

# 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.