



Christian Communicators Impacting the World

**PUBLIC POLICY
ACTION PAPER**

**Faith in a Box:
Entertainment Television and Religion
September 25, 2003-September 24, 2004**

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**National Religious Broadcasters
9510 Technology Drive
Manassas, Virginia 20110**

Executive Summary

According to a 2003 Harris Poll, 90% of Americans express belief in God. Television is gradually catching up with this statistic by including religious subject matter in more of the programs that air on its medium (one treatment per hour in 2003/2004 versus one every 3.3 hours in 1997). But the quality of those portrayals is cause for concern.

In this sixth Parents Television Council study looking at the treatment of religion on primetime television, an entire year of programming was analyzed. In 2,385.5 hours of programming 2,344 treatments of religion were found. The previous study, done in 1997, found 551 treatments of religion in its 1,800 hours studied.

Overall, negative depictions of religion surpassed those that are positive by a slim margin. However, depictions of aspects affiliated with organized religion were found to be overwhelmingly negative. The question, then, is does television's treatment of religion truly reflect the viewpoints of the majority of Americans.

A Gallup analysis done in 2003 found that 60% of Americans consider religion very important to them, while another 24% say it is fairly important. The Gallup poll found that roughly two-thirds of adult Americans consider themselves a member of a specific church or synagogue. Significantly, they also found that most Americans attend some sort of religious service once a month, at least; and a third of Americans do so on a weekly basis. So, it would appear that Hollywood's hostility toward religious institutions and the elements that comprise them (including clergy and devout laity) stands in stark contrast to the actual religiosity of the American public.

Major Findings:

- The treatment of religion in an institutional or doctrinal context (such as a reference to a church service, particular denomination, or to Scripture) was strikingly negative. More than 32% of TV's treatments of religious institutions and doctrine were negative. Only 11.7% of such treatments were positive. This is in stark contrast to findings in the 1997 survey in which similar treatments were positive almost twice the number of times they were negative (40.3% positive; 20.9% negative).
- Clergy members were depicted in a negative light more than twice the number of times they were shown positively (36.2% negative to a mere 14.6% positive). This is a cynical turn from the 1997 study, which found the clergy treated more kindly (32.7% positive, 27.6% negative).
- Representations of the devout laity tended to be negative more often than positive, but to a lesser degree than in the past. Laity was represented positively 20.4% of the time, versus negatively 33.3% of the time. These numbers are more hopeful than those in the 1997 study in which only 7.9% of the treatments were positive compared to a staggering 78.9% treated in a negative manner.
- Negative treatments were more prevalent than positive on NBC, Fox and WB in all time slots. On CBS, UPN, and Pax positive treatments outweighed negative

- ones in all time slots. Only in the 8:00 hour were there more positive than negative depictions of religion on ABC (17.7% positive to 14.5% negative).
- NBC had a shocking 9.5 negative treatments for every positive. Fox came in second, trailing far behind with 2.4 negative depictions for every one that was positive. (WB and ABC tied with 1.2 negative for each positive, followed by UPN with 1 negative for every 1.1 positive; CBS with one negative for every two positive; and Pax, which did not have a single negative depiction).
 - Negativity toward religion grew steadily with each passing hour of primetime. During the 7:00 p.m. hour, religion content was negative 16.9% of the time. In the 8:00 hour, 20.8% of instances were negative. In the 9:00 hour, 27.5% of instances were negative, and in the 10:00 hour, 28.2% were negative.
 - Only in the 8:00 hour did positive treatments outweigh negative when all networks were combined (24.2% positive, versus 20.8% negative).

Other Findings:

- Not surprisingly, Pax was the most pro-religion network, with 90.7% of the treatments of religion on that network being positive. Mixed treatments comprised 1.9% of treatments on Pax and Neutral 7.5%. CBS had the second highest percentage of positive treatments of religious themes and subject matter (38.3% of religious treatments on CBS were positive), followed by UPN (24.4%), WB (23.5%), ABC (16.9%), Fox (13.4%), and NBC (4.8%).
- Individual expressions of faith (such as a prayer, or an individual's simple manifestation of belief) were presented in a positive light 50.7% of the time.
- Negative treatments of religion on primetime broadcast television were nearly equal to positive treatments, with a ratio of 1.1 negative depictions for each positive treatment. In four of the five previous studies, positive depictions were more numerous than negative: 2 to 1 in 1994, 1996 and 1997, 4 to 3 in 1997. Only in the first of our studies, done in 1993, did negative depictions outweigh positive, in a ratio of 2 negative for every 1 positive treatment.

With more than 90% of Americans professing a belief in God, and a majority willing to affiliate themselves with organized religion, one would expect that TV would favor positive treatments of religious themes and institutions. However that is usually not the case. Instead, lay-folk and clergy are more often than not depicted as hypocritical and religious institutions as a mockery. Hollywood's general disdain for particular religious beliefs is out of step with the majority of citizens in this country.

Faith in a Box: Entertainment Television and Religion

September 25, 2003-September 24, 2004

By Caroline Eichenberg

Introduction

In this sixth report by the Parents Television Council on the treatment of religion in primetime broadcast entertainment programming, we will examine how the networks have treated religious matters from the beginning of the fall 2003 season through the beginning of the fall 2004 season. Religious subject matter was divided into several categories: Faith, Institution and Doctrine, Laity, and Clergy. References to faith were the most predominant (582 of the 2,344 treatments), and also the most positive. Less common, and more likely to be shown in a negative light, are more specific elements of religion; such as a particular church and its teachings (Institution/Doctrine), devout Laity, and the Clergy. Each of these topics was more frequently treated in a negative manner. These findings lend credibility to the idea that Hollywood accepts spirituality, but shies away from endorsing, or even tolerating, organized religion.

Methods

PTC Analysts studied the primetime entertainment programming on the seven broadcast networks between September 25, 2003 and September 24, 2004. Instances of religious content were entered into a computerized Entertainment Tracking System (ETS). They were then analyzed and placed in one of five categories: faith, institution and doctrine, the laity, the clergy, and miscellaneous.

Within each category, the depictions were classified as positive, negative, mixed, or neutral. "Mixed" indicates relatively balanced points of view with ultimately no side taken; "neutral" encompasses an ambiguous or an insufficiently substantial treatment of the issue.

Overview

- There were 2,344 treatments of religion—from a brief prayer to the actual presence of God in a scene—an average of one an hour.
- Of these treatments, 22.1 percent were positive, 24.4 percent negative.
- ABC had by far the most number of religious treatments per hour analyzed with an average of 2.3 treatments per hour. Fox followed with an average of one treatment per hour. Pax and UPN tied with an average of .9 instances per hour analyzed, followed by CBS (.7), NBC (.6), and WB (.4).
- Most of the religious content on primetime broadcast TV was neither positive nor negative. 42.3% of religious treatments on TV were neutral, meaning that the treatment was ambiguous or contained insufficient context.
- Pax was the most pro-religion network, with 90.7% of the treatments of religion on that network being positive, 1.9% mixed, and 7.5% neutral. CBS had the

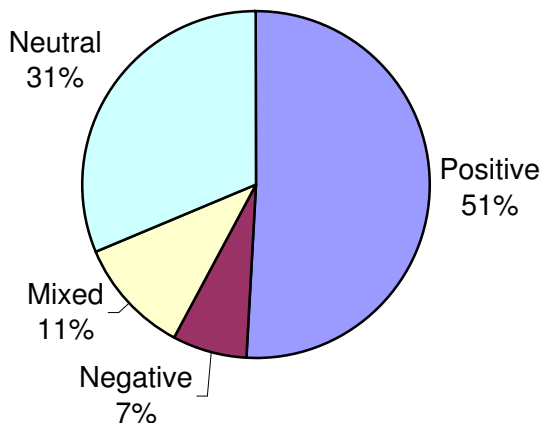
second highest percentage of positive treatments of religious themes and subject matter (38.3% of all religious treatments on CBS were positive), followed by UPN (24.4), WB (23.5%), ABC (16.9%), Fox (13.4%), and NBC (4.8%).

- Faith was the category most often treated in a positive manner, with half (50.7%) of the treatments in that category shown in a positive light. Treatments of the clergy (professional religious) were the most likely to be negative with 36.2% of these representations shown in a negative light.
- Representations of Institution/Doctrine, the Clergy and Miscellaneous instances were all more than twice as often negative than positive.
- The devout laity were also portrayed negatively more often than positively, but to a lesser degree (33.3% negative, versus 20.4% positive).
- The 8:00 hour was the most pro-religion timeslot. However, negative depictions still outweighed positive on NBC, Fox, and WB in that hour.
- The percentage of negative treatments rose steadily with each hour of primetime (16.9% at 7:00, 20.8% at 8:00, 27.5% at 9:00, and 28.2% at 10:00).
- Negative treatments of religion outweighed the positive on NBC, Fox, and the WB in every time slot.
- NBC had a shocking 9.5 negative treatments for every positive. Fox came in second, trailing far behind with 2.4 negative depictions for every one that was positive. (WB and ABC tied with 1.2 negative for each positive, followed by UPN with 1 negative for every 1.1 positive; CBS with one negative for every two positive; and Pax, which did not have a single negative depiction).

Categories

Faith

This category comprises instances in which a person manifests in simple terms his or her belief or lack thereof.



Positive—(50.7%)

Clint quotes a portion of the Gospel of Matthew and then states that he believes God will heal his patients' souls, if not their bodies on the November 2 episode of *Doc*.

Joan talks to God about her doubts on the November 14 *Joan of Arcadia*. God explains that questions are normal, but that if he explains everything to her than there is no need for faith.

On the December 12 *Life with Bonnie*, Bonnie's young son Charlie tells his friend, "Maybe we can say an extra bedtime prayer and ask God to have Santa stop at the studio, too." Frankie replies, "Yeah. God'll love that request, 'cause he mostly gets complaints."

On the February 20 episode of *JAG*, Mattie sits by Harm's bedside and prays for God to keep him safe. She then asks God to say hello to her deceased mother and tell her she loves her.

On the April 11 episode of *Sue Thomas: F.B. Eye*, Sue tells Helga, "Evil exists in this world. God doesn't promise us it won't exist, but he does promise us a place to take refuge when we encounter it. No one can endure what you endured alone. But with help, from friends and God, the inside will change."

April 17, on *The District*, a physician rationalizes euthanizing his patients, to which Jack replies, "I believe in the sanctity of life, and the power of the human spirit, and God's divine plan. And in that plan there is a chance of a miracle. I don't believe a human being has a right to kill..."

On the August 29 episode of *It's a Miracle*, Kristina says, "I can only believe that when you pray in accordance with God's will that he can make things beyond your wildest dreams happen."

Negative—(7%)

On the 31st *American Music Awards*, November 16, host Jimmy Kimmel gives his audience a brief list of rules, with which he concludes, "And finally, and this is a personal thing, no thanking God. God does not watch television. And if he did, he would not be watching this show. He would be watching *Tarzan* on the WB."

Mixed—(10.8%)

While trimming the Christmas tree on the December 23 episode of *I'm with Her*, Cheri laments: "Why don't you try having your birthday the day after Christmas. It is bad enough having to live my life over-shadowed by my sister. I also have to be over-shadowed by Jesus." The lights on the tree then flicker, after which a startled Cheri continues, "Who I love and worship."

Rico Amonte questions his fellow trainees on the January 18 *10-8*, "Do you think there are sins that can't be forgiven?" Chase Williams responds, "Depends on the mood of your God." Gabriella Lopez comments that the woman Rico is upset about is criminally negligent, having abandoned her baby. Rico tells them that the girl is repentant, but he seems to be the only one who cares. Chase questions, "When did true regret become suspect?" To which Gabriella replies: "I think it started when Judas took the pay off and ended with Jimmy Swaggart weeping

over the whores.” Chase concludes, “Yeah, I’m sorry is only used to buy time these days.”

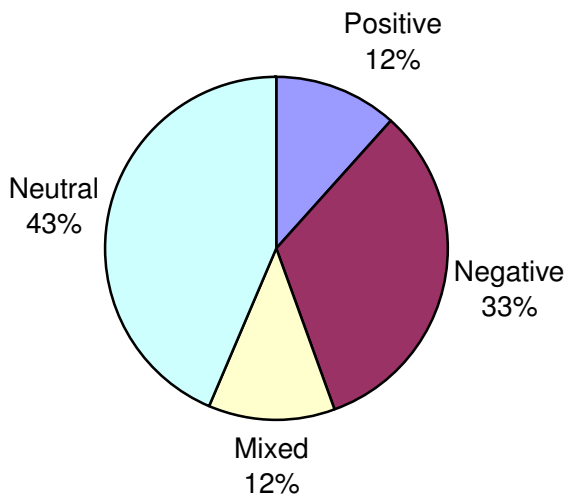
Neutral—(31.4%)

On the November 14 episode of *JAG*, Commander Bentley explains that as a new convert to Quakerism, he is no longer comfortable participating in the military.

On the March 7 episode of *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*, Ty greets his design team saying, “Hi! I hope to God you guys have a big plan...”

Institution and Doctrine

This category covers such instances as a reference to a church service, a particular denomination, or to Scripture.



Positive—(11.7%)

On the December 12 episode of *JAG*, Reverend Turner gives a sermon at a church service in which he talks about Jesus and quotes scripture.

April 19, on *Everybody Loves Raymond*, Amy’s Protestant father is hesitant to attend Catholic Mass with the Barones. Frank later asks him what he thought of their, “exotic Catholic ritual,” to which Hank replied, “Quite impressive and I thought your Father Hubley gave a very stirring reading of the resurrection...” His wife later says that Amy’s brother was, “very inspired by that Catholic ceremony.”

The April 24 episode of *The District* opens with a scene in which Mannion is in church singing “What a Friend We Have in Jesus” with the congregation.

Negative—(32.7%)

On the December 17 episode of *That '70s Show*, Eric questions Donna, “So, you have to work at the Radio Station on Christmas Eve? God, it’s like it doesn’t even respect the sanctity of that Holy Night? We were going to get drunk and fool around behind the manger scene.”

Lauren asks her mother what Mass is on the February 3 *Judging Amy*. Amy replies, “It’s what Catholics call church so they can feel more guilty about it when they miss it.” Bruce replies, “Hey!” To which Amy says, “Hey, it’s my dinner party, I’ll cast disparaging remarks if I want to.”

On the February 10 *Will and Grace*, in an attempt to cheer Grace up, Karen remarks: “Let’s go buy that historic church and turn it into a gay bar.”

On the January 15 episode of *The Simpsons*, Lisa tells Bart, “The Mount Builders worshipped turtles as well as badgers, snakes, and other animals.” Bart replies, “Thank God we’ve come to our senses and worship some carpenter that lived 2000 years ago.”

April 27, on *Scrubs*, Carla tells Turk, “That was Father Paul. He said we can’t read our own vows. We have to say the same Catholic ones like everybody else,” to which Turk replies, “Oh baby, Carla, that sucks.”

On the August 5 episode of *Last Comic Standing*, Tammy does her routine: “...It’s a Muslim country and they pray to Mecca five times a day and being Catholic I don’t know anything about prayer. I pay some guy to do it for me. It’s a good time to be Catholic ‘cause we’re grading on a curve. As long as you’re not touching pee pees you got a get out of hell free card. That poor Pope. If he could stand up, he’d stab those priests with his hat don’t you think? You know how you spot Catholics? Go to Star Wars movies. Every time they say ‘May the force be with you,’ they stand up and say, ‘And also with you.’”

Mixed—(11.9%)

On the February 27 episode of *Grounded for Life*, Eddie goes to talk to a nun about his premarital sex life. He tells her, “This woman wants me to impregnate her, so I’m having sex with her all the time.” Sister Helen replies, “You’re sort of out of practice on how to talk to a nun, aren’t you?” She continues, “Look, the church has a pretty well publicized position on sex outside of wedlock. We’re against it. You’re doing one of the most meaningful things a human being can do in a way that’s unbelievably meaningless.” She tells him to stop having sex with the woman. Eddie ponders, “Right...because if I don’t get off this path, I’ll never be happy.” Sister Helen retorts, “I don’t care about happiness, I’m a nun. I’m saying you’ll burn.”

On the April 30 episode of *JAG*, a General is investigated for delivering a sermon at a Baptist congregation that was perceived as anti-Islam. Mac thinks that the General was equating evil with Islam, while Harm says this isn't what the man said. He also points out that a sermon is protected by free speech and freedom of religion. The Secretary of the Navy notes that military personnel are less free and the situation ought to be investigated.

Neutral—(43.7%)

Patty goes to confession on her mother's behalf on the January 18 *American Dreams* and tells the priest that she is afraid that her mother will go to hell because of her past actions.

On the March 19 episode of *Wonderfalls*, Dr. Tyler reads his wife's bio upon the publication of her book: "Son Aaron is the youngest non-Asian to win the prestigious Fulton Scholarship for Religious Studies, and he's currently pursuing his Doctorate in Comparative Religion."

On the September 12 episode of *Charmed*, Piper and Leo attend a Hindu wedding.

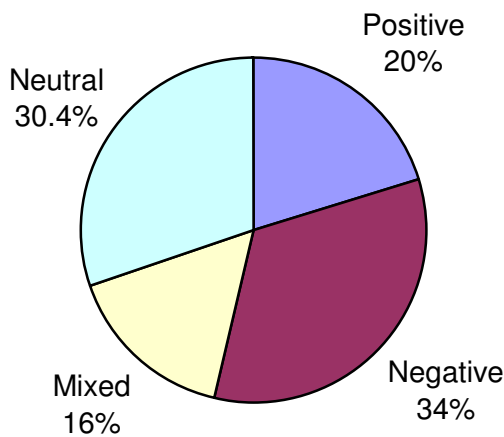
Laity

This category encompasses depictions of those for whom religion is a strong (perhaps the central) force in their lives. It covers both portrayals of their explicitly religious words and deeds and their secular conduct.

Positive (20.4%)

Helen talks to the med student who helped her research Will's surgery on the November 16 *American Dreams*. She tells him that she has gone to Mass every day that week. He responds, "Good. So you know that some of this is in God's hands."

On the November 30 *It's a Miracle*, a man who saved a paralyzed woman from dying in a house fire says of her, "I know that she was a very faithful lady to Church and a very faithful lady to God and I know that he honored her faithfulness by sending me to save her."



After following God's ambiguous recommendation that she ask the school bully to a dance on the December 12 *Joan of Arcadia*, Joan questions God about the apparent failure of her mission. He reveals to her that her faithfulness in doing what he asked of her kept the boy from killing himself and several of their schoolmates.

On the January 25 episode of *The Surreal Life*, Tammy refuses to go to a psychic. She tells the others that her faith has given her a lot of peace and joy and that rather than go to the psychic, "I'm going to get on my knees for advice and ask God to tell me, because he can tell me anything that she's going to tell me, if he wants me to know it."

April 28, on *I'm Still Alive*, the aunt of a boy hit by a car on a racetrack comments, "I mean I thought he was dead. And I knew we had to get a prayer chain going."

Negative (33.3%)

A Senator whose platform is morality and virtue arrives at the casino on the September 29 episode of *Las Vegas*. Danny says to Ed that the Senator is a hypocrite: "He stands in front of the cameras every chance he gets spouting morals and virtues, meanwhile he's here once a month, indulging in every one of the seven deadly sins. Oh, and I think he's up to number nine on the Ten Commandments list, too."

On the February 24 *Whoopi*, Mavis anxiously awaits the return of Tony, an old flame. When he arrives, he informs her that he has found Jesus and no longer dances, smokes pot, or has sex. Mavis's friends, not knowing of Tony's change of heart, speculate on whether or not she "got some." When she explains that Tony found Jesus, her friend Sofia says, "Mavis, if anyone can lead a man back to lust and sin, it's you." A subsequent scene implies that Mavis and Tony did indeed have sex.

On the March 24 episode of *The West Wing*, Josh and Toby approach Supreme Court Justice Ashland requesting that the ill judge step down to make room for their nomination and allowing the Republicans to pick someone for the other vacant seat. Ashland replies, "See who they pick of their favorite sons. See what segregationist... Isaiah-quoting, gay bashing bastard they come up with."

On the April 16 episode of *The Big House* Kevin remarks, "Damn! I haven't seen this many hot girls since Josh Glistein's bar mitzvah at the Playboy Mansion. He totally became a man that night, too..."

September 13, on *Everwood*, Mindy explains Madison's background to Andrew, "...her dad took off when she was a kid and her mom's kind of a religious zealot, so you can imagine how well she took the news about the pregnancy..."

Mixed (15.9%)

The September 26 episode of *Boston Public* featured a storyline in which, following an accident, a student thought he was Jesus. Discussing the matter, Danny says, “This kid thinks he’s Jesus.” The doctor with whom he is speaking replies, “Who wouldn’t want to be Jesus?”

Anna is confronted by the judges on the January 13 episode of *America’s Next Top Model* regarding why she would not pose for nude photographs. Contest judge Janice Dickinson is not impressed and comments: “I get it, it’s your religion.” Anna replies, “It’s not so much religion, I’m just trying to be Christ-like.”

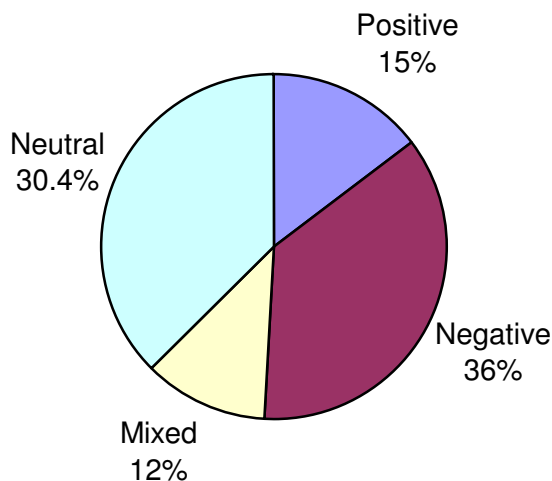
At the conclusion of the General’s court martial on the April 30 episode of *JAG*, a TV report tells of a suicide bombing in Fallujah where eighteen Marines were killed and the group claiming responsibility called it a glorious victory in this holy war. Harm notes, “This is why we need men like General Watson,” to which Mac retorts, “Or not.”

Neutral (30.4%)

Two missionaries are imprisoned in the Sudan for having Bibles and other Christian materials on the December 3 *West Wing*.

Stephen Baldwin wears a hat that says “Jesus” on it on the January 14 episode of *Celebrity Mole: Yucatan*.

On the April 20 *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*, Benson says, “You’re a good Catholic. I thought Jesus taught forgiveness,” to which Stabler replied, “Jesus was perfect. I’m not.”



Clergy

Positive (14.6%)

On the February 6 *George Lopez*, George tries to rationalize his way out of a commitment he made to God to appease Max. Father Rick tells George that God doesn’t bargain. George is pleased with this answer, thinking it means that he doesn’t have to keep the promise he made. Father Rick continues, however, telling George, “You did

make a promise. And if you don't keep your word, that's bearing false witness, which would be breaking a Commandment." George tries to give the priest money in lieu of keeping his promise. The priest does not take the money, but instead tells George to have a nice time fulfilling his promise.

On the April 20 episode of 7th *Heaven*, Eric decides not to by their home, commenting, "I didn't get into the ministry to own things. God has always provided for us, and owning our own house doesn't necessarily guarantee us a permanent residence...I've always trusted in God having a plan for us and we will both continue to go on trusting him, whatever God has in store for us."

Eric counsels Simon about pre-marital sex on the September 20 7th *Heaven*. He tells his son, "...You're not the type of guy who just can go from casual relationship to casual relationship, if for no other reason than you have more than a casual relationship with Christ..."

Negative (36.2%)

A priest, on the October 2 episode of *Without a Trace* is found in a hotel room with a woman. Only sheets cover the couple, implying a sexual affair.

When the mother of an autistic boy takes him to a church that believes in healing on the January 6 *Judging Amy*, a skeptical Maxine looks into the matter further. Later in the episode, she and a police officer enter the church where they find the minister beating the boy with a whip.

On the February 15 *Cold Case*, a case from 1958 is re-opened when a six-year old boy's body is found. The detectives learn that the boy was from an orphanage run by nuns and that he was the illegitimate son of one of the nuns. The boy died when shock therapy was performed on him at the request of his mother in the hopes that it would rectify his behavioral problems so someone would adopt him. Another nun is said to have beaten the children in the orphanage.

Alan discusses the recent arrest of a mutual friend for a woman's murder with Father Tom, a friend and Catholic priest on the February 22 episode of *The Practice*. Father Tom reveals that he had sex with the woman: "Two years ago. She was in my office in distress over who knows what affair she was having. She was describing it. She, she felt demeaned by the sexual nature of it. She was rather graphically describing the events. And God help me, I got aroused. I'm not sure I was even aware of it, but evidently she was, and she propositioned me."

On the March 26 episode of *Wonderfalls*, Jay accuses a priest, who is later said to have fathered a child, of "agnes-of-godding" a nun he is trying to convince not to leave religious life.

On the April 27 episode of *Judging Amy*, Bruce’s friend, a priest named Father Ted, has come to town to visit. When Bruce sees Ted, Ted is wearing a dress, wig, and pearls and says he is Theresa now.

Mixed (11.7%)

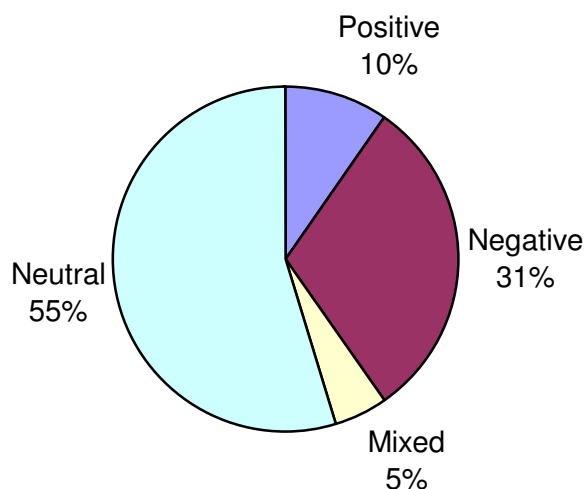
On the October 2 *Without a Trace*, Danny and Vivian are searching the office of a priest and see a photograph of an adolescent boys’ softball team. Vivian asserts that they will have to question the boys, at which Danny takes offense. He tells her that he was a troubled kid, ordered by a judge to be mentored by a priest. He says of his mentor: “Father Orlando kicked my ass. Probably saved my life.”

On the March 1 episode of *The Parkers*, Nikki and Andel’s friend Carla returns to town. They notice that she is wearing a large cross and Andel asks about it. Nikki replies, “Well, maybe she’s a nut.” Carla responds, “Actually, I’m a minister.” A stripper dancing in front of her without his shirt on hears this and backs away. Nikki hands him his shirt. When bad information about Carla’s past is revealed, she prays to God and seeks the forgiveness of her congregation.

Neutral (37.6%)

A priest is a guest on Bonnie’s morning talk show on the February 27 *Life with Bonnie*. Father Joe and Bonnie are doing a cooking segment as a promotion for his cookbook.

Miscellaneous



Positive (9.7%)

God tells Joan to join the cheerleading squad on the October 31 *Joan of Arcadia*. When she is found skipping class with the cheerleaders, God tells her that he told her to join the squad, not skip class.

At *An American Celebration at Ford’s Theater*, shown on ABC July 4, the entire cast is joined by Medal of Honor winners and they sing “God Bless America.”

On the July 29 episode of *Big Brother*, following a fellow contestant’s Bible reading, Marvin poses the question,

“...Do you think the Lord watches Big Brother?” Scott replies, “Money’s the most evil thing there is...what are we doing to get that money; lying, cheating...Saying hurtful things, deceiving. No. Period. God doesn’t want us in this house.”

Negative (30.7%)

Ephram’s friend Bright encourages him to pick up condoms on the way to his girlfriend’s dorm room on the February 9 episode of *Everwood*. Ephram isn’t convinced that his girlfriend wants to have sex with him that night, but Bright convinces him this is so. Ephram asks what he should do. Bright replies: “I don’t know. Is there some thing, special ritual that you Jewish kids do, or do you just kind of like, thank God and pray you don’t screw it up like the rest of us?”

On the May 19 episode of *That ‘70s Show*, Hyde explains to Kelso, “You don’t get paid to be the best man. You do it for the satisfaction of nailing the hottest bridesmaid. It’s in the *Bible*.”

On the September 13 episode of *North Shore*, MJ asks, “What is it with guys and three-ways? Why is that...the Holy Grail of hook-ups?”

May 4, on *Less Than Perfect*, Lydia tells Jeb that she thinks Kip is going insane. Jeb replies, “Well, it may be time for the same conversation that I had with Grandma. I just hope that Kip hasn’t already given all of his money to the 700 Club.”

Mixed (4.9%)

On the November 24 episode of *Still Standing*, the family goes to dinner at the house of a devout family whose son Lauren is dating. Tina steals a statue of Jesus while there and when they take it back, she embraces it, insisting that it is Kenny Loggins.

Sheriff’s Department trainee Rico Amonte contemplates, on the January 11 episode of *10-8*, “It’s kinda wild, isn’t it? I mean 666 is the devil’s sign, which is 999 upside down, which is our call for hell on the streets.” One of the training officers retorts, “It’s not too late to trade your badge for the collar, Amonte. Or a nun’s habit.”

Neutral (54.7%)

Arvin Sloane asks Sydney if she believes in redemption on the September 28 episode of *Alias*.

On the March 7 episode of *America’s Funniest Home Videos*, children are shown playing on a trampoline. Host Tom Bergeron commentates the video, saying, “He

doesn't listen when Mom tells him to get off the trampoline, but he listens when God tells him." At that point loud thunder is heard and the frightened boy promptly jumps off the trampoline.

Conclusion

Hollywood's hostility toward religion is in stark contrast to the actual religiosity of American citizens. According to a 2003 Harris Poll, 90 percent of Americans believe in God and 80 percent of those polled believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Though portrayals of religion have increased over the past six years, they still do not reflect the importance of the topic or the breadth of interest in it, as evidenced by the recent success of both films and books with religious subject matter.

Despite evidence that religion is important to most Americans, many of whom willingly affiliate themselves with organized religion, the entertainment industry refuses to accept this by continuing to insult the beliefs of Americans by negatively portraying religious institutions and the elements that comprise them. *7th Heaven* is a moderate exception in that the patriarch is a kind Christian minister; yet his profession is rarely a focal point of the show. Likewise, CBS's breakout hit, *Joan of Arcadia* certainly focuses on faith, but tends to do so with broad strokes, similar to *Touched by an Angel*'s treatment of religion. In fact, *Joan*'s creator has instituted several rules for the show's writers, one of which is that "God can never identify one religion as being right," though religion is still handled on occasion in an institutional manner, and positively so.

Nonetheless, the gap between fantasy and reality is clear. Hollywood's fantasy is one in which spirituality is trendy, but organized religion is outdated and oppressive. The reality is that religion is an important element in the lives of most Americans. The challenge for Hollywood, then, is a true examination of conscience. Ironically, the more often entertainment programs reflect the values and beliefs of Americans, the more it helps Hollywood's religion, the bottom line.

STATISTICAL APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1: Statistical Breakdown by Network and Timeslot

Network & Time Slot/ (# of depictions)	Positive % / (#)	Negative% / (#)	Mixed% / (#)	Neutral% / (#)
ABC 7 p.m.-8 p.m. (47)	6.4 (3)	14.9 (7)	0	78.7 (37)
ABC 8 p.m.-9 p.m. (429)	17.7 (76)	14.5 (62)	12.6 (54)	55.2 (237)
ABC 9 p.m.-10 p.m. (324)	21.3 (69)	21.6 (70)	12 (39)	45.1 (146)
ABC 10 p.m.-11 p.m. (169) *(+.1)	9.5 (16)	30.8 (52)	8.3 (14)	51.5 (87)
ABC Totals (969) *(-.1)	16.9 (164)	19.7 (191)	11 (107)	52.3 (507)
NBC 7p.m.-8 p.m. (0)	0	0	0	0
NBC 8 p.m.-9 p.m. (72)	13.9 (10)	36.1 (26)	12.5 (9)	37.5 (27)
NBC 9 p.m.-10 p.m. (72)	2.8 (2)	52.8 (38)	8.3 (6)	36.1 (26)
NBC 10 p.m.-11 p.m. (128)	.8 (1)	46.1 (59)	7.8 (10)	45.3 (58)
NBC Totals (272)	4.8 (13)	45.2 (123)	9.2 (25)	40.8 (111)
FOX 7 p.m.-8 p.m. (20)	5 (1)	25 (5)	40 (8)	30 (6)
FOX 8 p.m.-9 p.m. (200)	18 (36)	31.5 (63)	11 (22)	39.5 (79)
FOX 9 p.m.-10 p.m. (191) *(-.1)	9.4 (18)	34 (65)	8.9 (17)	47.6 (91)
FOX Totals (411)	13.4 (55)	32.4 (133)	11.4 (47)	42.8 (176)
CBS 7 p.m.-8 p.m. (0)	0	0	0	0
CBS 8 p.m.-9 p.m. (165)	46.7 (77)	17 (28)	13.9 (23)	22.4 (37)
CBS 9 p.m.-10 p.m. (110)	31.8 (35)	20.9 (23)	20 (22)	27.3 (30)
CBS 10 p.m.-11 p.m. (64)	28.1 (18)	20.3 (13)	20.3 (13)	31.3 (20)
CBS Totals (339)	38.3 (130)	18.9 (64)	17.1 (58)	25.7 (87)
WB 7 p.m.-8 p.m. (1)	0	0	100 (1)	0
WB 8 p.m.-9 p.m. (63)	27 (17)	28.6 (18)	6.3 (4)	38.1 (24)
WB 9 p.m.-10 p.m. (55)	20 (11)	27.3 (15)	10.9 (6)	41.8 (23)
WB Totals (119) *(-.1)	23.5 (28)	27.7 (33)	9.2 (11)	39.5 (47)
UPN 8 p.m.-9 p.m. (65)	21.5 (14)	20 (13)	10.8 (7)	47.7 (31)
UPN 9 p.m.-10 p.m. (62)	27.4 (17)	24.2 (15)	8.1 (5)	40.3 (25)
UPN Totals (127) *(-.1)	24.4 (31)	22 (28)	9.4 (12)	44.1 (56)
PAX 7 p.m.-8 p.m. (3)	0	0	0	100 (3)
PAX 8 p.m.-9 p.m. (16)	87.5 (14)	0	0	12.5 (2)
PAX 9 p.m.-10 p.m. (9)	88.9 (8)	0	0	11.1 (1)
PAX 10 p.m.-11 p.m. (79) *(-.1)	94.9 (75)	0	2.5 (2)	2.5 (2)
PAX Totals (107)	90.7 (97)	0	1.9 (2)	7.5 (8)
TOTALS of all networks (2344)	22.1 (518)	24.4 (572)	11.2 (262)	42.3 (992)

*Margin of Error

APPENDIX 2: Statistical Breakdown by Type of Depiction

Category/(# of depictions)	Positive % / (#)	Negative % / (#)	Mixed % / (#)	Neutral % / (#)
Faith (582)	50.7 (295)	7 (41)	10.8 (63)	31.4 (183)
Institution/doctrine (446)	11.7 (52)	32.7 (146)	11.9 (53)	43.7 (195)
Laity (372)	20.4 (76)	33.3 (124)	15.9 (59)	30.4 (113)
Clergy (213)	14.6 (31)	36.2 (77)	11.7 (25)	37.6 (80)
Miscellaneous (466)	9.7 (45)	30.7 (143)	4.9 (23)	54.7 (255)
Total (2344)	22.1 (518)	24.4 (572)	11.2 (262)	42.3 (992)

Recommended Actions

BACKGROUND:

With more than 90% of Americans professing a belief in God, and a majority willing to affiliate themselves with organized religion, one would expect that TV would favor positive treatments of religious themes and institutions. However that is usually not the case. Instead, lay-folk and clergy are more often than not depicted as hypocritical and religious institutions as a mockery. Hollywood's general disdain for particular religious beliefs is out of step with the majority of citizens in this country.

QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEW GUESTS:

1. Does Hollywood accurately and honestly portray America's religious sentiments in prime-time television?
2. How should we interpret this bias?
3. How does this dehumanizing of religious persons affect the cultural mindset?
4. How has the dehumanizing of certain people groups in a culture's media affected human rights in the past?
5. What can our audience do about this today?

FORMAT IDEAS:

Special Feature

Develop a special feature focusing on the appeal of family-oriented Christian programming. Get man-on-the-street interviews about what they don't like on television.

Webmasters

Post a survey on your website asking your visitors if they would like for secular programming to be held to the same standards as Christian programming. Post your results on your site.

Program Producers

Create a special segment citing the recent Parents Television Council report on Hollywood's treatment of religion. Explain the ramifications on the culture at large when people of faith are dehumanized.

News Directors

Interview your senators or congressmen about their thoughts on the importance of religion in the public square. Use the responses in a news story.

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