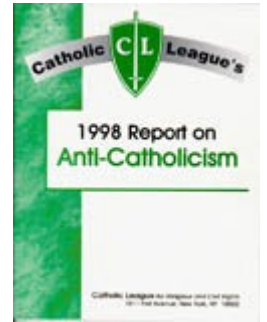


The Arts

January

Manalapan, FL – Florida Stage featured Michael Hollinger's play, "Incorruptible," a farce which promotes the most negative stereotypes about the medieval Church. For example, Catholic monks are depicted digging up dead bodies, cutting up the bones and selling them as relics—even, in one instance, passing off the bones of a dog as those of St. James the Greater.



February

Manchester, NH – The Currier Gallery, located directly across the street from the offices of the Diocese of Manchester, featured two works by David Gilhooly which caricatured the Last Supper. One, "Floor Show at the Last Supper," featured frogs in bathing suits dancing in front of the Passover table. The other depicted cartoon characters as "Extra Guests at the Last Supper."

February – March

Clarksville, IN – The Derby Dinner Playhouse presented "Do Black Patent Leather Shoes Really Reflect Up?" The play features stereotypical parodies of Catholic nuns and Catholic school students, and trivializes the sacrament of Penance. Responding to the league's complaint, the show's producer/director declared herself a "devote (sic) Catholic."

March

New Orleans, LA – Although the league has always avoided criticizing the long-running play "Nunsense," because of doubts as to whether it is truly objectionable, creator Dan Goggin went over the line by giving the green light to a production of "Nunsense" in drag. This called into serious question whether he might have a less benign agenda than simply light-hearted humor.

April/May

Seattle, WA – Two obscene, blasphemous paintings were displayed in the window of the Art/Not Terminal gallery. According to Michelle Malkin of the *Seattle Times*, the first painting, entitled, “A Sex Act?” showed “a smiling papal figure standing between two nuns. Each nun has her hand on the head of a male figure who is kneeling in front of the papal figure’s crotch. Are they conferring a religious blessing,” Ms. Malkin asked, “or forcing the figure to perform oral sex?”

The second painting was far more graphic and less ambiguous: “Hanging from a crudely designed crucifix made of intersecting penises is a Jesus Christ-like figure receiving oral sex from a veiled figure,” Ms. Malkin described. “Below the cross, two nuns lie on their backs with the ends of a coat hanger between their legs. Pages of the Bible are scrawled with the Satanic figure, 666.” There was also a “painted depiction of a priest receiving oral sex from a small child.”

The artist, Leigh Thompson, left little doubt that the works were designed to offend in order to gain him some notoriety. He was actually calling Seattle media in an effort to stir up controversy over these works of “art.”

May

New York, NY – On May 1 the *New York Post* broke the story of an upcoming “gay Jesus” play, setting off a firestorm of controversy. Contacted first by the *Post* and then by a multitude of media outlets, the league stepped forward to lead the outcry against Terrence McNally’s “Corpus Christi,” in which Jesus is portrayed as having sex with his apostles.

On May 5 the league wrote to Mr. McNally, requesting that he delete any such “deeply offensive” references to Christ from the play’s script. He never responded to our letter. Noting that the play’s producer, the Manhattan Theatre Club, receives funding from the National Endowment for the Arts and also from New York State and New York City, the league wrote to

officials at all three levels of government, questioning the propriety of such funding for an institution that would produce such blatantly offensive material.

On May 21 the Manhattan Theatre Club, citing “security concerns,” announced that it was cancelling production of the play. At a press conference a week later, however, the MTC reversed itself, announcing that production would go forward.

June

Seattle, WA – The same “artist” whose blasphemous obscenities graced the window of the Art/Not Terminal Gallery in April and May struck again, with a work even more vile. According to a league member who viewed the display, it featured “Christ on cross being sodomized by two men, anally and orally, genitals showing, ejaculation, while blood drips from his forehead and hands, semen is present.” The artist hung league president William Donohue’s name in the window alongside this latest masterpiece.

June

Warwick, RI – Chelo’s Restaurant hosted performances of a one-man production, “Misgivings,” which promised “A night of bellylaughs, blarney and bingo,” involving “stories and one-liners about growing up Catholic.” Several parishioners who saw the production, however, described in detail a script which they said ridicules the College of Cardinals, papal infallibility, St. Joseph and the Blessed Mother, as well as Church teachings on such matters as artificial insemination, human sexuality and the role of women in the Church.

After the league asked Chelo’s to evaluate whether the production crossed the line from good clean fun to a denigration of Catholic beliefs and practices, the restaurant canceled the show—prompting its author and sole performer, David Kane, to file suit against a parishioner and Catholic pastor who had protested. While Kane insisted that the show is not anti-Catholic, he perhaps tipped his own hand by

describing himself as a “recovering Catholic”—a term popular with those who denigrate the Church.

June

London, England – Bill Buford, in a review for the *London Guardian*, described the script for “Corpus Christi” as “more flagrantly blasphemous than anyone has yet realised.” Having obtained a copy of the script, he described it in detail too graphic to be printed in American newspapers: “It tells the story of Jesus, but set in Texas, and opens in a seamy, sweaty Tex-Mex dive, with a woman in the next room screaming ‘Fuck me, fuck me,’ over and over again (Joseph, we learn, got his balls shot off in the Guadalupe—thus Mary’s virginity). There is a circumcision, with lots of cartoon blood ejaculating all over everybody, and a theme of b dick, wee dick jokes. In the next scene, Joshua, a student at Pontius Pilate High School, disappoints his girlfriend on prom night—he can’t get an erection—and later comes to recognise his sexuality in the early hours with Judas. The rest is anachronistic and largely slapstick. The magic, curing touch of Christ is a hand job; the last supper is a food fight. When Joshua reveals that one of his disciples will betray him—someone who ‘has lain with him’—they all break out into campy, raucous declaration, revealing, well, that it could be any one of them, really. And the point? That Jesus is for all people. Of course.”

June 9 – 10

Huntington, NY – The Cinema Arts Center, in showings “made possible with public funds from the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York State Council on the Arts,” featured the movie “Lilies,” which it billed as “A powerful drama of gay love flourishing under the repression of prison and the Catholic Church.”

“The lilies [‘male prisoners so beautiful that they must be segregated from the general prison population for their own safety’] have cooked up a surprise for stuffy old Catholic

bishop Bilodeau, who, lured to hear a dying inmate's last confession, is instead trapped in the prison confessional and forced to watch a re-enactment of his own youth, when he was involved in a steamy love triangle with two other 18-year old boys," gushed the *Cinema Arts Review*. Part of the theater's Gay and Lesbian Pride Month celebration, the film was hailed by the *Review* for "exposing the Catholic Church's hypocrisy regarding homosexuality."

June 13

Randalls Island, NY – The annual Irish Fest sponsored by Guinness featured, for the second year in a row, a performance by notorious anti-Catholic Sinead O'Connor; and, while O'Connor refrained from any Catholic-bashing, another performer was there to pick up the slack. A female member of the band Chumbawumba appeared on stage dressed as a nun with rosary beads around her neck. "Any Catholics out there?" she shouted. During the song, she danced around the stage swinging the rosary beads while grabbing her crotch and chugging a can of beer. She repeatedly used her middle finger to bless herself.

Summer

Los Angeles, CA – *Dispatch*, the pornographic official publication of the Tom of Finland Foundation, included among its graphic "artistic expressions" of sexual perversion "Bob Seidemann's unforgettable crucifixion photograph," showing a legless man, with full frontal nudity, hanging from a cross.

Summer

South Haven, MI – A collage depicting Jesus Christ holding a condom was among the artistic offerings at the South Haven Center for the Arts. The artist said that the work, which he titled, "Oh, I should have mentioned these while I was here," was part of his "The Condom Sense Series," and was designed to make a statement about population control and disease.

June 23

New York NY – The “men-in-drag” version of the play “Nunsense” (“Nunsense-A-Men”) opened at the 47th Street Theatre. The production featured nuns using drugs and hawking a Blessed Virgin Mary cookbook that contains sexual innuendo.

June – July

Portland, OR – The Artists Repertory Theatre featured “Incorruptible,” the farce about the medieval Church in which monks are depicted digging up dead bodies, cutting up the bones and selling them as relics.

June – October

Chapel Hill, NC – The Ackland Art Museum of the University of North Carolina featured a series of photographs by Duane Michals entitled “Christ in New York.” One photo, showing a bearded man standing over the bloodied, partially covered body of a woman, is entitled, “Christ Sees a Woman who has Died During an Illegal Abortion.” We learn from the summary of the work that this is a commentary on “religious hypocrisy,” and that as “a meditation on...political and social oppressions” Michals’ “work reflects his own early Catholic upbringing.”

July

Williamstown, MA – The Nikos Stage featured “The Most Fabulous Story Ever Told,” described in a local newspaper as “a retelling of the Old Testament in which all of the characters are gay.” The Garden of Eden is inhabited not by Adam and Eve, but by male and female homosexual couples. “For good measure, there’s also a gay response to the New Testament,” the paper reported, and although Jesus does not appear in the play, one character admits to finding Him very “hot.” Not surprisingly, when the Manhattan Theatre Club at first balked at producing “Corpus Christi,” the Nikos offered to stage Terrence McNally’s play portraying Jesus having sex with his apostles.

August

Seattle, WA – “Artist” Leigh Thompson was at it again, displaying in the Art/Not Terminal Gallery a painting titled,

"With the Vatican's Blessing, the Archbishop Came." It showed a very small child having sex with a bishop, as the Virgin Mary stands by. The Catholic League logo was included on the painting.

August

Portland, ME – The Oak Street Theatre featured the Stone Pinhead Ensemble performing "Harold B. Thy Name," billed as a "dark musical comedy" designed "to poke, provoke and annoy anyone with an ounce of Christian belief." Loosely based on the 33-day papacy of John Paul I, the play ridiculed the papacy and Catholic hierarchy, the Church's teachings on celibacy and the role of women, and alleged Church ties to organized crime and rampant sex abuse by priests.

September 2 – October 11

Orlando, FL – The Mark Two Dinner Theater featured "Do Black Patent Leather Shoes Really Reflect Up?" a play which trivializes and ridicules the sacrament of Penance, and presents stereotypical parodies of Catholic nuns and Catholic school students.

September 18

New York, NY – The "Weekend Section" of the *New York Times* found four plays advertised on the same page dealing with Catholicism. Their treatment of the Church ranged from ridicule to blasphemy. "Tony n' Tina's Wedding" features an Italian wedding in which a pregnant bride on drugs interacts with a drunken priest. "Nonsense A-Men" takes the antics of "Nonsense"—nuns use drugs and hawk a Blessed Virgin Mary cookbook that contains sexual innuendo—a step further, by having the characters in drag. "Late Nite Catechism" targets the pre-Vatican II Church. And "Corpus Christi" portrays Jesus having sex with his apostles. The page's theater advertisements contained not one production targeting any other religion.

September 21

New York, NY – The league released a formal declaration, signed by nearly 50 organizations, including Catholic, Protestant, Jewish and Islamic groups, protesting “Corpus Christi’s” “vulgar and blasphemous...hate speech.”

September 22

New York, NY – Previews opened for “Corpus Christi.” The play depicted Jesus as a sexual hedonist who indulges in sex with his apostles, including a long-running affair with Jesus. He performed a homosexual wedding of two of his apostles, and physically assaulted a priest who challenged him. He ranted, “Fuck your mother, Fuck your father, Fuck God.” There was a clear obsession with the male sex organ, and the audience was treated to piped in sounds of urination during a bathroom scene. The Virgin Mary was portrayed as an alcoholic, and Joseph as an abusive husband. And recitation of the Hail Mary, as well as derogatory references to priests and nuns and to Boys Town, made clear that the Catholic Church was a particular target of this assault on traditional Judeo-Christian moral teachings.

September 24

New York, NY – “The Cardinal Detoxes,” an anti-Catholic play by Thomas M. Disch, opened at the Tribeca Playhouse. The play depicts the cardinal as 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 he is ultimately poisoned by a monk when he confesses his plan to expose the problems of the Church. Producer-director Jeff Cohen said that one of the reasons he brought the play back (it was the subject of controversy when it opened in 1990, in a building that was owned by the Archdiocese of New York) was as a result of the Manhattan Theatre Club’s initial decision to cancel “Corpus Christi”—Terrence McNally’s blasphemous portrayal of Jesus having sex with his apostles.

October

New York, NY – The Lehmann Maupin Gallery featured a work by

Jeffrey Vallance which interspersed clown figures into an image of the Shroud of Turin. The "mixed media piece," according to an art critic in the *New York Post*, "draws connections between many things, including the Shroud of Turin, the burial cloth of Jesus Christ, and a stained, sweaty blue handkerchief that Elvis Presley once handed out to a crowd of his devotees."

October 13

New York, NY – More than 2,000 people, representing Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Islamic and Buddhist groups, jammed the street outside City Center, to protest the opening of "Corpus Christi." A much smaller group gathered to protest this expression of free speech by those opposing this blasphemous play.

Critics were almost universal in their negative reviews of this Terrence McNally work.

"Flat and simple-minded," wrote Ben Brantley of the *New York Times*. "A Texas Chainsaw Massacre of the Bible...utterly devoid of moral seriousness or artistic integrity," was the reaction of Fintan O'Toole of the *New York Daily News*. Clive Barnes of the *New York Post* found it "dull"; David Lyons of the *Wall Street Journal* deplored its "parasitic insubstantiality" and "fatheadedness"; and Father Richard John Neuhaus, writing for the *New York Post*, blasted its "intellectual and moral incoherence."

"Self-pitying artists (Oscar Wilde, John Lennon et al) have long had the habit of comparing themselves to Jesus," observed the *Washington Post*, "but this play plummets to a whole new level of grandiosity."

October 16

Cambridge, MA – Christopher Durang's "The Marriage of Bette and Boo" opened at the Hasty Pudding Theatre. Durang, author of the notoriously anti-Catholic "Sister Mary Ignatius

Explains It All For You," continued his Catholic bashing in this work. According to a review in the *Boston Globe*, "the pompous priest delivering a eulogy" during the play "first admits he didn't know the man well, and then spins out of control into an embarrassing, nonsensical story about his 'colored garbageman' and how 'colored folk have funny ideas for names.'" The reviewer noted that even the actors playing the title roles "grimaced" during a rehearsal as the actor portraying the priest read those lines. "Later in the play," the review continues, "the priest attempts to counsel married couples with problems, with pathetic, hilarious results."

October 22

University Park, PA – An art exhibit at Penn State University included a painting showing a Nazi soldier and a Catholic priest standing side-by-side on top of the body of a Jewish prisoner.

November

New York, NY – "Burning Habits," an eight-part gay play which attacks the Catholic Church, began its run at Here in Soho. The play features an "evil Catholic witch" and three lesbian nuns. Future episodes, which were to run until March 13, 1999, would show that "the overriding evil is the Church, and the force of good are queers," according to the play's author, Blair Fell.

December

Los Angeles, CA – "Kalifornia Kristmas" playwright J.C. Curtiss "apparently has a thing about Catholicism," according to a review in the *Los Angeles Times*, because the play, being staged at the Actors Forum Theatre, contained one scene which "plays on the musty irreverent nun gag" and another which "depicts the pope as a show biz wannabe."

December

New York, NY – A gay play, "Jesus Christ, It's Your Birthday," promised to "put the X back in Christmas." It was being staged

at Fez during the Christmas season.

December

New York, NY – “Do You Hear What We Hear?”, being performed at the cabaret P.S. 122, was a show “about Christmas through the eyes of two alcoholic, dispossessed show business freaks,” according to its creators and stars, Kiki (a drag queen) and Herb. The show included a “fantasy sequence involving Kiki’s ‘cow friend,’ whom the 66-year-old crooner kidnapped from the Vatican’s living crèche. She’s 2,000 years old, ‘cause she was at the manger and consumed the afterbirth of Jesus and received everlasting life.”

December 9

Chicago, IL – An artist decided to use a charity benefit to display his paintings depicting President Clinton nailed to a cross, Hillary Clinton as the Virgin Mary, and special prosecutor Kenneth Starr as Pontius Pilate. Martin Miller, who had organized the art show to benefit the National Retinitis Pigmentosa Foundation, which funds research into curing blindness, said that the artist had entered the show under false pretenses, previewing different works for Miller before the show, then “at the last moment” displaying the offensive works. The police were called and the paintings removed.

December 14

New York, NY – “The Most Fabulous Story Ever Told,” Paul Rudnick’s homosexual retelling of the Bible, opened in New York to generally positive reviews. The play’s blasphemous elements were well-received by Ben Brantley of the *New York Times*, who found “reverence in Mr. Rudnick’s irreverence.” Theater critic Clive Barnes said this play was far more blasphemous than “Corpus Christi.”