

D'Oh! Homer not so Catholic, Vatican says

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October 22, 2010

VATICAN CITY (RNS) Several days after the Vatican's official newspaper reported that characters Homer and Bart Simpson are Catholic, the source of that supposed discovery has distanced himself from the cartoonish claim.

"I wouldn't say they're Catholic, I would say they're people of faith," the Rev. Francesco Occhetta told the AFP news agency. "I would say that the Simpsons are open on the question of God."

An article in the Oct. 17 edition of L'Osservatore Romano ran under the headline "Homer and Bart are Catholic." The news created buzz around the world, with heavy coverage by newspapers and blogs, and even a rebuttal from the show's executive producer.

"We've shown pretty clearly that Homer is not Catholic," Al Jean told Entertainment Weekly. "I really don't think he could go without eating meat on Fridays -- for even an hour."

The cartoon Simpsons are longtime members of the First Church of Springfield, which its pastor, the Rev. Lovejoy, claims is the "one true faith": The Western Branch of American Reform Presbyteranism.

L'Osservatore's article referred to Occhetta's nine-page scholarly

essay, "The Simpsons and Religion," in the latest edition of *La Civiltà Cattolica*, an Italian journal published by Occhetto's Jesuit order.

The Simpsons-loving priest still stands by his claim that the animated series is exceptional in the seriousness with which it treats Christianity and other faiths.

"The authors (of 'The Simpsons') are fiercely critical of some religious people but they respect faith, openness to God, prayer and going every Sunday to listen to their pastor," Occhetto said, "even if they sleep or eat popcorn when they go."