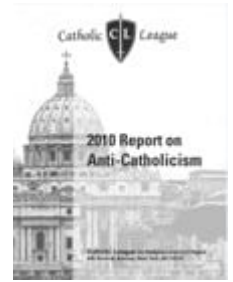


The Arts

February 11 – 28



Tampa, FL – The Shimberg Playhouse hosted “Agnes of God,” a play based on the notoriously anti-Catholic movie by the same name. In the play, a novice nun gives birth in a convent and claims that the baby, who is murdered, was the result of a virgin conception.

August 14

Hammonton, NJ – The musical “Bare” ran at the Eagle Theater. The musical, set in a Catholic boarding school, is about two young gay lovers that the Church “fails to understand.” *Variety* magazine called the story a “tragedy that cannot be prevented by the sympathetic but theologically narrow-minded counsel of the school’s priest.”

September 11 – October 6

Loveland, CO – The Loveland Museum, a publically funded establishment, held an exhibit called “The Misadventures of the Romantic Cannibals” which featured a lithograph containing an image of Jesus having oral sex performed on him by a man. We contacted Colorado Governor Bill Ritter and the state legislature, asking them why tax payer monies funded anti-Christian art. During this time, a woman smashed the Plexiglas case with a crowbar and ripped up the artwork. Susan Ison, Loveland’s director of Cultural Services, said that she was “appalled by the violence,” while Bud Shark, the organizer of the display, denied that the work was offensive to Christians and was upset by its protest.

September 12

New York, NY – The SoHo Playhouse ran “The Divine Sister,” a play about a Mother Superior (played by a homosexual man) who is caught in a mix of anxieties, some of which include: sexual hysteria among her nuns, a postulant experiencing “visions,” and an old lover who is trying to pull her away from her vows. The *New York Times* called the play “aggressively family-

oriented” while others remarked that it had a “convoluted plot” and was “an excuse for shameless puns.”

September 30 – October 19

New York, NY – Sotheby’s auction house hosted an exhibit, “Divine Comedy,” featuring 80 different works revolving around Dante’s Inferno. Most prominently among the artwork of the exhibit was the work of Martin Kippenberger, “Zuerst die Fuesse” (Feet First), which shows a frog in place of Jesus on the crucifix, sporting a mug of beer in one hand and an egg in the other. We responded to the offensive artwork by contacting a Sotheby’s media official and asked her to explain why they featured Kippenberger’s assault on Christian sensibilities.

October 15 – November 13

Washington, D.C. – Matthew Black documented the activist group The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence in an exhibition called “Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence: Identity Writ Large” at the Joan Hisaoka Healing Arts Gallery. The exhibit featured homosexual men from the anti-Catholic group dressed as nuns. The mission of the exhibit was to “use the art of drag to raise awareness for the LGBT community, educate about safe sex and AIDS, raise money for local non-profits and advocate for human rights.”

October 18

Los Angeles, CA – Chadmichael Morrisette and Mito Aviles decorated their home for Halloween with an anti-Catholic theme. Morrisette said, “This year, like all the years before, we typically put imagery and iconic things that are scary to use. So this year, the Catholic Church and the Pope are going to be represented on the roof of the house.” He included that “There’s going to be tormented souls around the Pope, young and old souls all displayed through mannequins.” To those who objected to the display he said, “They have [the] right to say we don’t like it as much [as we have] a right to put it on our roof. It’s all done in a respectful adult way, no one is mean and aggressive.”

December 11

New York, NY – “A Very Merry Christmas 2 You, Too” showed for one night only at the Laurie Beechman Theater. The show featured the Blessed Mother in drag who allegedly “sets the record straight” about the birth and life of Jesus Christ. The *New York Observer* was quoted as saying, “You could go to

Irving Berlin's 'White Christmas' or the Radio City Christmas Spectacular, but then how could you look at yourself in the mirror the next morning? Instead, try the holiday show that dares to dress our Holy Mother in drag."

SMITHSONIAN CONTROVERSY

November 30

Washington, D.C. – The Smithsonian Institution hosted an exhibit that featured a video that showed ants crawling over Jesus on the Cross. After complaints from the Catholic League, the video was pulled. The ensuing uproar was worldwide: the artistic community exploded in anger at both the Smithsonian and the Catholic League for objecting to the video.

The video was part of an exhibit, "Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture," that featured totally nude men kissing, men masturbating, sadomasochistic depictions and more. When the Catholic League wrote to the House and Senate Appropriations Committees asking them to "reconsider federal financing" of the Smithsonian, we were called censors and subjected to an onslaught of the most outrageously abusive speech, even receiving threatening letters from across the Atlantic, all through December.

December 3

Washington, D.C. – The *Washington Post* backed its critic's interpretation of the offensive video by saying that ants on a crucifix "could be understood as an expression of the 'hideous, heartrending loss of a loved one...'" Bill Donohue responded by informing them that it can also be interpreted as hate speech. He also pointed out that in October, the *Post* censored a cartoon because they said it "might offend and provoke some *Post* readers, especially Muslims." The cartoon showed kids and animals frolicking in a park with the words "Where's Muhammad?" The hypocrisy was sickening.

December 16

New York, NY – New York Archbishop Timothy Dolan wrote an article on his blog following the barrage of criticism targeted at the Catholic League for protesting the Smithsonian's ants-on-Jesus video. His support was much appreciated and his kind words were respected. He said, "No one should doubt the high value and necessity of [Donohue's] efforts, or dismiss him in crude terms. Even the recent high-volume critiques of his stand on this controversy exhibit

nasty anti-Catholic canards. Keep at it, Bill! We need you!"

SMITHSONIAN MADNESS

Bill Donohue wrote the following piece for the January-February 2011 Catalyst commenting on the Smithsonian controversy:

By now, everyone knows that we objected to the video that showed large ants crawling all over Jesus on the Cross, but what is less well known is that this "contribution" to art was just one piece of a gay and lesbian exhibition. For the record, I did not know that gays were associated with this venture when I complained to a reporter, and even if I did, it matters not a whit whether the offensive video was part of an exhibition created by heterosexuals or homosexuals. But, of course, I was branded anti-gay anyway.

Andrew Sullivan, a gay writer, wrote, "Maybe what is truly offensive to Donohue is the notion that gay men might actually seek refuge in Jesus' similar experience of marginalized, stigmatized agony." That would not be easy to do considering I did not know this was the work of gays. Christopher Knight, the art critic for the *Los Angeles Times*, said criticism of the Smithsonian exhibition amounted to "anti-gay bullying," noting that the criticism was coming on the heels of gay teens who committed suicide! Frank Rich of the *New York Times* said my "religious" objections (his quote marks) were nothing more than "a perfunctory cover for the homophobia" that drove my complaint. Don't you just love the Freudian analysis?

It's time these men grew up. Not everything is about them. So wrapped up in the issue of gay rights that they cannot fathom how anyone could object to irreligious art that is part of a larger gay exhibit without being anti-gay. They need to step back and take a deep breath. It is precisely the narcissism of people like Sullivan, Knight and Rich that allows them to see the world through one set of lenses, tightly fitted, condemning anyone who doesn't share their view.

The gay art themes that I did not comment on, but which my critics adored, were nicely captured by Michael Medved, an Orthodox Jew and an astute student of American culture. The Smithsonian exhibition, he wrote, featured such lovely fare as "transvestitism, fetishism, sado-masochism, photographs of AIDS-ravaged corpses, full frontal male nudity," and the like. All funded by you.

The complaint that I lodged—simply asking members of Congress to “reconsider federal funding” of the Smithsonian—led to forums organized to denounce the Catholic League in places like London, Los Angeles and New York. There were street demonstrations in New York and Washington, and many cities hosted the vile video in local art galleries. To these people, art is more than an expression—it functions as an ersatz religion.

Some liberal Catholics rushed to defend the exhibition. *U.S. Catholic* magazine said plainly that the ants-on-Jesus video was “not an assault on religion.” Catholics United, a radical left-wing group, accused me of “manufacturing” the entire controversy for my “end-of-the-year fundraising efforts.” When someone made a similar charge on radio, I responded by saying, “Not only did I arrange this whole thing, those are my ants.” Catholics for Choice, which specializes in Catholic bashing, weighed in against me and in favor of the video. And the *National Catholic Reporter* sided with Frank Rich against me, asking its readers to “pray for the conversion of our brother William.” Sounds very fundamentalist to me.

Of all the issues involved in this controversy, the two that strike me as the most salient are the incredible insouciance shown to Christians offended by the art, and the equally incredible arrogance evinced by those who insist that their interpretation is the only correct one. Over and over again, we looked for just one of these art mavens to give us a genuflection, a quick recognition that Christians might justly feel abused by the ant crawlers. But, no, we were told we are too ignorant to catch its true meaning.

Stephen Prothero teaches courses on religion at Boston University, and he found the ant crawlers “deeply theological,” asking those who were offended whether they would be offended if the ants crawled on Christopher Hitchens. Yes, he actually said this. Another savant told us that the ants are “a metaphor for society because the social structure of the ant world is parallel to ours.” Now how about them apples! Charles Haynes of the Religious Freedom Education Project said that *Washington Post* art critic Blake Gopnik got it right when he said that the artist who created it intended to speak for his friend who died of AIDS. That went right over our heads as well. And an editorial in the *Sacramento Bee* said

the art “could be seen as a modern take on the theme of divine suffering that has been the subject of Christian art for centuries.” Sure. And it could also be seen as hate speech. Though I would prefer to go to a pub than a museum, and I strongly believe that the working class should not have to fund the leisure of the rich (they’re the typical museum-goers), at the end of the day I have more respect for what art is supposed to be than any of these charlatans. Indeed, their defense of the ant crawlers undermines their credibility. This Smithsonian madness proves it.

WASHINGTON POST CHAT

At the height of the controversy over the Smithsonian exhibition, Bill Donohue was invited by the Washington Post to enter an online chat with his critics. They posed the questions, and he chose which ones to answer. Below is a selection of the Q&A:

Washington, D.C.: Mr. Donohue, I can’t begin to say how angry and disappointed this censorship makes me. My simple question/comment is this: If you don’t want to see this exhibit, don’t go see it. Why do you think that you have the right to keep me from seeing it?

Donohue: Nothing I did constituted censorship, nor did I even ask that the vile video be pulled. Censorship means the government abridges speech—all I am asking is for the House and Senate Appropriations Committees to reconsider federal funding of the Smithsonian. My principle is this: if it is wrong for the government to pick the pocket of the public to promote religion, it should be equally wrong to pick its pocket to assault it.

Fairfax, VA: What were the criteria used by you to ask that it be removed?

Donohue: The criteria I used were honesty and common sense. I know, as well as my critics, that if Muhammad were shown with ants eating him, Muslims would never allow the retort that it wasn’t meant to offend. So what was this vile video? A Christmas gift to Christians. It was hate speech, pure and simple, and it should not be funded by the 80 percent of the nation which is Christian.

Washington, D.C.: Will the committees consider withholding funding?

Donohue: I hope they will reconsider funding. After all, why should the working class pay for the leisure, e.g., going to museums, of the upper class? We don't subsidize professional wrestling, yet the working class has to pay for the leisure of the rich. Not only that, because the elites don't smoke, they bar the working class from smoking in arenas. This is class discrimination and should be opposed by those committed to social justice.

Philadelphia, PA: Actions like this make people more curious about the work—this spineless action by the Smithsonian will result in more people making an effort to see the work. Is that what you wanted?

Donohue: If someone wants to peddle hate speech disguised as art, let them do it on their own dime. Moreover, when the Chicago City Council ordered the police into a museum in the 1980s to take down a portrait of the black mayor, Mr. Washington (he was shown in his underwear), none of those branding me a censor said a word. I have never called for censorship, but I have asked legitimate questions regarding the propriety of funding hate speech directed at my religion.

Washington, D.C.: Ants crawling on a crucifix is no different than ants crawling on a rock. They're both inanimate objects. Whether you're a member of organized religion or not, anyone with an open, intellectual mind is able to understand this.

Donohue: Fine. Then let the ants crawl on an image of Martin Luther King next month when we celebrate his day, and let the taxpayers underwrite it.

Washington, D.C.: David Wojnarowics's video was set in the days of the AIDS epidemic. He had been thrown out of his home when he came out, and had to survive in the streets. His art was about alienation, despair, rebellion and survival. When placed in context, you can see that this was not an assault on the Christian faith. Why do you deny us the opportunity for a conversation? The whole point of this exhibit was to confront and try to look behind the veil, not to change points of view but show that there are other points of view.

Donohue: Someone should have gotten to him earlier and told him to stop with his self-destructive behavior and to stop blaming the faithful for his maladies.

Contradictions?: You say that the government should not promote or assault religion. So what happens when the National

Christmas tree is illuminated?

Donohue: Christmas is a national holiday and the Christmas tree is a secular symbol.

Pittsburgh, PA: How do you define the difference between art and anything that might be deemed offensive? The very nature of art is expression and individuality. How is this different than many other almost macabre images of the crucifixion, Jesus's suffering, or cruelty of man against man—all depicted in art.

Donohue: People in the asylum are expressive as well, and so are children in nursery schools. Should we subsidize them as well?