

# FUNDING FOR "POPE AND WITCH" HURT NEA

The Catholic League's recent criticism of federal funds being used to support an anti-Catholic play was used as a reason to deny more money to the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA).

This past spring the league denounced NEA support for the Dario Fo play, "The Pope and the Witch." The play is a vicious attack on the pope, priests and nuns written by a Catholic-bashing communist. So when the NEA was looking for an increase in its budget, some congressmen sought to block the increase by citing monies distributed to the Irondale Ensemble Project and the Theater for the New City Foundation; the former performed the play and the latter hosted the event.

Congressman Tom DeLay had this to say: "When a group takes federal dollars it must not pervert that subsidy by supporting groups that directly attack the religious beliefs and cultural values of a large segment of Americans. Congress can't remain neutral on the sidelines while the NEA is funding groups that subsidize vicious, bigoted productions."

Similarly, Congressman Joseph Pitts cited the Fo play saying, "It depicts the Pope called John Paul II, as a heroin addicted paranoid advocating birth control and legalization of drugs. As long as this type of funding is done by NEA, we need to send them a signal and give them the modest cut of 2 percent."

Though the NEA's budget was not trimmed, it did not get the increase that its supporters sought. And that is a direct result of the league's public outrage at this play and the willingness of sympathetic congressmen to cite our involvement.