

WHY “CONCLAVE” IS A FLOP

Bill Donohue

When *Playboy* reigned supreme—before the age of internet porn—it was regarded as the choice girly publication of the urbane set. It had essays, poems, book reviews, interviews with celebrities, music reviews, and the like. It was said that only 10 percent of the magazine featured pictures of naked gals. But everyone knew that guys didn’t buy *Playboy* because of the other 90 percent.

Similarly, there are many outstanding artistic elements to “Conclave,” the movie about the election of a new pope, but does anyone really believe that it would be heralded as a great film if it weren’t for the ending? That’s when we learn that the newly elected pope has a uterus.

Last weekend “Conclave” won the top prize at the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) Awards, and this weekend it is up for Best Picture at the Oscars; it previously beat all competitors at the British Academy Film Awards (BAFTA).

Movie makers in the USA and the UK want desperately to see the Catholic Church become more “modern.” This is code for Protestanizing. But married priests, women priests, and a soft—if not welcoming—approach to homosexuality, abortion and gender ideology has not exactly been a home run for the mainline denominations. Indeed, they are in free fall. Most important, it is precisely because they decided to become “relevant” that they are crashing.

Secularists may not have noticed but orthodoxy sells. This is as true for Catholics as it is for Protestants and Jews.

Why does Cardinal Vincent Benitez, who becomes the new pope in “Conclave,” have a uterus? Because he’s a freak? No, because those associated with the film want Catholics to think outside

the box and become more accepting of heterodoxy. In other words, they want Catholics to reconsider the wisdom of Church teachings.

In an honest review in the *Washington Post*, Monica Hesse understands what's going on. "Perhaps the film's point is the Benitez's identity as an intersex individual is going to radically inform everything he does, which is, in turn, going to radically change the Catholic Church. It would be impossible for Benitez *not* to be transformative to the church, because he has been transformed himself."

Of course, he could have been a force for radical change had they depicted him as transgender, but intersex is sexier and much more provocative. Transgender is getting old.

Now some reviewers, such as Dana Stevens at Slate, see the movie's ending to be more of a last minute flip of the switch. She sees it as "an eleventh-hour plot device to make the audience say, 'whoa! in unison, rather than a subject of reflection and discussion." Similarly, Nick Schager at the Daily Beast said the big revelation at the end "lands with a hilarious thud."

That means the movie's point was lost.

It appears that the desired outcome—to jar the public, especially Catholics—to change their mind about the Church's teachings on sexuality and welcome a pope with a uterus—is not getting through. When the audience giggles, it's a sure sign they failed to receive the memo. That's why the movie is a flop.