

SCAPEGOATING OVER SHEPARD AND SLEPIAN

Two thugs kill a homosexual in Laramie, Wyoming (Matthew Shepard) and a nut kills an abortion doctor in suburban Buffalo (Barnett Slepian). Immediately, gay-rights advocates and abortion-rights advocates (often one and the same) blame Christianity. Some get specific and either criticize, or blame, Pope John Paul II, Cardinal O'Connor and William Donohue for what happened.

"There's no bigot like a Christian bigot," is how Bob Hanna began his column in the *Standard Times*, a New Bedford, Massachusetts newspaper. "When it come to bigotry," he said, "Christians have a copyright." He then proceeded to recount stories about witches, the slaughter of Indians, racism, the Holocaust (Pope Pius XII was guilty of "never lifting a finger"), etc. He ended by saying, "Fear the Christian bigot."

Donohue's letter on Hanna's article, which was printed in the newspaper, wondered whether "a writer would be kept on staff if he simply ended his piece with, 'Fear the Jewish bigot,' never mind engaged in a bigoted diatribe against those 'Christ-killing Jews.'" Donohue closed by saying, "By printing Hanna's hate speech, you have done a public service, however perversely intended: You have demonstrated the two-faced bias that pervades your newsroom."

Chris Quinn, director of something called the New York City Anti-Gay and Lesbian Violence Unit, went so far as to hold the Catholic League complicit in Shepard's death. Why? Because the league was protesting the gay Jesus play, "Corpus Christi," at a time when Shepard was killed. In a sentence that defies logic, Quinn said, "If it's blasphemous for the image of Jesus Christ to be gay, then they're saying that it's blasphemous for anyone to be gay."

The *National Catholic Reporter* offered an article by Joseph Cunneen, formerly a drama professor at Fordham University, that not only sounded the same alarm, it enunciated the same tortured logic. "It's not only that 'Corpus Christi' opened the same week that a young homosexual student was killed in Wyoming; anyone aware of the psychological pressures on Catholic high school boys knows that there is immense work to be done." We have a hunch what Cunneen means, but that is all. Can you figure this out?

We have a better grip on what Cunneen means when he talks about the "immense work" that needs to be done. "Church authorities and moral theologians need to engage in open dialogue on norms of behavior." There's that word again—dialogue.

Open dialogue sounds to us much better than closed dialogue, which is why we're anti-closed dialogue. Now what about this business about a dialogue on "norms of behavior"? We trust that Cunneen isn't talking about drinking and driving, but about accepting sodomy and gay marriages. Swell.

In the course of Cunneen's review of "Corpus Christi," we couldn't help but notice that he found acceptable most of what the Catholic League found objectionable. But there was one scene, so short it had no effect on us, that did get his goat.

Cunneen rightfully registers a complaint about Terrence McNally's portrait of "Mary as a lush," but then adds how it is hard for him to understand why the playwright presented Joshua, the Jesus-figure, as someone who would deny Mary the right to enter the room just as the Last Supper was about to take place. It "seems like an odd attack on the women's ordination movement." No wonder that one got by us. But it does prove one thing: even the *National Catholic Reporter* is capable of being offended by an artist.

"You helped create the Holocaust (sic) of hatred, prejudice,

killings and beatings against all gays and lesbians in America!" This is what someone wrote in a letter to Donohue regarding the killing of Shepard. "You are the Real Murderer of Matthew W. Shepard! Confess!" The letter goes on like this and ends with "What Goes Around—Comes Around! God will Strike You Down—Watch!!!" The underlining was in red, with yellow added to some comments. Attached to this letter was a news clipping about Shepard, and in large red letters across the top, it said, "DONOHUE—MURDERER!" Just another day in the office.

No one knows how to scapegoat like Tony Kushner, the avowed homosexual, anti-Catholic playwright. In a telling article in the *Nation*, the Stalinist journal of opinion, Kushner not only blames Trent Lott for killing Shepard, he blames the pope. "Pope John Paul II endorses murder," is what he said.

Not one to waffle, Kushner says that "on the subject of gay-bashing, the Pope and his cardinals and his bishops and priests maintain their cynical political silence." Want more? "Behind this murdered kid [Shepard] stand legions of kids whose lives are scarred by the bigotry this Pope defends as sanctioned by God." Donohue's reply to this piece ended with, "Save it, Kushner, and grow up: accountability is not a sin."

Kushner's irresponsibility was matched by Polly Rothstein, president of the Westchester Coalition for Legal Abortion. Rothstein blamed John Cardinal O'Connor for the killing of Dr. Slepian. She said that had it not been for people like Cardinal O'Connor "spewing hate, there would be no anti-abortion movement." Incredibly, she added that although the Cardinal "did not pull the trigger," he was still "accountable for these religious followers who do pull the trigger." The league blasted Rothstein in a news release for her slanderous attack.

Finally, we have the august *Philadelphia Inquirer* weighing in with a lecture to Cardinal O'Connor. In an editorial on the

slaying of Dr. Slepian, Cardinal O'Connor was taken to task for allegedly offering nothing more than "perfunctory laments"; the newspaper duly noted that this "will not suffice."

Now either the *Philadelphia Inquirer* was ignorant of Cardinal O'Connor's remarks on this subject (if so, it was willful), or the writers knew exactly what the New York Archbishop had said and were dismissing his comments so as to set him up for a cheap shot. "Either way," Donohue said, "you come out a loser." The newspaper printed Donohue's letter.

The kinds of statements restated here suggest that there is something worse than anti-Catholicism going on. When people's heads and hearts are full of hate, there is literally no rational rebuttal that will sway them. That's all the more reason why the Catholic League will dig in its heels and continue to fight the good fight.