

TERRENCE McNALLY DIES AT 81

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on the passing of Terrence McNally:

Playwright Terrence McNally has died as a result of complications from coronavirus; he was 81. The four-time Tony award winner came to the attention of the Catholic League when his play, "Corpus Christi," was performed at the Manhattan Theatre Club. The play featured Christ having sex with the twelve apostles and was the source of a demonstration I led when it opened in October 1998.

The *New York Times* got a copy of the script during the summer, before the play debuted. It said that "from the beginning to the end [the script] retells the Biblical story of a Jesus-like figure—from his birth in a Texas flea-bag hotel with people having profane, violent sex in the room next door to his crucifixion as 'king of the queers.'" It added, for good measure, that the Christ-like character, Joshua, "has a long-running affair with Judas and sexual relations with the other apostles." The script ended with a statement to Christians. "If we have offended you, so be it."

The play, interestingly, was replete with gay stereotypes, ranging from the sexual to the scatological. There was crotch grabbing and a clear obsession with the male sex organ. The Christ-like figure pretended to urinate in front of the audience, and he was joined by three of the apostles, complete with sounds of urination piped into the theater. No doubt this was considered creative.

Joshua had sex with Judas at a high school prom and then another romp with Philip. At one point, Philip said to Joshua, "I hope you have rubbers." He then asked the Jesus-figure to perform oral sex on him.

According to the *New York Times*, the demonstration I led drew

2,000 on a rainy night; only 300 joined a counterdemonstration. "The protest began with a fiery speech by William A. Donohue, the president of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights," the newspaper said. "Mr. Donohue shouted criticisms at the opposition. 'You are the real authoritarians at heart. We're the ones that believe in tolerance, not you phonies.'"

The counterdemonstration was organized to protest the free-speech rights of the Catholic League. I never called for censorship. Our critics were led by People for the American Way. They were joined by the National Campaign for Freedom of Expression, the National Coalition Against Censorship, and the PEN American Center. All of these organizations were founded to defend freedom of expression, and all were there to condemn my free-speech rights.

The play turned out to be a bomb. Fintan O'Toole of the New York *Daily News* called it "utterly devoid of moral seriousness or artistic integrity." Clive Barnes of the *New York Post* said it was "dull," and David Lyons of the *Wall Street Journal* rebuked it for its "fatheadedness." The *Washington Post* said "the play plummets to a whole new level of grandiosity," and the *New York Times* pronounced the writing "lazy" as well as "flat and simpleminded." None were critical of the play's Christian bashing, or the fact that McNally singled out Catholics for special treatment.

McNally is gone. Let him rest in peace.