and objectivity about the subject. But there appears to be precious little of it in many Holocaust studies programs. Out of 55 books listed on the combined reading lists in Holocaust courses taught in eight states, only 26 of them specifically deal with Catholic Poles. When I recently spoke on the subject of Jewish and Polish child victims of the Nazi era at Florida State University's Holocaust Institute, an organization designed to educate high-school teachers on the subject, a sizable portion of the audience was unprepared intellectually for a rigorous and fair analysis of the subject. What many in the audience wanted to hear was hagiography, not history.

This is what happens when history is merchandised. It becomes vulgar, pop history with all of the cheap distortions and falsifications that are part of the phenomenon. It demeans Jew and gentile alike in having the ring of propaganda.

Richard C. Lukas, Ph.D., is the author of seven books, including *Did the Children Cry?: Hitler's War Against Jewish and Polish Children, 1939-1945*, for which he won the prestigious Janusz Korczak Literary Award. Hippocrene Books recently published the revised edition of Lukas' *Forgotten Holocaust: The Poles Under German Occupation, 1939-1944*.

LEAGUE ASSISTS CALIFORNIA INMATES

Several months ago, the Catholic League received a letter from an inmate at the Chuckawalla Valley State Prison (CVSP) in Blythe, California which indicated that Catholic prisoners were not being allowed to freely practice their religion. The inmate charged that for over a year there had been no full-

time Catholic chaplain, and that when interim priests were available, the inmates were not always allowed to attend Mass. He also said that the Catholic inmates did not have access to Catholic reading material. In addition, he pointed out that Protestant inmates had both a full-time chaplain and reading material.

The league immediately wrote to the acting director of the California Department of Corrections and stated that if the charges were true, then "the situation at CVSP is extremely disturbing and arguably, unconstitutional. The First Amendment guarantees freedom of religion to all Americans, even those who are incarcerated."

Before the league received a response to the letter regarding the problems at CVSP, complaints were sent to the league from two inmates at the Richard J. Donovan Correctional Facility in San Diego, California. They charged that Catholic inmates were being denied access to Mass (with preferential treatment being given to Protestant services) and that their rosaries and religious pictures were often desecrated and destroyed by prison officers. Also, non-meat meals were not available during the Lenten season.

Following notification about these charges, the league wrote to an official in the Office of Community Resources of the California Department of Corrections about both cases.

The league was informed by an official of CVSP that the facility now has a Catholic chaplain who will arrange for priests to say Mass and who will lead Bible studies, among other things . In addition, the league was told that Catholic reading material is now available to the Catholic inmates. In reference to the situation at the Richard J. Donovan Correctional Facility, because of the league's intervention, the two inmates who made the charges have had a meeting with an official of the prison regarding their complaints; they are awaiting word on what will be done.

DISNEY AND MORALITY

We're not sure what to make of it. First, Disney chairman Michael Eisner suggests that he's discovered morality, then the next minute we learn that his company doesn't want to touch the subject.

On August 24, Michael Eisner sounded like he got some of that old-time religion when he announced that he was upset with baseball for not suspending a player for drug possession. When Tony Phillips, who plays for the Disney-owned Anaheim Angels, was treated lightly for drug possession, Eisner commented, "I'm disappointed that baseball doesn't have the kind of discipline that I think would be a good idea for an industry presenting itself as a role model for kids."

Eisner's remark makes us wonder whether he has any mirrors in his house. Nonetheless, he gave us reason for hope. That was quickly dashed when Disney spokesman Ken Green was asked by the *Washington Post* to comment on the [Disney view of culture and morality](#). "We're not getting into that" he said. But, of course, the company that pays his salary was founded to make its impact on culture and morality. And that it did, with style. Today's Disney also impacts on culture and morality, but in a manner that Walt would never recognize.

DIVIDENDS PAID IN DRIVE

AGAINST MTV

Last month's *Catalyst* included a story about the MTV show, "The Real World." We were troubled by the opening show of the season which featured several not-so-funny comments about Catholics. We wrote to the show's producers and to the sponsors. It looks like we might have had an impact.

McDonald's wrote saying that they cannot prescreen "The Real World" because the show is not scripted (this is true). They made it clear, however, that they "would never intentionally advertise on a show that negatively portrays or is offensive to any religion, race, or nationality." Knowing that, we'll be sure to hold them to this standard.

M&M/Mars said it would share our comments with its advertising agencies. The Department of the Army felt that overall the show did not violate its guidelines, however it denounced "the anti-Catholic bigotry" that marred some of the program. More important, the Army informed its agency buyers and MTV account executive that they would maintain "on-going scrutiny" of the show. The best news came from the Den-Mat Corporation: upon receipt of our letter, they immediately withdrew all advertising on the show.

Things may be looking up. Since we registered our complaint with MTV and the sponsors, the anti-Catholic element to the show has ceased. But no thanks to Michael Eisner: Disney, which sponsors the show, never responded to our letter.

PROTEST AGAINST "LASH WEDNESDAY" MOUNTS

Last month we reported that an effort was underway in San Diego to protest the "Lash Wednesday" segment of the "Dave, Shelly & Chainsaw" show. The segment, which airs on 101 KGB, features callers who "confess" their sins to the Catholic-bashing hosts. Now, due to the work of the San Diego chapter of the league, the heat is being turned up more than ever.

Orchestrated by chapter president Carl Horst, approximately 15,000 postcards were printed and distributed to the 105 parishes in the Diocese of San Diego; the cards sent a message of outrage to the station. According the radio station itself, more than 8,000 cards were received. Just as encouraging was the response of local officials and non-Catholics.

Due to the efforts of a Protestant minister, Rev. Samuel Fous-Mensah, his organization, E.R.A.S.E., was able to persuade the Mayor of El Cajon, and several Council members, to protest the show. They maintained that the "Lash Wednesday" segment was indecent and in violation of F.C.C. regulations.

Thanks to Horst, the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith and the San Diego Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints have also joined the campaign against the show. This brings together Catholics (Catholic League Chapter), African Americans (E.R.A.S.E.), Jews (ADL) and Mormons (Latter Day Saints). Though the show is still airing, it is our hope that this formidable coalition will prevail in the end.

Once again, league members are being asked to notify the program manager. Please write to: Todd Little, 5745 Kearny Villa Road, Suite M, San Diego, CA 92123. If these steps do not prove fruitful, we will deal with the sponsors of the show. It is never humorous to mock our sacraments, especially

given the vulgar manner in which it is done on this show.

MARIA MONK PUT TO PASTURE

Perhaps the most infamous anti-Catholic story of the nineteenth century was the tale of Maria Monk. Monk said that on the night that she was inducted into a Montreal convent, she came upon a tunnel which was used by priests and monks from a nearby monastery to sneak into the convent at night. Monk said they had sex with the sisters, leaving many of them pregnant. Once the child was born, the old sisters would smother him or her to death, but only after they baptized them first.

The story is a hoax. Monk was a woman without morals who made it all up. She wasn't even a Catholic (she was Protestant) much less a nun. But that didn't stop the book, *The Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk* from being a best-seller. It sold over a million copies before the end of the century and is still selling today.

When William Donohue recently learned that Barnes & Noble was carrying this book in its catalog, he protested. The response was great. "I concur with your opinion and believe that this title is inappropriate for our catalog," wrote Greg Oviatt, Vice President of Merchandising. "It will not appear in future Barnes & Noble catalogs," he added.

PENN STATE DOES GOOD

Readers know that we have had our differences with Penn State over the past year. But fairness demands that we give Penn State its due when merited.

In last month's *Catalyst*, we ran a piece objecting to a Penn State brochure for its conference on Education Technology. It showed a man resembling Christ with pens and pencils pierced in his body. Conference Chairman Professor Henry C. Johnson, Jr. responded with a sincere letter that puts to rest any bad intent. A lengthy description of the image that we objected to was provided.

In essence, the figure was supposed to represent St. Sebastian and the message of the artist was to show how human life can be subjugated by technology, especially as it bears on language and communication. "Furthermore, and ironically," wrote Johnson, "the assault on religion and the sacred, as legitimate aspects of human experience, exacerbated by the increasing impact of technology, is a principal theme of Ellul and Illich, and several presentations from that perspective are scheduled during the Conference."

In his letter to Dr. Donohue, Professor Johnson said that "all of us on the Conference Committee would share the goals of your important organization." At the bottom of his letter, he added, "There is, of course, no relation between our project and the art exhibits you cite, which most of us view with equal distaste, although that is not a strong enough term."

Also meriting our attention is a statement from Andrew Sicree, Curator of Penn State's Earth & Mineral Sciences Museum. In August, Sicree wrote a letter to the National Museum of American History decrying the Smithsonian organization's "Science in American Life" exhibit. Sicree objected to the way the Catholic Church's teachings on contraception were

misrepresented. He even agreed to go to D.C. to explain *Humanae Vitae* to the directors.

This is good news. The Catholic League has no agenda against any person or institution and is only too happy to report on good news, as well as bad news.