

MAUDE

'The subtlety of attempting to picture abortion as socially acceptable and accessible as going to the dentist may be an insidious way of anesthetizing the country'

By PAT COSTA

Abortion. A laughing matter? The producers of "Maude" the popular new situation comedy seen Tuesday nights on CBS, apparently thought it was. And so Maude, the show's fortyish heroine, a grandmother, became pregnant.

The listing in TV Guide for the two-part story gave only an oblique hint that the real thrust of the program would not center on late life pregnancy but rather on Maude's choice of solutions: abortion.

Viewers across the country accustomed to turning on the set without consulting TV previews found out the hard way that the subject matter was not only poor fare for their children but a direct assault on one of their deepest moral beliefs.

The reaction of such Catholic organizations as the Knights of Columbus and the Diocesan Union of Holy Name Societies as well as a multitude of smaller groups was sharp and immediate.

John W. McDevitt, supreme knight, protested in a letter to CBS: "The sophisms of the abortionists are about as dearly appreciated by millions of Americans as is rat poison in Halloween candy."

In a four-page, single-spaced missive to the network, Holy Name president William Moon called for "fairness time on the ground that abortion is a major

controversial issue and that a pro-life program be presented within the framework of the Maude show supporting the right to life of unborn babies . . ."

In a letter to this column, an area woman, Mrs. Marilyn Timmons of Fox Meadow Road, Rochester, attacked a line in the first episode that has drawn the greatest wrath of individuals and groups alike.

Maude, played by actress Beatrice Arthur, discusses with her daughter (Adrienne Barbeau) the possibility of abortion and likens it to "having the dentist extract a bad tooth" and marveling over how wonderful it is that New York State is so progressive.

Mrs. Timmons continued, "Also mentioned freely were other forms of birth control with Maude's husband commenting, 'Damn it, I knew I should have had that vasectomy.'"

Mrs. Peggy Dawson of 179 Depew St., who sent us a copy of her letter to CBS, wrote, "Since my children are freely given information regarding family life, not a moment's thought was given the possibility that this might not be a show suitable for children. What I expected was a light-hearted spoof on the trials and tribulations of pregnancy late in life. How wrong could I have been?"

Obviously many viewers were taken in by assuming that this show might be mildly sensational in the manner of its parent

series "All in the Family." Archie Bunker et al have dealt with homosexuality, menopause, impotence to name a few formerly taboo TV subjects.

While some see the abortion shows as a crude attempt at humor and an obvious assault on the moral views of a large segment of the nation, there are those who see it as possibly more.

The subtlety of attempting to picture abortion as socially acceptable and accessible as going to the dentist may be an insidious way of anesthetizing the country.

That the format was a situation comedy rather than a news or information show is an interesting point.

Mrs. Jeanne Sweeney of the area Right-to-Life Committee notes that pro-abortion groups have declared it is not enough to deliver their message through television documentaries but to get entertainment shows to spread the acceptability of abortion on demand.

It is easy to see how fortuitous this could be for the abortion people. Not only would situation comedies reach a greater number of people but the humor format could trim the peaks of inhibition for those on the abortion fence.

Then, too, strong identification with a popular character who suddenly behaves in a manner many consider immoral may lead to rationalization on the viewer's part that if Maude or Archie do it, it must be okay and maybe the viewer is just behind the times.

Perhaps worst of all along this line is the realization that situation comedies do not ordinarily convey messages. Viewers are off guard, more susceptible to ideas they might ordinarily re-

ject if they were presented in a more familiar and serious show-case.

Whether the Maude episodes were intended to influence and persuade or presented simply as the producer's idea of clever situation that would get a lot of laughs is not known here.

It is suggested that those who wish to register their displeasure with the Maude show should not waste their letters writing to the local station. Go to the source:

CBS Television
51 West 52nd St.
New York City, N.Y.

Mrs. Timmons also took down the name of the sponsors of the second show. A protest in the pocketbook is a protest that is felt. You can write to the makers of Anacin and Dristan, Lipton Cup of Soup, Cheetos, Norelco and General Electric Color Television.

The addresses with the head of each company are listed below:

For Anacin, Dristan: Henry E. Peterson, president Whitehall Laboratories, 685 Third Ave., N.Y., N.Y. 10017.

For Cup of Soup: W. G. Barker, president, Thomas J. Lipton, Inc., 800 Sylvan Ave., Englewood Cliff, N.J. 07632.

For Norelco: Pieter C. Vink, president, North American Phillips Corp., 100 E. 42nd St., N.Y., N.Y. 10017.

For Cheetos: Harold R. Lilley, president, Cheeto-Frito-Lay Inc., Dallas, Texas 75235.

For G.E.: Fred J. Borch, chairman of the board, General Electric Co., 570 Lexington Ave., N.Y., N.Y. 10022.

Aquinas Athletes Honored

The Aquinas Sports Boosters honored the Catholic Soccer League champions, as well as other Irish athletes at the Annual Fall Sports Banquet in the Aquinas Cafeteria Sunday.

Varsity Soccer Coach Dave Missell, with a record of 8-3-2, awarded individual trophies to Joe Vella, most improved; Nathan Hoffer, most outstanding and sportsmanlike; Bob Cupello, most valuable. Twenty-two others received varsity letters.

The Cross-Country team, under its new coach, Father Michael Wesley, CSB, kept their all-time record perfect against city schools with eight wins. Individual awards went to Steve Colvin, most outstanding; Kevin Kauff-

man, most valuable; Charlie Andrews, most improved. Five other harriers received varsity letters.

Although football had its first losing season since 1964, Coach Nick Teta expressed pride in the players. Trophies were awarded to Bob D'Ettore, most valuable; Rick Furia, most outstanding; Steve Lester, most outstanding lineman; Charlie Eber, most popular; Mark Whalen, ironman award; Jim Lane, most outstanding end; Howie Lockhart, sportsmanship award and Paul Genovese, most improved.

The banquet was under the chairmanship of Booster President Jeff Wilkin.

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