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Truth Really Is Stranger Than Fiction — “The Book of Daniel” and the Episcopalians

Friday, January 20, 2006

Jack Kenny, the creator of NBC's, *The Book of Daniel*, is desperately trying to save his show from an almost certain cancellation. He accused conservative Christians of being “bullies” and blamed the show's weak ratings on evangelicals. He didn't say anything about the millions of Americans who are offended by the show's misuse of Jesus Christ as a character, and who find the story of a pill-dropping Episcopal priest and his family — a family that manages to get itself involved in almost every known form of sin in an hour-long television program.

According to [Religion News Service](#), Kenny said: *Ordinarily, I would never ask anyone to do this, but the AFA [American Family Association] and bullies like them are hard at work to try and prevent you from seeing these beautiful shows, and that is censorship — pure and simple,”* Kenny wrote. *“And that is both un-Christian and un-American.”*

That's worth a laugh at many levels. First, if the show was piling up viewer ratings, the opposition from Christian groups wouldn't matter. Remember *Desperate Housewives* or *Will & Grace*? Second, the cry of “censorship” is pathetic. No one has a constitutional right to have his television program succeed. The show is failing because viewers don't like it. That's not censorship.

Advertisers are staying away in droves. As a matter of fact, the RNS story reveals that only one corporate sponsor remains — [Burlington Coat Factory](#).

[Media Daily News](#), a feature of [CNN](#), reports that the upcoming ratings sweep may be the last gasp for the program: *Ratings for the controversial drama dropped 23 percent Friday among adults 18-49 versus its Jan. 6 premiere. With a 2.2 mark, the show lost 36 percent of its “Dateline” lead-in. (Viewers declined by two million, or 29 percent, compared to the week before.)*

[The New York Times](#) commented plainly: *“The real mark against ‘The Book of Daniel’ is not any antipathy it might show toward the family or sympathy for the devil. The real objection is that it's just not very good.”*

One would think that Episcopalians would be outraged that their church is portrayed in such an insulting fashion, but some are not. As [I reported last week](#), some liberal Episcopalians apparently love the show and its portrayal of the *ubertolerant* priest and the peccadilloes of his family, bishop, and congregation.

The [Episcopal Diocese of Washington](#) has even created a blog, *The Blog of Daniel*, in order to support and celebrate the program. It's not to be missed. [See Jack Kenny's letter [here](#).] Here is a statement published at the blog: *Coming soon, the story of the attack on the Episcopal Church, and the secular right wing foundations that fund it. Well, we won't want to miss that.*

Not all Episcopalians are ready to celebrate the maligning of their church, however. [The Bakersfield Californian](#) reports that some are ready to speak of their outrage. *“I feel like I'm being slandered by the show,”* said the Rev. Jack Estes of St. Luke's Episcopal Church. *“If there was a priest in our diocese living the kind of life reflected in that show, he would be removed from the pulpit . . . This is a clear case of apostasy — portraying the church as having thrown away its morals and embracing values that are totally wrong,”* Estes said. *“That's really what is being portrayed under the*

guise of tolerance and working out family problems.”

NBC is committed to only eight episodes. Kenny pleaded for supporters of the program to rally to its defense: “Please believe me when I tell you that the stories that we are about to tell you ... are the most heartbreakingly beautiful stories I’ve ever had the pleasure of being associated with,” he said. Beauty, as they say, is in the eye of the beholder.

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