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February 5, 2004

Rev. Michael C. McFarland, S.J.
President
College of the Holy Cross
Worcester, MA 01610-2395

Dear Fr. McFarland:

Enclosed is an article of mine from the Notre Dame Observer of January 29th. The position stated in it applies to Holy Cross as well as Notre Dame.

Sincerely,


Charles E. Rice
Professor Emeritus of Law

CER/lp

cc: Rev. Earle Markey, S.J.
bc: Vic Melfa

THE OBSERVER VIEWPOINT

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Pg. 10

Scandal in 'Catholic' colleges

At least 40 "Catholic" colleges, including Notre Dame for the third time, will sponsor or host public performances of the vagina Monologues this term. My concern here is solely with the judgment exhibited by our leaders in allowing this play again at Notre Dame.

These comments, therefore, raise no issues relating to the students involved in the play.

One object of the play is to desensitize people to the naming of female sex organs in order to discourage violence against women. The performers deliver monologues focusing on, and personifying, their sex organs. These contributions to literature include a description of a group masturbation in a "vagina workshop" run by "a woman who believes in vaginas."

It describes how the participants masturbated with the aid of hand mirrors. Other monologists recount conversations with their vaginas. Another talks to her vulva. Others describe lesbian sexual acts. And so on, with abundant description. Apart from this repudiation of modesty and reserve, the personification of a body part destroys the integrity of the person and invites the objectification of women which can generate the violence the play purports to oppose.

These and other aspects of the play ought to preclude its performance at Notre Dame. The most compelling reason, however, for opposing that performance arises from the sex abuse scandal in the Church.

The most highly publicized monologue describes the lesbian seduction of a 16-year-old by an adult as a "salvation" for the victim.

In *The Little Coochi Snorcher That Could*, "a Southern woman of color" describes, among other childhood sexual memories, her encounters at age 16 with a "gorgeous 24-year-old woman. The child's mother agrees to the woman's request that the girl spend the night with her. (I omit explicit details.)

"I'm scared, but I really can't wait. Her apartment's fantastic ... the beads, the fluffy pillows, the mood lights ... She makes a vodka for herself and then ... the pretty lady makes me a drink ... The alcohol has gone to my head and I'm loose and ready ... as she gently and slowly lays me out on the bed ... Then she does everything to me ... that I always thought was nasty before, and wow, I'm so hot, so wild ... I get crazy wild ...

"Afterward the gorgeous lady teaches me ... all the different ways to give myself pleasure. She's very thorough. She tells me to always know how to give myself pleasure so I'll never need to rely on a man. In the morning I am worried ... because I'm so in love with her. She laughs, but I never see her again. I realized later she was my surprising, unexpected, politically incorrect salvation. She transformed my sorry-ass coochi snorcher and raised it up into a kind of heaven." Eve Ensler, *The Vagina Monologues* (2001), 77-82.

On Jan. 6, the Catholic bishops released their report on the efforts of the dioceses to correct the sex abuse problem. The vast majority of cases involved the exploitation by priests of teenage

boys in homosexual relations with varying degrees of consent. The monologue recounting the seduction of a trusting 16-year-old girl by a 24-year-old woman she admires is the precise counterpart of the exploitation of male teenagers by priests that has ruined lives and rocked the Church.

Sexual exploitation of a teenager by an adult is despicable, whether the participants are both male, both female or mixed. No one has a moral right to present such an exploitation as a benefit to the victim. This is a very serious matter.

In light of the ongoing scandal in the Church, it is totally inexcusable for any "Catholic" institution, and especially the University of Our Lady, to allow itself to be used as a public forum for a portrayal of the sexual exploitation of a teenager by an adult as a "salvation" for the victim.

Regrettably, the Notre Dame President and Provost have responded to complaints about this with academic banalities reflecting a politically correct paralysis of judgment.

I hope that our leaders will reconsider this failure of judgment and will cancel this third performance. If not, all the responsible administrators, from the top down, should resign their administrative positions. If they do not resign, they should be removed.

Baseball has it right: Three strikes and you're out.

Prof. Emeritus Rice is on the Law School faculty. His column appears every other Wednesday.

The views expressed in this column are those of the author and not necessarily those of The Observer.

Charles E. Rice

Right or Wrong?