

# HOST TO ANTI-CATHOLIC PLAY RECEIVES FEDERAL FUNDS

From April 26 to May 21, the Irondale Ensemble Project performed the anti-Catholic play, "The Pope and The Witch," at the Theater for the New City in New York's East Village.

Written by the 1997 winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature, Dario Fo, the play has been characterized by *Newsday* as involving "a heroin-addicted, paranoid Pope called John Paul II, along with scheming priests, bumbling nuns and monks, corrupt cops and other assorted worthies from Fo's stable of demons." Similarly, the *Albany Times-Union* has said that the play is a "sharp satire about the present pontiff," one that portrays the Holy Father in a "sacrilegious manner." The pope, for example, is depicted as advocating birth control and the legalization of drugs.

The Catholic League released the following comment to the press about the play:

"Dario Fo is a Stalinist and an anti-Catholic bigot, thus making him indistinguishable from many in the crowd he runs with. Also lacking in distinction is the fact that the Irondale Ensemble Project, as well as the Theater for the New City Foundation, receives federal funds via the National Endowment for the Arts; no anti-Catholic troupe that we are aware of has ever been turned down for its Catholic bashing.

"Those who think that the Catholic League's criticisms are arguably biased should do themselves a favor and tap into the Irondale Ensemble Project's website at [www.irondale.org](http://www.irondale.org) and check out the *Special Vatican Issue*, Volume 3, No. 1, Spring 2000. After reading 'The Pope and The Witch' statement, no one will dispute our conclusion.

"We are writing to every member of congress who serves on the

Appropriations Committee requesting that all future federal funding of the Irondale Ensemble Project and the Theater for the New City Foundation be stopped. It is one thing for Catholics to put up with bigotry, quite another to force them to subsidize it."

As a result of our letter, the congressional liaison for the NEA called our office in an attempt to defend the institution.

He said that no money was going directly from the NEA for this particular play. We let him know that we weren't persuaded: money is fungible and nowhere is this more true than in Washington. We were happy to hear, however, that our letter had created "quite a stir" in the nation's capital.