

# **“CORPUS CHRISTI” IS GAY HATE SPEECH**

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Just a few days before the gala opening of the Terrence McNally play, “Corpus Christi,” I had a chance to preview it. The basic message is this: Jesus was no more divine than the rest of us and the reason why he was crucified was because he approved of homosexuality. That is why he was branded, “King of the Queers.”

The play provides a faithful rendition of the gay stereotype. For example, the script is replete with sexual and scatological comments, as well as behavior that is prototypically gay, e.g., crotch grabbing. There is a clear obsession with the male sex organ, and there are instances where this fixation finds expression in Joshua (the Christ figure) pretending to urinate in front of the audience; he is joined by three of the apostles, complete with piped-in sounds of urination. No doubt this is considered creative.

When Joshua turns to the apostles and proclaims them all to be divine, he says to them, “F— your mother, F— your father, F— God.” Joshua, of course, has sex with Judas at his high school prom and then has another romp with Philip. Philip dutifully says to Joshua, ‘I hope you have rubbers.’ He then asks the Jesus figure to perform fellatio.

The key scene in the play, which occurs near the end, is when Joshua condemns a priest for condemning homosexuality. After hearing the priest recite Biblical teachings on homosexuality, Joshua charges that “you have perverted my Father’s words.” Joshua says he knows Scripture as well as anyone and that no one should take everything that he says literally. The Bible, he says, is about love. Joshua then presides over a “wedding”

between James and Bartholomew. Not finished damning the priest, Joshua says "I despise you," and then proceeds to hit him several times. Not surprisingly, the all white audience responded favorably to the violence.

One final note: the recitation of the "Hail Mary" and the references to priests, nuns and Boys Town, makes it clear that Catholics are real the target of McNally's hate speech.

It needs to be asked why McNally found it necessary to write this play. Above all, I believe it has to do with his need to justify his lifestyle. And this is certainly something that many other gays can relate to, especially if they were brought up Catholic, as McNally was.

Instead of rejecting God, they are driven by a passion to seek His approval for their behavior. To be blunt, sodomy is not a sin that these gay men can accept. Unlike other gay men, they find it impossible to simply dismiss the Bible as fiction. No, they want to believe in God, but they don't want to believe in God as we know Him. To do that would be to admit to their sin, and their sin is their lifestyle. Better to rework Him than to reject Him. But God cannot be rehabilitated, and they know it. This is what drives them crazy.

The play does have its defenders, and among them is Jim Martin. Soon to be priest, Jim writes for *America* magazine, the Jesuit journal of opinion. A talented writer, Jim recently criticized me for criticizing "Corpus Christi" before I had "experienced" it. In his article, which was a thinly-veiled defense of the play, Jim confesses not to having seen the play himself, relying instead on the take that one of his Jesuit friends had of it. Apparently the irony is lost on him.

Jim is of the opinion that we can't tell if a sewer stinks unless we've visited the sewer. I do not share that position. My initial reaction to the play was based on conversations I had with reporters who had read the script, printed excerpts

and a review that appeared in the London *Guardian*. After having seen the play, I am more convinced than ever that "Corpus Christi" is a piece of filth. That it could never be shown on TV speaks volumes.

It is no wonder why McNally refused to accede to my request to excise the worst parts of the play—it was rotten from beginning to end. It was not, as Jim would have it, a multicultural expression, a gay interpretation of "The Greatest Story Ever Told." Nor was it a "workable theatrical event." It was hate speech.

It is striking that Jim accuses me of anti-Catholicism for objecting to a play before I have seen it. Two days after I read his account, I got a letter from Rabbi Dr. Esor Ben-Sorek about the play. "Have I seen it? No, and I have no intention to see it," he said. "Can I then, in fairness, make a judgment?" His answer should send chills through the spine of those at *America*: "Yes. That which hurts my brother hurts me."