

# Arts



January 4 – February 5

**Millburn, NJ** – In the play *Forever Plaid*, performed at the Paper Mill Playhouse in New Jersey, a bus filled with Catholic youths hits a car, killing the occupants. This incident triggered a barrage of insults aimed at the Catholic teenagers, e.g., “What a way to die—being slammed by a bus of parochial virgins.”

January 20

**Louisville, KY** – The Kentucky Opera Association staged a production of *Side by Side by Sondheim*, which included the song, “I Never Do Anything Twice.” The song made numerous references to things specifically Catholic and to things Christian. Derogatory references were made to habits worn by religious, to the Rosary, to nails and a hammer, etc. The references to habits and the Rosary were made in the midst of a scene involving sex in a brothel.

February

Bill Bell designed a limited edition collector plate, *Holy Cats*, which was available through the Franklin Mint. Described in an advertisement as “the convent cats and the feline friars, making merry and dancing the night away” in a cathedral, the plate features colorful cats in medieval garb. One cat is reading a book from a pulpit while on the ground a feast is being shared by some cats. One dressed as a pope has what looks like a chalice in his hand. Bubbles are coming out and food is present. Some of the cats are dancing together. Stained glass images show one with a cat standing like Jesus with His Sacred Heart being emphasized and the other with Mary as a cat holding her baby cat, presumably Jesus. The ceiling shows a cat as the human about to touch God, Who is drawn as a

lion.

March

**New York** – *Art Now Gallery Guide*, published in New York, published an ad for the exhibit of "Initiation," a painting which depicts an angel, seen from the back, legs spread wide, having sex up against an altar. On the white marble altar, seen between the legs of the angel, is an ornate gold cross. The backdrop for the entire image is a large gold cross reaching from side to side, and top to bottom. The ad content reads, in part, "'Initiation,' a painting by Houston artist Donell, pushes the limits of conventional thought regarding the connection between spirituality and sexuality. It has received international media attention due to its censorship by the Catholic Church." The ad noted that "Initiation" could also be seen in the February issue of *Playboy*.

March 8 – April 9

**Saint Paul, MN** – The Great American History Theatre staged the production *Pope Joan: A Divine Comedy*, written by Lance S. Belville. An ad for the play read as follows: "*POPE JOAN* is a comedic and provocative exploration of the myths behind Pope John VIII. John was a woman. Or was he? A priest searches for the truth behind the myths and legends of the medieval church. The journey will lead him through the battlefields of Christendom to the bedchambers of the Vatican, all in the name of truth. Laugh with Pope Leo IV, Charlemagne and Cardinal Odilo as they unfold Joan's existence. Could this powerful woman have been scratched from the history books? She was everything a pope should be...except a woman."

March 26-April 28

**Quincy, IL** – The 45th Annual Quad-State Juried Art Exhibition was presented by The Quincy Art Center and Dame & Hurdle Jewelers. An exhibit which won a Merit Award was "Madonna Enthroned in Sewer with Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles" by

Andreas Fischer. This exhibition was underwritten in part by the National Endowment for the Arts.

April

**Hartford, CT** – The Hartford State Company premiered *Clean*, a play which focuses on the (never consummated) relationship between a 30-year-old Catholic priest and Gustavito, a ten-year-old boy. Set in New York City and a Puerto Rican village, *Clean* portrays the romantic involvements of the Delgado family, which, in addition to Gustavito, includes a “tradition-bound Catholic father given to outbursts of drunken violence.” The *New York Times* described *Clean* as a work “unlikely to win an endorsement from John Cardinal O’Connor.”

May 18

**New York** – *Party*, a play from the pen of David Dillon, is about seven gay men in a rap session in various stages of undress. What separates this from other gay genre plays is the most outrageous character—Father Ray. He is celibate because he has taken vows, but he has, according to a *New York Newsday* review, “the randiest tongue of the bunch...[and] gets all the saucy lines...” The *New York Daily News* noted that the “bitchiest of the guests, the priest” enabled the play to feature “Catholic-bashing.” *Party* moved from off-off Broadway to the respectable Douglas Fairbanks Theatre in its run in New York.

June

**Philadelphia, PA** – *Bad Girls Upset by the Truth*, a play that was performed at the Plays and Players Theater, featured a pious nymphomaniac who views her 157 sexual experiences as a way to find Jesus. Among the incidents pertaining to Catholicism is a character depicting the Virgin Mary who has an immaculate conception in a supermarket.

July

**Santa Ana, CA** – At a Santora Arts Complex exhibit Connie Sasso featured “condoms floating in an amber liquid with a rosary draped around the jar.” Sasso said that her work reflected the suffering of women as a result of “church policies on human reproduction.” She added that “the church’s policies on abortion and birth control contribute to everything from poverty to AIDS and prostitution.”

July

**Chicago, IL** – Maile Flanagan’s *One-Woman Sound of Music* is an offensive spoof of the family classic musical starring Julie Andrews. Shown at the Zebra Crossing Theatre, this account consisted of nuns who are lesbians, Captain Von Trapp is shown as a sadist, and Liesl is a bisexual. It was said in the *Chicago Reader* that this production gave Flanagan “one more opportunity to react to Catholic school sadomasochism.”

September 6 – October 15

**Millburn, NJ** – The Paper Mill Playhouse featured an offensive production, *Nine*. Among the jabs at Catholicism was the transformation of the character of a nun into a “voluptuous whore.” It received funding from the NEA and the New Jersey State Council on the Arts. Gov. Christine Todd Whitman is the Honorary Chairperson of the playhouse’s Board of Trustees.

September 24

Bravo cable network aired a program called *Windows* as its Texaco Performing Arts Showcase. The program featured a number of dance routines, the last of which included a priest, a nun, and a choir. Called “Temptation” after the song sung during the performance, the routine centered around a dancing priest’s battle with temptation. The object of his struggle was the nun—dressed as a hooker. She was wearing a habit and Rosary beads around her neck; she was dressed in a black strapless minidress and high heels. Seductively holding a pole on a dark street in an alley, she was grabbed at by the

priest. He crossed himself, outlined the female form with his hands, and made sexual gestures toward the nun. Among the other objectionable elements of this production were his repeated dropping of the Bible, his stealing from a homeless woman, and, most offensive of all, his consumption, along with the choir, of white wafers—obviously meant to indicate the Host—followed by them all spitting it out.

October 7

**Omaha, NE** – Artist Nick Chiburis took photographs inside area churches and then superimposed images of naked women on them for display in a show at the 13th Street Gallery. The Archdiocese threatened action, forcing the artist to put a disclaimer on his work. He used Eve motifs complete with snake. The model's breasts are apparent as she appears to sit in a pew with religious images surrounding her.

October-November

**New York, NY** – *Sacrilege*, a play about a disaffected activist nun who wants to become a Catholic priest, ran on Broadway. Ellen Burstyn played the nun who serves the poor while defying Church teaching. She “hears” confession and gives the last rites to a dying man. The Cardinal who removed her from her order ends up having her hear his confession. The play invited the audience to see the Catholic Church as an oppressive institution, portraying the dissenters in a positive light and adherents to tradition as authoritarian.

November 4

**Plymouth, MA** – Plimoth Plantation, a historical preserve, planned to host a celebration of Guy Fawkes Day, an anti-Catholic holiday that was celebrated in colonial America. Traditionally, the event included burning the Pope in effigy. The plantation planned to celebrate it like a Halloween-type festival, irrespective of the historical context. After a protest by the league, the plantation decided to cancel the

event.