

Christians and Media: A Prayer for Forgiveness

By Barbara R. Nicolosi

Setting the tone for the Jubilee Year, John Paul II has issued a historic declaration asking forgiveness for the sins committed by Christians down through the ages. It falls to each of us to follow the Pope's example, by applying the spirit of repentance to our own individual worlds of activity. I work in the entertainment industry. So here goes...

Let us ask for forgiveness as a Church, for our absence in the mainstream culture. Our failure to have a significant presence in the arts and in the world of entertainment has sorely impacted the people of our time, and for this we are profoundly sorry. Let us repent of the sloth and fear, the dearth of professionalism and depth, the inability to work together, and the lack of pastoral concern, which has kept us as a body on the sidelines in the marketplace of ideas. We have most often taken the easy road of complaining and criticizing the media instead of setting a positive example, and so we offer this prayer of repentance.

We ask forgiveness from every soul in torment and loneliness who has lived and died without the hope that we could have shared with them had we been better apostles of the media. We take responsibility for the darkness of error that we have allowed to flourish by our silence in the culture. For failing to stir the collective heart of humanity towards that which is good by beautiful movies and inspiring television, and haunting melodies, we are sorry. We ask forgiveness from all those whom we might have led to their knees, or sustained on their spiritual journeys, or inspired to a life of heroism and greatness.

Let us ask forgiveness of those whose lives have been scarred by our failure to find a compelling forum for the Church in the arts and media. For keeping the Gospel of Life to ourselves in a culture of death, we are ashamed and sorry. For ignoring the Church's mandate to use film and television and radio to unite the human family in the cause of truth and social justice, we are sorry. We repent of the lack of creativity and passion with which we have applied Christian principles to the real problems of our day. Too often, the world has rejected

our art as being banal, and our writing as being nothing but platitudes, and too often, the world has been right.

Let us ask forgiveness from those in the Mystical Body of Christ who have been crushed under negative media attacks that have gone unanswered by us. We are sorry for allowing the entire Christian community to be defined in the popular culture from the outside, by those who do not understand us, or who disdain the Gospel message. From those who might be Christians now, had we presented ourselves and what we believe in a powerful way, we ask forgiveness. For the whining and self-pity with which we have most often answered attacks in the media against our faith, and for being victims instead of martyrs, we are deeply sorry.

Let us ask forgiveness from those persons whom we have allowed to be objectified for our viewing pleasure. Media that diminishes the dignity of any person, with or without their consent, diminishes us all, and so we regret the voyeuristic spirit with which we have approached media sexuality and violence. Let us repent if we have used or excused pornography in any form. For our failure to get up and walk out of movies that are offensive, we are sorry. Let us repent of our habits of racy novels, and Sports Illustrated swimsuit issues, and grocery store tabloids, and WWF, and Jerry Springer shows, and mindless talk radio. For the bad example we have given others by wallowing in mediocrity and that which is unworthy, we are sorry.

Let us ask forgiveness from our children for our failure to prepare them to live in a media age. For not giving young people the tools and training to be intelligent and moderate users of the modern media, we are sorry. We repudiate the fear and ignorance that has

kept us from sharing with our children the beautiful movies and music that could have deepened them and connected them to others. We repent of having made our children television and video game addicts, by our lazy use of these means as babysitters. We bitterly regret acquiescing to the loss of innocence in young people, by not providing them guidance as to their choices of television and music and movies.

We ask forgiveness from those in our circle of friends and family whom we have neglected because of our irresponsible use of media. We regret every wonderful memory we might have made with them had we not wasted our hours in senseless video games and Internet chat rooms and vacuous TV shows. We have fled into music and television so often when we might have grown in some times of silence. So to those who have needed the fruit of that silence – the insight and counsel which we didn't have to give – we are sorry.

Finally, we ask forgiveness from those committed Christians in the entertainment industry who have gone unsupported by our prayers and actions. We repent of our failure to implore God to send talented artists and writers and actors and directors into places of influence in the world of media. We take responsibility for our Church changing from being the Patron of the arts into being the prey of the arts, and we commit ourselves to support those believers who would overflow with gifts of beauty and faith in the world.