

EPISCOPAL BISHOPS RESPONDS

In the last issue of *Catalyst*, we printed a letter by William Donohue to New York Episcopal Bishop Mark S. Sisk. Donohue described the artistic work of Diane Victor that was showcased in the Cathedral of St. John the Divine; Victor's "The Eight Marys" portrayed Our Blessed Mother in an obscene way. Donohue asked the bishop whether he would object if the artist portrayed his own mother the way the Virgin Mary was shown in the exhibit.

One month later, Donohue received a letter from Rev. Canon Thomas P. Miller; he said he was writing on behalf of Bishop Sisk. He said, in part, that "the artist's figures are not meant to be representations of the Holy Mother." So what are they? "They are self-portraits in reference to the artist's own struggle as a woman to come to terms with traditional religious iconography," he said. The art, he stressed, was supposed to express "the dynamic spirit of a democratic South Africa."

Want more baloney? Read this paragraph: "Diane Victor's personal struggle as an artist and as a woman may be difficult to look at, but that very difficulty might serve to remind us of our call to be stewards of divine mercy in deference to God's judgment. In a Cathedral filled with beautiful and transcendent images, we are reminded that, like Jesus and in Christ's name, we are called to reach out beyond our comfort to the unlovely and unloved. Mary's Song promises that God looks with favor on the lowly, who will be lifted up, as the proud will be scattered and the powerful brought down. In this light, the Victor portraits reach for Mary's advocacy and offer hope even for what is most disturbing among us." Whew!

Why is it that these nutty artists are always struggling? And what explains why she is struggling *as a woman*? Is it a struggle for her not to be a man? If so, she needs treatment,

something any man of the cloth who purports to be troubled by the “unlovely” should have counseled. As for this business about “the Victor portraits...offer hope even for what is most disturbing among us,” someone needs to tell this struggling artist that nothing is more disturbing than her own work.

We’re saving the best for last. After being told that we didn’t quite understand Victor’s masterpiece, we are then congratulated: “Your questioning of ‘The Eight Marys’ has helped us to think more incisively about this important mission and reminded us of the importance of critical dialogue in the arts as well as religion.”

Now if we blew it, why the pat on the back? Moreover, wouldn’t it be highly condescending to thank us for getting it wrong?

Want to know what really happened? After getting pummeled by Catholic League members (we provided the bishop’s address in the *March Catalyst* on purpose), the bishop told his underling to spin the issue by writing a tortured letter laced with artsy lingo. He succeeded. But we succeeded—thanks to you—in getting our point across.