

# CHRISTIE'S AND CATTELAN SEEK ANOTHER "SENSATION"

On May 17, Christie's auctioned one of two versions of "The Ninth Hour" by Maurizio Cattelan. The installation depicts Pope John Paul II being crushed by a meteorite while clutching his crozier. The Cattelan sculpture has been the source of controversy when shown in parts of Europe. This was especially true when it was featured in Poland where two members of the Parliament tried to destroy the artwork.

"Cattelan's 'The Ninth Hour' strikes us as being bizarre," said William Donohue, "but not necessarily anti-Catholic." What was of interest to the Catholic League was not so much the installation but all the hoopla surrounding it. We were also interested in the extent to which the artwork acted as fodder for anti-Catholics.

Donohue put his finger on one of the issues that did interest the league. "For example," he offered, "it is well-known that Christie's, which played an integral role in sponsoring the anti-Catholic exhibit, 'Sensation,' at the Brooklyn Museum of Art in 1999, has been hyping 'The Ninth Hour' in search of another fast buck." Donohue noted that Christie's featured the felled pope on the cover of its spring catalog. "As for Cattelan," said Donohue, "he admits to being disappointed by the lack of reaction to his work and is now tweaking reporters by saying that 'The Ninth Hour' is a 'little' anti-Catholic."

The other issue was how certain notables responded to the art. "To be sure," commented Donohue, "Cattelan's pope is attracting the crazies." He offered as evidence Norman Rosenthal, head honcho of England's Royal Academy. Upon seeing the art, Rosenthal was moved to blaming the pope for the spread of AIDS. Donohue remarked, "It remains to be seen if the Catholic bashers in New York can top this one."

Using sarcasm, Donohue said, "In fairness, Christie's has every reason to be ticked off at the Catholic League. Had we taken their bait and urged Catholics to protest, it might have been a lucrative deal. But now they're stuck with this pile of junk. Finally, we couldn't help but noticing that Cattelan's pope is shown surviving the meteorite. Talk about a bummer for the Christie's crowd!"

Donohue appeared on TV in New York on the CBS affiliate and nationwide on UPN discussing the issue.