

# LEAGUE'S FREE SPEECH ASSAILED

On the night of the Catholic League's rally against "Corpus Christi," People for the American Way led a small band of anti-free speech protesters objecting to the league's First Amendment right to voice its opposition to the play. Joining the attack on the Catholic League's free speech was the National Campaign for Freedom of Expression, National Coalition Against Censorship, PEN American Center and Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts.

From the beginning, the league has argued that the play should not be censored by the government but that the producers of the play should have canceled it in the name of common decency.

William Donohue said that People for the Fascist Way would be a more accurate title for the organization leading the anti-speech rally and made the following statement to the press regarding this issue:

"The reason why Barbara Handman, vice president of 'People,' is leading the charge against the First Amendment is because she delights in exhibitions that assault the sensibilities of Catholics. She once told me that the Andres Serrano display of a crucifix submerged in a jar of urine was 'glorious' and 'reverential.' Given this mind-set, it is not surprising that she loves the idea of a Christ-like figure having sex with the apostles. But her enthusiasm for indecency is one thing, it is quite another when her debased appetite descends to gag speech."

---

# CATHOLICS, PROTESTANTS, JEWS AND MUSLIMS PROTEST “CORPUS CHRISTI”

The Catholic League is delighted with the strong support it has received for its protest of Terrence McNally’s blasphemous play, “Corpus Christi.” It is proud to announce that the following 49 organizations, representing the four major religions in the United States today, have signed a formal letter of protest objecting to the play:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Alliance Defense Fund</li></ul></li><li>• American Catholic Lawyers Association<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• American Family Association</li><li>• Americans United for the Pope</li></ul></li><li>• Ancient Order of Hibernians in America, Inc.</li><li>• (Diocese of the) Armenian Church of America<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Brotherhood of Catholic Laymen</li></ul></li><li>• CALL Network (Collegians Activated to Liberate Life)</li><li>• Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cardinal Newman Society</li><li>• Catholic Alliance</li><li>• Catholic Answers</li></ul></li><li>• Catholic Campaign of America</li><li>• Catholic Coalition of Westchester</li><li>• Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Catholics United for the Faith</li><li>• Center for Equal Opportunity</li></ul></li><li>• Center for Jewish and Christian Values</li><li>• Chinese Catholic Information Center<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Christian Coalition</li></ul></li><li>• Congregation of Mount Sinai</li><li>• Council of American Islamic Relations<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Crisis</li></ul></li><li>• Family Defense Council</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Family Research Council</li><li>• Free Congress Foundation</li><li>• Guild of Catholic Lawyers<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Interfaith Alliance</li></ul></li><li>• Interfaith Committee of Orthodox Jews<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Islamic Center of Long Island</li><li>• Jews for Morality</li><li>• Knights of Columbus</li></ul></li><li>• Knights of the Holy Sepulchre<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Kosciuszko Foundation</li><li>• Legatus</li></ul></li><li>• Media Research Center</li><li>• National Cops for Life</li><li>• National Council on Islamic Affairs<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Police Officers For Christ</li><li>• Polish American Congress</li><li>• Project Reality</li></ul></li><li>• Society of Catholic Social Scientists<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sons of Italy</li></ul></li><li>• Southern Baptist Convention (Ethics &amp; Religious Liberty Commission)<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Toward Tradition</li></ul></li><li>• Traditional Values Coalition</li><li>• Wethersfield Institute</li><li>• Women for Faith and Family</li><li>• Young America’s Foundation</li></ul> |
|--|--|

The letter that they signed reads as follows:

“The Manhattan Theatre Club has a legal right to offend Christians, but it has no moral right to do so. Hate speech is hate speech; it does not become something less if dressed in artistic clothing. Moreover, to flagrantly offend the sensibilities of any religious group is outrageous and can only fan the flames of bigotry. History has shown that an attack on one religion may open the door to attacks on other religions, and that is why we call upon the goodwill of all Americans to join with us in condemning this blasphemy.”

The league urges all its members in the New York metropolitan area to join the rally on October 13.

---

## **BROADWAY'S CATHOLICISM**

## **PROBLEM:**

In the “Weekend” section of the September 18<sup>th</sup> edition *New York Times*, several plays were advertised on one page. Four of them deal with Catholicism, one way or another: “Corpus Christi”; “Tony n’ Tina”; “Nonsense A-Men!”; and “Late Nite Catechism.” Their treatment of Catholicism, as even reviewers have noted, ranges from ridicule to blasphemy.

The Catholic League issued a news release on this subject:

“The play ‘Tony n’ Tina’ features an Italian Catholic wedding in which a pregnant bride on drugs interacts with a drunken

priest. 'Nunsense A-Men!' is an adaptation of the play 'Nunsense,' only this time the characters are in drag; the nuns use drugs and hawk a Blessed Virgin Mary cookbook that contains sexual innuendo. 'Late Nite Catechism' ridicules the pre-Vatican II church in a way that its fans would label outrageous had the script targeted 'progressive' nuns. 'Corpus Christi' is Terrence McNally's contribution to hate speech.

"Reporters often ask me which segment of society harbors the greatest animus against Catholicism. They frequently think I will finger the media. No, I believe it is the artistic community that hates Catholicism the most; the higher education community is a close second. Why this is so has much to do with sex: our elites sponsor a libertine notion of sexuality while the Catholic Church preaches the virtue of restraint. Want to know which version liberates? The statistics kept by courts and morgues provide the answer."

---

## **PROTEST OVER "CORPUS CHRISTI" IN HIGH GEAR**

Over the summer, the Catholic League garnered the support of over 40 Catholic, Protestant, Jewish and Muslim national organizations, all of which signed a statement of protest against the Terrence McNally play, "Corpus Christi." The names of the organizations will be released to the press prior to September 22, the night of the preview, and will appear in next month's *Catalyst*.

Most of those who will attend the preview of "Corpus Christi" are subscribers of the Manhattan Theatre Club (MTC), the play's producer. The play will hold its premiere, or opening

night, on October 13; Catholic League president William Donohue and league director of communications, Rick Hinshaw, are scheduled to see the play before its premiere.

The Catholic League is calling on all of its members in the New York area to picket the site of the play, the City Center, on opening night. We will assemble across the street from the City Center at 7:00 pm on Tuesday, October 13; it is located on 55<sup>th</sup> Street between 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The police have been notified of our protest.

The MTC says that the play presents McNally's "own unique view of 'the greatest story ever told.'" But there is nothing unique about blasphemy, especially in the artistic community in the late twentieth century: it's the norm.

The review of the play that appeared in the *Guardian*, the well-respected London newspaper, was shocking.

Many Congressmen and Senators are under the impression that the MTC, which receives funding from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), did not receive a grant for "Corpus Christi." This is mistaken.

In 1996, the NEA awarded \$31,000 to the MTC for "Corpus Christi." However, the MTC subsequently asked the NEA if it could use this grant to fund some other play, to which the NEA said yes. In other words, the NEA is guilty as charged and the MTC is guilty of playing games.

---

---

# CHRISTMAS HOLIDAY HITS COURTS

A Cincinnati attorney is suing the United States government because Christmas is recognized as a legal holiday. On August 4, Richard Ganulin filed suit yesterday in U.S. District Court arguing that it is unconstitutional for Congress to proclaim Christmas as a national holiday. In his lawsuit, Ganulin said that he is “damaged” by enforcement of the law because he does not believe in Jesus.

The Catholic League was the first organization in the nation to confront Ganulin. The *Cincinnati Enquirer* broke the story, citing the league’s position.

“Ganulin doesn’t have a leg to stand on” we said. Reviewing judicial rulings in this area, we mentioned that in the 1980s, the U.S. Supreme Court rendered two decisions that recognized the secular, as well as religious, meaning of Christmas. As such, the law that grants Christmas a national holiday passes muster with the strictures laid down by the Supreme Court in its 1971 ruling, *Lemon v. Kurtzman*.

“But beyond the legalisms lies the real issue,” commented the league, namely “the determination of secular zealots to scrub our society clean of all religious influence. This represents not only a war against our heritage, it represents an authoritarian impulse to restructure our culture according to the dictates of devout atheists. In the end, what bothers these people is that those who believe in Christ have Christmas to celebrate while those like themselves have, by definition, nothing to celebrate.”

---

# "CORPUS CHRISTI" TO RUN IN FALL; PROTEST MOUNTS

Terrence McNally's "Corpus Christi," a play about a Christ-like character who has sex with the apostles, is scheduled to open in New York this fall. It had previously been withdrawn but then it was rescheduled; the producer, the Manhattan Theatre Club, succumbed to pressure from the artistic community and put the play back on the drawing board.

Following the announcement to cancel the play, thirty major playwrights signed a letter demanding that the Manhattan Theatre Club stick to its guns. It was signed by Tony Kushner, Arthur Miller, Christopher Durang, A.R. Gurney, Stephen Sondheim, Wendy Wasserstein and others.

From the beginning, the Catholic League has led the fight against this "gay Jesus" play. Over the summer, the league is building a coalition of Catholic, Protestant, Jewish and Muslim groups who object to this blasphemy. The early support from the Orthodox Jewish community has been outstanding.

The media response to the league's objections has been incredible. Most of the reporting has been fair, but some of the commentaries have been unfair, not to say hypocritical. Leading the way in this regard was a May 28 editorial in the *New York Times*, entitled "Censoring Terrence McNally." The Catholic League answered the *Times* with an op-ed page ad of its own (see p.2).

Neither the playwright nor the producer will release a copy of the script to the Catholic League. But a story in the *New York Times* says that the script "from the beginning to the end retells the Biblical story of a Jesus-like figure—from his birth in a Texas flea-bag hotel with people having profane, violent sex in the room next door to his crucifixion as 'king

of the queers.'” It adds that the Christ-like character, Joshua, “has a long-running affair with Judas and sexual relations with the other apostles”; the Jesus-figure also has sex on stage, albeit in a nonexplicit way, with an HIV-positive street hustler.

The play ends by saying, “If we have offended, so be it. He belongs to us as well as you.” The league urges its members to write to their congressman and senators demanding an end to support for the National Endowment for the Arts (the Manhattan Theatre Club receives NEA grants). The league will unveil other strategies in due course.

---

## DIGITAL PULLS AD

In response to concerns raised by the Catholic League, Digital Equipment Corporation of Massachusetts has withdrawn an ad that the league found objectionable.

The ad promoted Digital computers, contrasting them with a well-known competitor. What the league found unacceptable was the large graphic that featured the Inquisition: monks were depicted holding crucifixes in the face of tortured soldiers. Moreover, the word “Heresy” was printed across the illustration. The effect of the ad, however unintentional, was to unnecessarily stir prejudice against Catholicism.

In a letter to Digital, we stated that they ought to be able to advertise their product “without resorting to such a crass caricature of Catholic history.” We also sent along a recent book review of Henry Kamen’s new work, “The Spanish Inquisition.” As one reviewer of this book concluded, the “torture-mad Inquisition is largely a 19<sup>th</sup> century myth.” No

wonder: Kamen effectively debunks prevailing views on the subject, noting, for instance, the role played by foreign propaganda in the creation of the diabolic image of the Inquisition.

The letter that the Catholic League received said that “It is never the intention of Digital Equipment Corporation to offend any religious, ethnic or racial group in its advertisements. We regret that the reproduction of the famous Diego Rivera mural in one of our advertisements has caused this reaction. We have withdrawn this advertisement from further publication.”

The league is delighted with Digital’s responsible decision.

---

## **“GAY JESUS” COMING TO BROADWAY**

This fall, the Manhattan Theatre Club is scheduled to produce a Terrence McNally play, “Corpus Christi,” that makes reference to Jesus having sex with the twelve apostles. When the Catholic League learned of this play, it immediately voiced its objections; its news release was picked up by newspapers across the country. This, in turn, led to several interviews on radio and TV, all handled by Rick Hinshaw, the league’s communications director.

The response to the league’s concerns, both from the public and from those in the media, was overwhelmingly positive (even Joan Rivers was unequivocally on our side). The league’s next step was to ask playwright McNally, winner of three Tonys, to alter the script. Below is the text of the letter that Catholic League president William Donohue sent to McNally:

“In your upcoming play, ‘Corpus Christi,’ the script calls for an offstage comment by the apostles regarding their having sex with Jesus. As you know, this part of your work is deeply offensive to Christians. That is why I am asking you to delete any such reference from the script.

“If this part of the play is not central to your work, then you should have no problem honoring this request. On the other hand, if you insist that you must not excise this segment because it is integral to the play, then the intent and effect of ‘Corpus Christi’ will be evident for all to see.

“You have earned a reputation for being a creative playwright. Surely your status would not suffer by acceding to this request, and indeed it may well be enhanced. The obverse, however, is also true: by failing to amend the script, you will have sent a message to the public that is hardly endearing.

“In the spirit of civility and community, I appeal to you to make the requested change. Thank you for your consideration.”

Donohue’s letter was released to the press and a copy was sent to McNally’s agent as well. News reports said McNally was not going to back down and that is why the league wrote to those federal, state and local officials who have oversight responsibilities for funding of the arts; the production company receives monies from all three layers of government.

---

**“MAD TV” BASHES CATHOLIC**

# PRIEST

The April 25 edition of Fox's "Mad TV" contained a skit about an Irish Catholic priest who visits a patient in the hospital. It intimated that the priest was a child molester and an alcoholic. It showed him grabbing the behind of the mother of the dying patient and repeatedly fondling the breasts of the patient. The patient called him "Father Fellatio" and remarked that it was clear that his "Crucifix swings both ways." The skit ended with the statement, "To be continued."

In a news release to the media, the Catholic League complained that "It is one thing to poke gentle fun at a priest, quite another to set him up as a depraved cleric. The language used was deplorable and it makes absolutely no difference to the Catholic League that it was a late-evening show: there is no legitimate time slot for Catholic bashing."

Many media outlets picked up our story, the result being that Fox was forced to make a statement of its own. "We respect the Catholic League's work to combat religious bias," said Fox. "Comedies like 'Mad TV' use social satire to expose cultural stereotypes rather than to perpetuate them."

Catholic League president William Donohue wrote to Fox chief Roger Ailes expressing his desire not to see a sequel to this episode. We are delighted to note that it didn't appear in the May 2 edition.

---

## ABC'S "THAT'S LIFE" — THE

# MOST BIGOTED SHOW OF ALL

The phones at the Catholic League rang off the hook in response to the April 7 episode of the ABC show, "That's Life." Here is how league president William Donohue described the show to the press:

"No show that I have ever seen was as viciously anti-Catholic as last night's episode of 'That's Life.' It was relentless in its bigotry, mocking Christ's crucifixion, the Host, transubstantiation, Holy Water, Catholic prayers, Midnight Mass, salvation, Catholic rituals, the Vatican, the New Testament, the Stations of the Cross, Confession, nuns, priests and, of course, those stupid laypersons who swallow all this moonshine. Reference was made in the show to Easter, offering further evidence that malice was at work; as the producers know, this is Holy Week."

The league was so outraged over this show that it made 1200 copies of the program, sending a tape to the major media outlets and to every bishop and congressman in the nation. The early response was encouraging: dozens of persons had seen the show and, with one lone exception, everyone agreed it was positively shameful. Cardinal O'Connor, without mentioning the show by name, labeled it "insulting" during a talk on Good Friday at St. Patrick's Cathedral.

On April 16, the night of the league's 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Dinner at The Plaza, Donohue held a press conference setting out the league's objections to the show and to ABC, in general. He mentioned how a pattern had emerged at the network. Specific reference was made to an episode of "The Practice," an edition of "Night Line," Christopher Hitchens' attack on Mother Teresa at her funeral, a movie called "Devil's Child," and the propaganda program, "Nothing Sacred."

The *New York Times* ran a story on the press conference quoting

Donohue as saying of ABC, "They wouldn't do it to Jews; they wouldn't do it to African-Americans; they wouldn't do it to gays. But somehow they think they can have open season on Catholics." Donohue was also quoted as saying, "There may be some people at ABC who are not happy with the Catholic League after we created war with them over the show, 'Nothing Sacred.'" He added, "Was this their last goodbye? I don't know."

The league expects that those who review a tape of the show will let ABC know how they feel.