



The Church on TV: Portrayals of Priests, Pastors and Nuns on American Television Series

Richard Wolff

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Sister Bertrille, Father Dowling, and Reverend Camden - these three characters span the history of television's depiction of church leaders, from "The Flying Nun (1967-1970)" to "The Father Dowling Mysteries (1989-1990)" and "7th Heaven (1996-2007)". Each exemplifies one of three trends in television's chronicle of the church, from shows of the 1960s-70s that focus on internal conflicts in the church, to those of the 1980s and early 1990s that illustrate the church's struggle for relevance in the modern world, and finally those of the 1990s through today that portray the church in the family context. Along the way, the book discusses the programs' depiction of various issues facing the church of their times, including: the role of women in the church; clerics reconsidering their call; the sexuality of clerics; the ecumenical movement; and the church's response to abortion, homosexuality, racial injustice and illegal immigration. "The Church on TV" looks at American broadcast network programs that focused regularly and principally on church leaders. It takes a historical-critical approach, discussing seventeen programs in-depth and looking not only at how each depicted the church and its leaders but also comparing this depiction to actual church history. What trends emerged? Why? How accurate was the portrayal? What does the depiction say about American popular culture and its view of religion in American society? It's these probing questions and answers that bring the current research up to date.

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