

MICHIANA POINT OF VIEW

Notre Dame defense of 'Monologues' production falls short

By SUSAN BIDDLE SHEARER

Seldom, if ever, within my 20 years of service in higher education, have I seen as intellectually specious and morally indefensible an argument as that which has now been employed by the administrative hierarchy at the University of Notre Dame to justify the appropriateness of the university's decision to, once again, permit the performance of Eve Ensler's vulgar, obscene and base "The Vagina Monologues" at Notre Dame.

As reported by The Tribune on March 12, the administration's decision was based upon the following path of reasoning:

First, "It is the role of the university to foster free and open discussion of controversial issues."

Oh? When the "controversial issues" are hostile to the mission of the institution and its faith context, the institution has neither the moral nor intellectual responsibility to openly discuss them.

Second, "It is the responsibility of all involved in sponsoring a controversial event to ensure that the presentation has academic merit, multiple viewpoints are heard ..."

The play consists of a series of monologues by women recounting personal experiences, largely sexual, with comparatively few involving violence. Most of any length are graphic ac-

counts of highly charged sexual episodes, typically but not exclusively lesbian intercourse (including the intoxication and seduction of a minor under the guise of her "liberation") and masturbation. Perhaps the most telling testimony to the play's character and intended effect comes from the author herself, who, on the first page of her introduction, boasts of having "thirty-two public orgasms a night" in her performances.

Anyone interested in the question of whether the university ought, through approving the play, encourage young Notre Dame students to perform the Ensler role should purchase and read the play itself — it is modestly priced, either new or used — since any description falls short of the play's full force.

One is hard-pressed to determine what, if any, "academic merit" may be found in this piece of tripe. It additionally lacks any academic relevance to the departments sponsoring this year's production: anthropology, sociology and, astoundingly, political science. Moreover, the suggestion that "reasoned and respectful exchanges" which are "the hallmark of a great university" may ensue from its performance is absurd.

The play's intent is to shock and desensitize while relentlessly assaulting the libido. It reduces the beautiful

essence of womanhood to a body part which exists independent of the heart, mind and soul.

The administration maintains, thirdly, and perhaps most disingenuously, that those sponsoring this event "must make clear that their sponsorship is not an endorsement of the views presented, and any language or actions suggesting such endorsement must be avoided."

Such reasoning brings to mind a scenario in which my husband and I throw an alcohol-soaked party for our teenage daughter and her friends and, upon arrival of the arresting police officers, explain to them that we were actually not "endorsing" but rather merely "sponsoring" or "facilitating" the event and are thus neither morally nor legally culpable. The line between sponsorship and endorsement is thin indeed. It should also be noted that if an event is not worth endorsing, it ought not be sponsored or given venue.

Finally, "When a significant issue of Catholic teaching is touched on, it is incumbent upon us as a Catholic university to ensure that a knowledgeable presentation of Catholic teaching is included."

Hence, "After each performance, and as part of each academic panel, at least one of the panelists will offer a thorough and sympathetic account of

the Catholic tradition in relation to the issues raised in the play." Thus, having inundated the audience with the libidinous and carnally saturated excess offered by "The Vagina Monologues," the university will now, perhaps, timidly suggest that the profundity expressed within Pope John Paul's II's "Theology of the Body" may have some merit.

The administration then expresses the extent to which it pains it to disappoint Bishop John D'Arcy, for whom it "has a great deal of respect and affection, much less the myriad Notre Dame alumni who consider the play contrary to the Catholic mission of Notre Dame." While it may be that the administration is no doubt sincere in its expression of respect and affection for D'Arcy, might it also be pertinent to suggest that when one respects those with whom one is in fraternal authority, one does not disregard and dismiss the gentle but firm authoritative counsel repeatedly given. Such actions do not indicate respect. Rather, they indicate arrogance and a lack of recognition that rightful authority and hierarchy generally exist for a reason, and that reason is protection of the truth.

The administration then notes that, concurrently, "Others are upset at the restrictions on this performance" ... and that ... a panel must follow each play which includes "a sympathetic

and thorough presentation of Catholic teaching."

Might it not also be pertinent to note that those who are "upset" by the mere suggestion that Catholic teaching with regard to sexuality be juxtaposed against this performance have no place at the university and ought leave with the blessings of the myriad members of the Notre Dame community who wish them gone? In their malignant narcissism, they have wasted untold hours of administrative time and energy and caused immeasurable harm and spiritual distress to those who have fought long and hard against the agenda they have so selfishly and insistently promoted.

In closing, in his seminal work "Manliness," Harvard political scientist Harvey C. Mansfield notes that the title of his book is not gender but value specific and refers, among other things, to the characteristic of standing up and fighting for that which is good, pure and true. Perhaps a thorough read of this fascinating book would well benefit all those in positions of authority at our beloved Notre Dame.

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