

# RALLY AGAINST "CORPUS CHRISTI" A HIT; CRITICS PAN THE PLAY

On October 13, the night of the gala opening of "Corpus Christi," the Catholic League led over 2,000 demonstrators in a spirited rally against the play. Joining Catholics at the rally were Protestants, Jews, Muslims and Buddhists.

"The protest began with a fiery speech from William A. Donohue, the president of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights," is how the *New York Times* characterized the rally. "Holding a bullhorn inside an area barricaded by the police," the article said, "Mr. Donohue shouted criticisms at the opposition. 'You are the real authoritarians at heart,' he said. 'We're the ones that believe in tolerance, not you phonies.'"

A band of 300 counterdemonstrators was there to protest the Catholic League's free speech and to defend the hate speech of playwright Terrence McNally. A Catholic News Service article incorrectly said that it was "a somewhat smaller group" than the Catholic League crowd (as the *Times* said, we "dwarfed" them); the same article incorrectly said that "hundreds of protesters" were at our rally (2,000 was the official police statistic).

The play was not only offensive, it was lousy theater. Fintan O'Toole of the *New York Daily News* entitled his review, "A Texas Chainsaw Massacre of the Bible," commenting that it was "utterly devoid of moral seriousness or artistic integrity." In the *New York Post*, Clive Barnes called the play "dull," and said it exemplified "boredom." In the same newspaper, Father Richard John Neuhaus blasted "Corpus Christi" for its "intellectual and moral incoherence," saying that the play can

be viewed "as a comprehensive exercise in anti-Americanism."

David Lyons of the *Wall Street Journal* wrote that "the problem" with the play is its "parasitic insubstantiality"; he added that the play deserves to be rebuked for its "fatheadedness." The *Washington Post* noted that "Self-pitying artists (Oscar Wilde, John Lennon et al.) have long had the habit of comparing themselves to Jesus, but this play plummets to a whole new level of grandiosity." And Ben Brantley of the *New York Times* remarked that "The excitement stops right after the metal detectors," a comment on the airport devices that the theater installed to ward off violence. Brantley characterized the writing as "lazy" and finished his piece by branding the play "flat and simpleminded."

All in all it proved to be a great victory for the Catholic League.