

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.

LEAGUE’S FREE SPEECH ASSAILED

On the night of the Catholic League’s rally against “Corpus Christi,” People for the American Way led a small band of anti-free speech protesters objecting to the league’s First Amendment right to voice its opposition to the play. Joining the attack on the Catholic League’s free speech was the National Campaign for Freedom of Expression, National Coalition Against Censorship, PEN American Center and Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts.

From the beginning, the league has argued that the play should not be censored by the government but that the producers of the play should have canceled it in the name of common decency.

William Donohue said that People for the Fascist Way would be a more accurate title for the organization leading the anti-speech rally and made the following statement to the press regarding this issue:

“The reason why Barbara Handman, vice president of ‘People,’ is leading the charge against the First Amendment is because she delights in exhibitions that assault the sensibilities of Catholics. She once told me that the Andres Serrano display of a crucifix submerged in a jar of urine was ‘glorious’ and ‘reverential.’ Given this mind-set, it is not surprising that she loves the idea of a Christ-like figure having sex with the apostles. But her enthusiasm for indecency is one thing, it is quite another when her debased appetite descends to gag speech.”

“CORPUS CHRISTI” IS GAY HATE SPEECH

William A. Donohue

Just a few days before the gala opening of the Terrence McNally play, “Corpus Christi,” I had a chance to preview it. The basic message is this: Jesus was no more divine than the rest of us and the reason why he was crucified was because he approved of homosexuality. That is why he was branded, “King of the Queers.”

The play provides a faithful rendition of the gay stereotype. For example, the script is replete with sexual and scatological comments, as well as behavior that is prototypically gay, e.g., crotch grabbing. There is a clear obsession with the male sex organ, and there are instances

where this fixation finds expression in Joshua (the Christ figure) pretending to urinate in front of the audience; he is joined by three of the apostles, complete with piped-in sounds of urination. No doubt this is considered creative.

When Joshua turns to the apostles and proclaims them all to be divine, he says to them, "F— your mother, F— your father, F— God." Joshua, of course, has sex with Judas at his high school prom and then has another romp with Philip. Philip dutifully says to Joshua, 'I hope you have rubbers.' He then asks the Jesus figure to perform fellatio.

The key scene in the play, which occurs near the end, is when Joshua condemns a priest for condemning homosexuality. After hearing the priest recite Biblical teachings on homosexuality, Joshua charges that "you have perverted my Father's words." Joshua says he knows Scripture as well as anyone and that no one should take everything that he says literally. The Bible, he says, is about love. Joshua then presides over a "wedding" between James and Bartholomew. Not finished damning the priest, Joshua says "I despise you," and then proceeds to hit him several times. Not surprisingly, the all white audience responded favorably to the violence.

One final note: the recitation of the "Hail Mary" and the references to priests, nuns and Boys Town, makes it clear that Catholics are real the target of McNally's hate speech.

It needs to be asked why McNally found it necessary to write this play. Above all, I believe it has to do with his need to justify his lifestyle. And this is certainly something that many other gays can relate to, especially if they were brought up Catholic, as McNally was.

Instead of rejecting God, they are driven by a passion to seek His approval for their behavior. To be blunt, sodomy is not a sin that these gay men can accept. Unlike other gay men, they find it impossible to simply dismiss the Bible as fiction. No,

they want to believe in God, but they don't want to believe in God as we know Him. To do that would be to admit to their sin, and their sin is their lifestyle. Better to rework Him than to reject Him. But God cannot be rehabilitated, and they know it. This is what drives them crazy.

The play does have its defenders, and among them is Jim Martin. Soon to be priest, Jim writes for *America* magazine, the Jesuit journal of opinion. A talented writer, Jim recently criticized me for criticizing "Corpus Christi" before I had "experienced" it. In his article, which was a thinly-veiled defense of the play, Jim confesses not to having seen the play himself, relying instead on the take that one of his Jesuit friends had of it. Apparently the irony is lost on him.

Jim is of the opinion that we can't tell if a sewer stinks unless we've visited the sewer. I do not share that position. My initial reaction to the play was based on conversations I had with reporters who had read the script, printed excerpts and a review that appeared in the London *Guardian*. After having seen the play, I am more convinced than ever that "Corpus Christi" is a piece of filth. That it could never be shown on TV speaks volumes.

It is no wonder why McNally refused to accede to my request to excise the worst parts of the play—it was rotten from beginning to end. It was not, as Jim would have it, a multicultural expression, a gay interpretation of "The Greatest Story Ever Told." Nor was it a "workable theatrical event." It was hate speech.

It is striking that Jim accuses me of anti-Catholicism for objecting to a play before I have seen it. Two days after I read his account, I got a letter from Rabbi Dr. Esor Ben-Sorek about the play. "Have I seen it? No, and I have no intention to see it," he said. "Can I then, in fairness, make a judgment?" His answer should send chills through the spine of those at *America*: "Yes. That which hurts my brother hurts me."

ANTI-CATHOLIC BIAS IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

by Inez Fitzgerald Storck

Good parents have always known that it is necessary to watch over their children's reading. But Catholic parents today and even Catholic educators may not be aware of the extent of the negative elements in contemporary children's literature. Many if not most books for preteens and teens attack Christian values. Examples of violence, unchastity, and New Age paganism abound, with a few books favorable to homosexuality and abortion. Many children's and young adult books are also informed by gender feminism, which denies the very basis for masculinity and femininity.

One of the most pernicious trends is blatant anti-Catholicism. A review of more than 100 mainstream children's and young adult books published or reprinted in the last two decades has yielded numerous examples of negative portrayals of Catholicism. Not a single positive description of the Catholic faith has surfaced, even though other groups such as blacks, Jews, Buddhists, and American Indians receive favorable treatment consistently. A few examples of antagonistic treatment of Catholicism appear below.

In *Year of Impossible Goodbyes* by Sook Nyul Choi, a girl raised in the religion of her Catholic mother turns to the Buddhism of her grandfather in time of need. She ends up rejecting her faith: "I didn't even like Mother's God." The preteens to whom the novel is targeted will end up with a very positive picture of Buddhism and a quite negative impression of Catholicism. One cannot but think that this was the

author's intent.

Cynthia Voight's *Jackaroo* is set in what is ostensibly the Middle Ages, or rather a parody of medieval times, with poverty, enforced ignorance (common people are forbidden to learn to read), and cruelty of the lords toward underlings. Nowhere is there mention of the Christian culture which informed every aspect of society, save for a few scattered reference to priests. The few comments that are made suggest that priests are more interested in making a profit than in caring for those in need.

Queen Eleanor, Independent Spirit of the Medieval World by Polly Schoyer Brooks depicts Catholicism in a biased manner, with mixed reviews of St. Bernard of Clairvaux. Eleanor of Aquitaine rejects both the counsels of St. Bernard and the piety of Louis VII of France, her first husband, and is seen as a strong, dynamic woman for having done so. In fact, she is cast more as a modern feminist heroine than a medieval queen, particularly in her stance toward civil and ecclesiastic authority. Middle school students, on whose level the book is written, are left with an image of a Church that is weak and ineffectual.

A girl who has been abducted and later adopted returns to her birth family in *Whatever Happened to Janie?* by Caroline B. Cooney. She is exposed to the strong Catholic faith of her birth parents: "Janie felt a little cautious around the church part of their lives. She had been to Mass with them every week and found it a strange way to spend an hour." There is no positive statement about Catholicism. The young adult who reads the novel is likely to come away with the notion that it is a peculiar religion.

In Robert Cormier's *Other Bells for Us to Ring*, a Catholic girl tells her Unitarian friend Darcy about "the strange practices of Catholics," including bribing God by buying a Mass to get souls out of purgatory, "a terrible waiting room

between heaven and hell where you might get stuck forever" without these bribes. Catholic notions of sin are satirized in the Catholic girls's enumeration of the categories of sin: venial, mortal, and cardinal ("really big ones"). Understandably confused by her friend's exposition of sin, Darcy queries her own mother on the subject. The mother presents an alternative explanation of sin that seems much more reasonable, and of course makes the role of the priest appear superfluous. When Darcy asks a nun for information on the Church, the nun replies, "God comes first...Not whether you are this or that, Protestant or Catholic, young or old. Loving God is the first thing." Thus the nun communicates religious indifferentism, misusing the greatest commandment to justify this stance. And the effect in the book is that Darcy does not have to trouble herself with clearing up her confused ideas about the Church. Catholic doctrine and religious practices appear to obscure the reality of God and His love.

Small-Town Girl by Ellen Cooney is one of the worst offenders. The protagonist of the novel, a Catholic high school girl, has incorrect notions about indulgences and works to gain them in a mechanical way that appears to satirize Church teaching: "...she bought herself fourteen years of grace each day." Devout Catholic women are mockingly described as "a pewful of old women muttering into their rosary beads." The religious teaching sisters appear as benighted, bumbling souls fixated on purity. When the girl goes to confession, the priest asks her an inappropriate question about purity. She is afraid he will assault her sexually. Needless to say, he comes across as an uneducated lecher. (This priest actually makes Father Ray of "Nothing Sacred" look good!)

Perhaps the most significant evidence of anti-Catholic bias in young people's literature is the portrayal of Catholics in two books awarded the American Library Association's Newbery Medal, the most prestigious national award for children's literature. Jerry Spinelli's *Maniac Magee* received the 1991

Newbery Medal. In the novel an orphaned boy, Jeffrey, lives with his uncle and aunt: "Aunt Dot and Uncle Dan hated each other, but because they were strict Catholics, they wouldn't get a divorce. Around the time Jeffrey arrived, they stopped talking to each other. Then they stopped sharing"—to the point where they had two of everything, including toasters and refrigerators. Jeffrey has the reader's complete sympathy when he runs away from that travesty of a family. A similarly negative parody of Jews or blacks would undoubtedly disqualify a book from consideration for the Newbery laurels, and rightly so.

The 1996 Newbery Medal winner, *The Midwife's Apprentice* by Karen Cushman, takes place in the Middle Ages. The midwife of the story is a Catholic who goes to Mass on Sunday, yet she is hard-hearted to the point of cruelty, doing her job "without care, compassion, or joy." An adulterous relationship thrown in for good measure intensifies the degradation of her character. One asks if it could be mere coincidence that the midwife is the only person in the story depicted as an observant Catholic. What is worse, the author, in a postscript note characterizing the medieval midwife's repertory as a blend of herbal medicine and magic, states, "Superstitions included the use of relics, water from holy wells, charms, and magic words." It is highly insulting to Catholics to have the use of sacramentals equated with superstitious practices, which are condemned by the Church. The many other honors bestowed on *The Midwife's Apprentice* show that there is considerable support in the library and publishing fields for anti-Catholic bias.


It is evident that parents must more than ever watch over the moral education and spiritual formation of their young in order to be faithful to the Church's injunction to "teach children to avoid the comprising and degrading influences which threaten human societies."

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POPE JOHN PAUL II: ENEMY OF ANTI-SEMITISM

The following advertisement appeared in the Op-Ed page of the *New York Times* on October 16, 1998.

POPE JOHN PAUL II: ENEMY OF ANTI-SEMITISM
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<p>Today marks the 20th anniversary of the papacy of John Paul II. Already known to many as John Paul the Great, his list of accomplishments are as plentiful as they are monumental. Surely among them is his role in establishing strong relations between Catholics and Jews. The Holy Father has not shied from roundly criticizing the actions of many Christians before and during the Holocaust. But he has also defended the role of Pope Pius XII during the war: "Those who don't limit themselves to cheap polemics know very well what Pius XII thought of the Nazi regime, and how much he did to help the countless victims persecuted by that regime."</p> <p>Last Friday marked the 40th anniversary of the death of Pius XII. When he died, Jewish organizations the world over congratulated him for his efforts in saving Jews from the Nazis (he is credited with saving the lives of as many as 860,000 Jews).</p> <p>Expressing their gratitude when Pius died were the following: Anti-Defamation League; Synagogue Council of America; Rabbinical Council of America; American Jewish Congress; World Jewish Congress; New York Board of Rabbis; American Jewish Committee; Central Conference of American Rabbis; National Conference of Christians and Jews; National Council of Jewish Women; the Chief Rabbi of Israel; the Chief Rabbi of Rome; Golda Meir; and virtually every major rabbi in New York City.</p> <p>Given this historical fact, it is disturbing to read revisionist accounts blaming Pius for the Holocaust. The decision of Pius to authorize the shelter and protection of Jews, as opposed to making rhetorical flourishes denouncing the Nazis, was a wise one.</p>		<p>When the Dutch Catholic bishops openly condemned Hitler in 1942, more Jews were deported to death camps than from any other nation.</p> <p>Indeed, prior to the Dutch Catholic bishops' statement, the Nazis had exempted the deportation of baptized Jews. But not afterwards. Among those who died as a result was the Jewish born Carmelite nun, Edith Stein. She was canonized this week, showing once again the leadership of Pope John Paul II. As the Pontiff previously said, Stein died at Auschwitz because she was both Jewish and Catholic.</p> <p>The beatification of Cardinal Alojzije Stepinac earlier this month was another courageous move on the part of the Holy Father. Cardinal Stepinac, who died in 1960, spent 16 years in prison for his defiance of Marshal Tito of Yugoslavia. Unfortunately, there are those today who want to brand Stepinac a Nazi collaborator. Yet at the time of his farcical trial, the American Association of Jews protested the charge as "slander"; in 1985, Jakov Blazevic, the man who originally tried Stepinac, admitted that the trial was framed from beginning to end. Pope John Paul II is the first pope to visit the Synagogue of Rome and he is responsible for formally recognizing the state of Israel. He knows that Catholic misdeeds have contributed to anti-Semitism and he knows as well how much more needs to be done to show true brotherhood between Catholics and Jews. But is there anyone who doubts that he has done more to address this issue, with honesty and fairness, than any other world leader?</p> <p>Congratulations, Holy Father. You are an inspiration to the world.</p> <p><i>William A. Donohue, President</i></p>
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GAYS, JEWS AND “CORPUS CHRISTI”

It is impossible to say for sure who is patronizing “Corpus Christi,” but there is anecdotal evidence that the patrons are disproportionately gay and Jewish.

Writing in Gannett newspapers, theater critic Jacques Le Sourd recently wrote a column on the play saying that “it is no secret that the audience for theater in New York is largely Jewish and largely gay, and that to take a poke at Christian morality in this setting is hardly an act of bravery.”

In 1993, arts critic Richard Grenier commented that it was his observation that Broadway was patronized by audiences that were “overwhelmingly Jewish.” He added that “at the more commercially successful homosexual works, I got the impression that the audiences were something like 10 per cent homosexuals and 90 per cent heterosexual Jews—to all appearances well-to-do, liberal, husband-and-wife couples.”

It is a sad commentary that anti-Catholic bigotry has become almost a popular sport among certain segments of American society, and this is especially true of artists and their patrons. Whether the bigots are gay or straight, Jew or Gentile, is of no consequence to the offended. But to the extent that gays and Jews are overrepresented in the ranks of those supporting “Corpus Christi,” it is a blot on their community. We hasten to add that when it comes to anti-Catholic bigotry these days, the worst offenders tend to be embittered ex-Catholics like Terrence McNally, and that under no circumstance is it proper to make blanket charges against any group.

The cause of real religious tolerance will only move forward when Catholics, Protestants, Jews and Muslims seek to seriously address bigotry in their midst. No group is free from the sin of prejudice and no group has a monopoly on its possession. In the meantime, it is the duty of men and women of goodwill to do what they can to dissuade those given to religious prejudice from acting on their sentiments.

ANOTHER ANTI-CATHOLIC PLAY HITS NEW YORK

"The Cardinal Detoxes," an anti-Catholic play by Thomas M. Disch, opened on September 24 at the Tribeca Playhouse in New York City. The play, which ran until October 18, is a 35-minute monologue by a character who plays a cardinal. The cardinal is an alcoholic who runs down and kills a pregnant woman while driving drunk. He attacks the Church for its teachings on women and sexuality and is ultimately poisoned by a monk when he confesses his plan to expose the problems of the Church.

The play was the source of some controversy in 1990 when it opened in a building that was owned by the Archdiocese of New York.

The Catholic League news release on this play was given a front-page story in the performing arts weekly, *Back Stage*. Here is what we said to the press:

"Jeff Cohen, the director and producer of 'The Cardinal Detoxes,' said that one of the reasons he brought back the play now was due to the initial decision of the Manhattan Theatre Club to cancel Terrence McNally's play, 'Corpus

Christi.’ This is quite an admission: to think that Cohen is competing with McNally and for the honor of being known as New York’s biggest anti-Catholic bigot is something. This means that there is now a three way race going on, the third entry being Khalid Muhammad.

“One reviewer of Disch’s autobiography described the playwright’s life as ‘full of dead-ends, back-roads, breakdowns, detours.’ This sheds needed light on why Disch is determined to renew his hate speech. Some things never change.”

COMEDY CENTRAL ATTACKS CHRIST

On September 24 and 25, Comedy Central aired a “Daily Show” segment with host Craig Kilborn that outdid all its previous attacks on Christianity. This one celebrated the Terrence McNally anti-Christian play, “Corpus Christi,” by calling it a “delightfully blasphemous homosexual romp.” It aired a news clip of those priests who protested the play on September 22, mocking them throughout. What followed made this look tame. Here is a direct quote from Kilborn:

“While historians argue that Jesus was not gay, there is evidence he did enjoy the occasional three-way [a photo of the three crosses of the Crucifixion is flashed on the screen]. The opening night reviews were mixed with critics complaining about the erotic raising of Lazarus scene and the one act with a second, third and fourth coming of Christ.”

The Catholic League news release on this show pulled no punches:

“Just as Terrence McNally, or anyone associated with the

Manhattan Theatre Club, refuses to debate me, no one at Comedy Central is available to discuss this matter with me. It must be a terrible thing to go to work each day convinced that it is impossible to publicly defend one's efforts. But perhaps the worst element in this was the audience reaction: the crowd roared with laughter as Jesus Christ was attacked in a vicious and obscene way.

"In David Clay Large's account of Hitler's rise to power, *Where Ghosts Walk*, he mentions how Hitler arrived in Munich in 1913, settling on the edge of Schwabing, the city's artistic and intellectual quarter. 'He did so,' Large explains, 'because he considered himself to be an artist and wanted to be close to the center of action.' He was—Schwabing was Germany's bohemia. Isn't it striking that it was in this milieu of moral nihilism that Hitler was nurtured? Something for the Comedy Central folks to think about."

No one at Comedy Central would talk to William Donohue when he called to complain. Please write to Doug Herzog, president of Comedy Central, at 1775 Broadway, New York, New York 10019. Or give him a call at (212) 767-4070.

Let him know that we said hello.

PHONIES HONOR McNALLY

When we learned that the New York State English Council was featuring Terrence McNally at one of its events, Bill Donohue took the time to look over the brochure and write the organizer a letter. Here is the text of his letter to Donna Meister:

"I noticed that on October 22, Terrence McNally will be

featured at the Mersand Luncheon. I also noticed that among the Programs of Excellence, NYSEC has recognized the “Prejudice Reduction” work of Bayshore High School. This raises an interesting question: Why would an organization that quite properly awards efforts at prejudice reduction want to feature a playwright whose latest work (‘Corpus Christi’) bears all the marks of a unrelenting bigot? Unless, of course, NYSEC doesn’t regard bigotry vented against Christians as prejudice.

“I’d enjoy hearing a response from you.”

We haven’t gotten a response, nor do we think we’ll get one. Some things just can’t be defended.

IS JOURNALISM AUTHORITARIAN?

How many times has it been said that the Catholic Church is an “authoritarian” organization that brooks no dissent? Answer: almost as many times as there is a theologian in the news dissenting from Church teachings. Yet journalists, in particular, never tire of repeating this tired cliché about the Church. As recent events disclose, however, the question that needs to be asked is whether the profession of journalism is authoritarian.

The Clinton sexgate caper has left a lot of moral debris in its wake, not the least of which has been the spectacle of reporters donning their wrecking crew hats in search of a scandal. In the case of Rep. Henry Hyde, an on-line magazine called Salon found one: he had an affair in the 1960s. Bingo—there is no moral difference between Hyde and Clinton.

We will leave it to others to decide whether there is a

difference between a man who had an affair thirty years ago and a sitting president who had oral sex in the Oval Office with a 21 year-old intern while he was discussing of the nation with a Congressman. And then lied about it under oath. But what we won't leave to others is the story within the story: quite unlike the way matters are handled in the Catholic Church, the Washington bureau chief of Salon was forced to resign after he publicly questioned the journalistic merits of the decision.

Just as the Hyde story was breaking, the editor of Salon, David Talbot, told his Washington bureau chief, Jonathan Broder, not to air his differences with his editors. But Broder didn't hold back and was summarily canned. Talbot said that Broder's decision to "publicly air his criticisms" of the Hyde story was in direct defiance of his supervisors' instructions and "a fundamental violation of the trust that any organization must have in its employees."

That no one branded this decision "authoritarian" tells us how gentle the gentlepersons of the media can be when dealing with one of their own. Had it been the Church that gave some university theologian the boot for his decision to "publicly air his criticisms," every major media outlet in the nation would have been screaming "authoritarian," "censorship," "draconian," etc.

Want more evidence that journalism loves to brand the Catholic Church "authoritarian"? Then consider this. In a Lexis-Nexis search (it's essentially a computer library search), we decided to see how many times, in the past 90 days, the word "authoritarian" appeared in news articles around the country with the word "journalism." There were 34 entries.

We then decided to what happened when we linked "authoritarianism" with the major religions. When we linked "Jewish" with "authoritarianism," we got 50 entries; there were 58 entries when we linked with "Protestant." And when we

searched to see how many times the word “Catholicism” was linked with “authoritarianism,” up popped the following: “This search has been interrupted because it will return more than 1,000 documents.”

All stereotypes die hard. This is particularly the case when it is the wordsmiths who promote them. But that is no reason to give up. Not now. Not ever.