

Of d'ohs and doughnuts: Vatican newspaper discusses Simpsons' theology

VATICAN CITY - People either love or hate the TV cartoon series, "The Simpsons," but there's no doubt the 20-year-old series reflects very modern notions - and confusion - about religion and spirituality, the Vatican newspaper said.

"Rigid censors turn off the television" when the Fox program comes on, "but the more serious analysts praise the realism and intelligence of its scripts, even if they often attack - and rightly so - the crude language and the violence of some episodes," the newspaper, L'Osservatore Romano, said Dec. 22.

Marking the 20th anniversary of the Simpsons, created by Matt Groening, the paper described the show as a "tender and irreverent, scandalous and ironic, boisterous and profound, philosophical - and sometimes even theological - nutty synthesis of pop culture and of the lukewarm and nihilistic American middle class."

Of the myriad themes treated in the show's almost 450 episodes, "one of the most important - and most serious" is that of God and the relationship between each person and God, done in a way that mirrors "the religious and spiritual confusion of our times," it said.

"Simultaneously reflecting modern people's indifference toward and great need for the sacred, Homer ... finds his ultimate refuge in God" - even if he doesn't always get God's name right, it said.

The paper cited one episode in which Homer sort of prays: "I'm usually not a religious man, but if you're up there, save me, Superman."

Misnaming God actually is just a momentary lapse on Homer's part, the paper said, "because in reality the two know each other quite well."