

TRAVEL CHANNEL'S VATICAN "MYSTERY"



Bill Donohue comments on the Travel Channel's "Greatest Mysteries: Vatican"; it premiered last night:

Lies about Catholicism abound, and the intentional distortion of the truth is also commonplace. We're used to it at the Catholic League. But there are times when the source astounds us. This happened today when John Mulvey, a policy analyst, watched the recklessly inaccurate portrayal of Catholicism that aired Sunday night on the Travel Channel. At times the material seemed straight out of the annals of sci-fi.

Yes, there were rogue popes, none more disgraceful than Rodrigo Borgia, Alexander VI. But if the goal was to promote skepticism of all matters Catholic, then the savants who worked on this program should have stopped there. To say they put their foot in it when they invented a female pope would be a gross understatement.

Just as there are people who believe the earth is flat, there are those who believe that Pope Joan ruled in 855. Among the true believers is Candida Moss, a Notre Dame professor who is mostly known for discounting the persecution of Christians in the early Church. The fact is that Pope Joan is pure myth: the fairy tale began in the middle of the 13th century, making inexplicable (from the perspective of the true believers) why no historians in the intervening years managed to write about Ms. Popess.

Here is an inconvenient fact: Leo IV died on July 17, 855, and

he was immediately followed by Benedict III. There was no pope in between. But if Moss wants to persist in her fantasy, and the Travel Channel wants to challenge the historical record, then they need to contact Eamon Duffy, author of *Saints & Sinners: A History of the Popes*, the most authoritative volume on the subject. The University of Cambridge professor never heard of the gal.