

THE MANY FACES OF PREJUDICE

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Most of us can easily identify prejudicial statements when sweeping generalizations of a negative kind are made. But prejudice has many faces, and not all of them are readily apparent. Take the "Dateline" example that is mentioned in this issue of *Catalyst*.

Does the Catholic Church have dirty laundry? Of course. What institution or group of people doesn't? Furthermore, it is the right of the media to uncover wrongdoing whenever and wherever it occurs. So what was so wrong about "Dateline's" exposé of a Catholic-operated mental hospital in Quebec in the first half of this century? Aside from the decision to air this segment at Christmastime, there is the question, "Why?" Why was this story chosen for investigation in the first place? After all, it had no legs to it that made it of contemporary interest.

As I said in my letter to NBC, many viewers might like to see a "Dateline" exclusive on babies born alive in abortion clinics; or a segment on who's funding Rev. Al Sharpton; or a story on the legalization of torture in Israel; or a piece on the gay contribution to AIDS.

When I asked a senior NBC official whether "Dateline" might consider doing any of these stories, he was non-committal, purposely leaving the door open. But he knows as well as I do that "Dateline" would *never* consider airing any of these stories. And not just "Dateline": is there anyone who really believes that Mike Wallace would do a "60 Minutes" piece on any of these subjects?

What the media decide to investigate, and what they choose not explore, involve value judgments. The decision not to air the dirty laundry that exists in the abortion industry—doctors and nurses running around with a baby that is alive but is

supposed to be dead—is a value judgment. Not to unmask whose dole Al Sharpton is on is a value judgment (he has no reported income). Not to tell the American public, which generously gives money to Israel, about that country's legal use of torture—in the 21st century—is a value judgment. And not to explore why reckless gays should not be treated the way we do smokers—with stigma, and by holding them accountable for promoting certain diseases—is a value judgment.

Another example of prejudice occurs when cultural observers get more exercised over those who oppose bigotry than they do about bigotry itself. In this regard, Kinney Littlefield is a perfect example.

Ms. Littlefield writes a weekly TV column for the *Orange County Register* in Southern California. To put it mildly, she hates the Catholic League. That doesn't make her unique, but what does distinguish her from other boob-tube experts (imagine telling your grandchildren that what you did for a living was watch TV all day) is her anger at reverent portrayals of Catholicism.

This past fall, NBC aired a movie "Mary, Mother of Jesus," that was produced by JFK's sister Eunice Kennedy Shriver and son Bobby Shriver. Littlefield acknowledged that the film was anything but anti-Catholic, but that was just the problem: it should have been.

Littlefield not only objected to the high revenue that NBC stood to gain by airing this film, she was worried about something else. "More crucially—and perhaps dangerously—it is smooth, seamless infotainment, crafted to sell the Shriviers' personal view of Christianity and Mary's role in it." Well, now, that's really saying something: it is dangerous to offer a movie that Christians might like. Shame on Kate O'Beirne for not making this her "Outrage of the Week" on the Capital Gang!

"Mary, Mother of Jesus," Littlefield writes, "should help

Donohue and cohorts relax. It delivers the kind of safe, secure view of Catholicism they require." Borrowing from her lens, it could also be said that the reason she likes movies like "Dogma" is because they deliver the kind of bigoted, trashy view of Catholicism she requires. Different strokes for different folks.

Oh, yes, as the year ended, Littlefield mention us again. "The conservative Catholic League—not affiliated with the Catholic Church—castigated Kevin Smith's crude but compassionate film 'Dogma' for debasing the Catholic faith." It was so good of her to red flag our "conservative" nature to the reader (in the same piece she provided no adjective when describing either the NAACP or the Anti-Defamation League). And it was intriguing to learn that "Dogma" was at once both crude and compassionate (I'll have to speak to Pat Scully about this—it must have gotten by him; I know it got by me).

As for the matter of us not being affiliated with the Church, Littlefield is wrong. Now that it's the year 2000, it's time to come clean: the Catholic League is a mole within secular society hired by the pope to impose the teachings of the Catholic Church on America. And the world, too. And beyond. When are we landing on Mars?