

NEA-FUNDED ATHEY OFFENDS CATHOLICS

Scheduled to perform at P.S. 122 in Manhattan this weekend is Ron Athey, an artist who is funded by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). Athey's performance, "Four Scenes in a Harsh Life." has already evoked considerable controversy due to its vulgar nature. In this production. Athey, who is HIV positive. sheds the blood of" a naked man on stage (he has also shed his own blood). Importantly, he uses Catholic symbols to promote his message.

The Village Voice described "Four Scenes in a Harsh Life'" as follows: "After donning latex gloves and rubbing the man with alcohol, Athey began to pinch up folds of skin at the man's waist, back, neck, upper arm, and inserted long needles with feathers at one end: arrows for St. Sebastian. Coating his hands with oil, Athey began to anoint the flock pressed against the stage. Then he turned and removed the arrows from the naked man's body and untied him. Athey lifted the man – who looked weak – then, kneeling, he cradled him in the image of Pieta."

Kathy Halbreich of Minneapolis' Walker Art Center has said that Athey's program should be understood in the context of "the rituals of the church and the body and blood or Christ being used." A press release for Athey has stated that his work is "surrounded by religious iconography" and that when his body is "pierced and covered with his own blood [it] is evocative of Saint Sebastian." Athey is known to use "a crown of thorns" (actually a "halo of needles") to draw blood: he has also stuck hypodermic needles in his arms.

Commenting on the upcoming program was Dr. William A. Donohue, president of the Catholic League:

That Ron Athey wants to offend Christians, and Catholics in particular, is not newsworthy. That he has succeeded with the help of the Federal Government, and with the explicit endorsement of NEA chair, Jane Alexander, is. Taking liberties with the revered icons of anyone's religion is shameful, and it is particularly shameful that the Clinton administration, which has amassed an embarrassing record with Roman Catholics, should fail to separate itself from Athey's blasphemy. Those who boast of compassion and respect for diversity should be the first ones to criticize someone like Athey. Not to do so is suggestive of more than hypocrisy. It suggests contempt of elementary standards of public decency and disrespect for the Catholic religion."

The Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights is the nation's largest Catholic civil rights organization. It defends the right of Catholics—lay and clergy alike—to participate in American life without defamation or discrimination.

A&E TARGETS CATHOLIC CHURCH

On October 21, the Arts & Entertainment Network (A&E) broadcast a program on the Catholic Church, "Sex and the Church: A House Divided," that broke new ground in reporting on division within the Church: it actually promoted it. Unlike other documentaries on dissent, this program, which was produced and narrated by Bill Kurtis, sought to paint the Catholic Church in the worst possible light.

In "Sex and the Church," we learn about the "hopelessly defining Pope" a laity that is "forming their own religion," women and young people who are "leaving the Roman Catholic

Church," priests who are "a grey lot, overworked and weary of the struggle," along with "the truly desperate." That the Catholic Church continues to increase its ranks while mainline Protestant churches (which have made the changes that Kurtis desires) are declining is not something the A&E program sought to explain.

We also learn about the Church's "restrictive views on sex" which have "effectively gutted the priest- hood" because of its "medieval" perspective. Indeed it is the Church's "sexual repression" and its "ruling class of celibate males that "tell[s] women what to do," resulting in the 'slowly flickering flame" of the Church. In short, as A&E sees it, either the Church can stop being Catholic or it will quickly collapse.

Dr. William A. Donohue, president of the Catholic League, issued the following statement on the program:

"It seems plain that the producer and narrator of the A&E broadcast 'Sex and the Church,' has an animus against the Catholic Church. Kurtis first exposed his real interest in Catholicism in his 1993 foray against the Church. "Sins of the Father." Now he has returned to distort out of all proportion the extent of the divisiveness in the Church, using hyperbole for fact. It is clear that Kurtis prefers a trendy Church to one that evinces Truth. That is his choice. But he should not expect Catholics to entertain his fantasies in public without being tarred with the brush of bigotry."

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LEAGUE CALLS FOR “WARNING LABELS” ON CONDOMS

The Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights is about to launch its fourth anti-condom ad, this time in Washington D.C. Beginning November 1, the following ad will appear alongside 50 buses in Washington D.C. for one month. The “queen size” ad will run the entire length of the bus.

FACTS ABOUT CONDOMS

Some Break. Some Leak. Some Are Damaged.

**We Put Warning Labels on Cigarettes.
We Put Warning Labels on Beer.
So Why Not On CONDOMS?**



*Some common sense and
a public service message from the*
Catholic League
for Religious and Civil Rights
1011 First Avenue
New York, NY 10022
(212) 371-3191

Dr William Donohue, president of the Catholic League, explained the purpose of the ad:

“The purpose of this ad is to challenge the wisdom of those health officials and educators who recommend condoms to young people without sufficiently advising them about condom failure. How many young people know, for example, that the failure rate of condoms is one in three? And how many know about the consequences of condom failure?

“There is no greater parental right than the right of parents to safeguard the well-being of their children. But that right is violated when the authorities provide misinformation about condoms to students. The most practical way to inform young

people of the risks of condom use would be for the Surgeon General to authorize the placement of warning labels on every condom package, whether manufactured in the United States or abroad. Accordingly, that is exactly what the Catholic League urges Dr. Joycelyn Elders to do.”

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