

TELEVISION

Inquisition Soap Opera Draws Raves, Controversy

By Peter Nares
Bogota, Colombia (NC) — A television soap opera on the Spanish Inquisition has sparked controversy in Colombia, with some viewers denouncing the show as anti-clerical.

Others say the program, "The Devil's Paw," is historically factual and amusing. The series is attracting near-record audiences in the South American country, which has 28 million Catholics.

The series is aired late at night but is watched by more than nine million people. Since it began five months ago, it has soared in the ratings.

"The Devil's Paw," produced by the commercial RTI company of Colombia, is set in Cartagena, a colonial city on the Caribbean coast. Prior to Colombian independence in the early 19th century, investigations of the Spanish Inquisition were conducted in a palace there. The building has been preserved as a museum.

David Stivel, director of the series, based his work on

a novel by Cartagena writer Alfonso Bonilla. The book sold few copies, but its televised version has captured a multimillion audience with scenes of flagellation, torture, witchcraft and, of course, a burning at the stake.

The main character is the Spanish Inquisitor, Mayorga, played by Kepa Amuchastegui, who is often stopped on the streets by people wanting to tell him "how unspeakable he is." On each show Mayorga can be seen devising fresh tortments for his victims.

Stivel admitted that one reason for the series' success is that it arouses the sado-masochistic instinct in its viewers. His script writer, Julio Jimenez, said the bloody scenes of "The Devil's Paw" are planned to appeal to a mass audience.

Not everyone is amused, however. One man wrote to RTI to protest that the program was "heresy." His letter ended: "Please, señores, no more soap operas mocking our religion." A woman complained that the Inquisi-

tor was "destroying her nerves."

Stivel said he has shown both the positive and negative aspects of the colonial church. The show includes portrayals of others, such as St. Peter Claver, who labored for the welfare of slaves in Cartagena.

Cartagena historian Eduardo Lemaitre said the Inquisition began "not to persecute heretics but to protect them, by rational trial, from the anger of the public who frequently stoned them to death."

The Inquisition, he said, was as much a civil as a religious body, and its role was similar to that of a secret police force. But its protective functions "degenerated" and abuses were committed. Lemaitre said that in colonial days torture was an accepted judicial procedure.

Colombian clergymen have not joined the controversy, which is likely to continue. The series is expected to be screened in other Latin American countries.



JFK Remembered

President and Mrs. John F. Kennedy, played by Martin Sheen and Blair Brown, get a big welcome as they arrive in Dallas, where tragedy later overtakes them, in the NBC miniseries "Kennedy," airing Nov. 20, 21 and 22. (NC Photo)

BOOKS

Looking Back at Baseball's Black Sox Scandal And 23 Years of Teaching Among Book Fare

"Hoopla," by Harry Stein. Knopf (New York, 1983). 366 pp., \$14.95.

Reviewed by Nancy L. Roberts
NC News Service

A divertissement crafted around the notorious Black Sox scandal of the 1919 World Series, "Hoopla" is an absorbing tapestry of fact and fiction. The story unfolds through the alternating stories of a baseball player and a reporter on the trail.

Fictional newspaperman Luther Pond is a master of the hustle in the heyday of yellow journalism. George "Buck" Weaver, a real character, is a wholesome White Sox shortstop with an independent streak.

As their stories unfold, both characters become larger than life, as does ragtime America, a time when it was still possible to believe in heroes. Detailed description and authentic slang help transport the reader to a more innocent America, when most people disdained "dumb chicks" and aspired to be "good eggs."

But Stein doesn't romanticize, either. He presents hard-hitting portraits of newspaper baron William Randolph Hearst; Jack Johnson and Jim Jeffries in their fight of the century; Ty Cobb, perhaps the meanest ballplayer of all time; Kenesaw Mountain Landis, baseball's first commissioner, who condemned the eight Chicago players for their "treasonous" actions; and Arnold Rothstein, the mobster. Also included are memorable portrayals of Jim Thorpe, Bat Masterson, George M. Cohan, Ring Lardner and a host of long-anonymous ballplayers.

Besides illuminating early baseball, "Hoopla" conveys the excitement of reporting at a time when newspapers were the public's main source of news.

(Ms. Roberts is a journalism professor at the University of Minnesota.)

"What the Children Taught Me," by Jack Greenstein. The University of Chicago Press (Chicago, 1983). 248 pp., no price given.

Reviewed by Joseph F. McKenna
NC News Service

With a delightful writing style, Jack Greenstein, a former elementary school teacher and principal, tells how he once reprimanded a substitute teacher for striking a pupil. Greenstein writes:

"Do you remember my telling you that I didn't want you to lay a hand on a student?" I asked.

"I certainly do," he responded. "Well, a boy came in to see me, and he claims that you hit him!"

"I didn't lay a hand on him," insisted the teacher. "I hit him on the head with a book."

That is but one of the numerous academic anecdotes Greenstein offers the reader. But if that same reader expects nothing more than a litany of such classroom capers, he is in for a surprise -- and an edifying one at that.

Greenstein draws on the experience of 23 years in elementary education in Chicago's public school system not only to entertain, but also to make very intelligent observations about teaching.

"His classrooms and schools are peopled with neither white knights nor villains," Kevin Ryan writes in the book's foreword. "He trots out no educational devil theory nor does he sharpen axes for us. His vision of teaching and schooling is that of an extremely difficult human activity that must be carried on with limited resources and by imperfect human beings."

For example, Greenstein is not ready to unplug all of America's TV sets because reading scores have declined, although he does note that too much TV "is not good just like too much of anything else." Greenstein may have found a key motivation for some of the unprovoked attacks on the tube: "Teachers get tired of being the scapegoats for the decline in reading scores and try to find some scapegoats of their own."

Greenstein also offers a chapter-length argument against the use of corporal punishment in schools. Noting that his opposition to corporal punishment is "based chiefly on moral and ethical values" -- notably, the teacher as role model -- Greenstein deals convincingly with the practical problems of using the hand or the hickory stick.

Best of all, Greenstein, who began teaching at 37, is willing to admit "that there was a lot more to life than the inside of my little classroom -- that if Eddie failed his spelling test or Sam didn't finish his homework they were not doomed for all

eternity...The feelings, emotions and attitudes of the children must be considered, and how we teach may be more important than what we teach."

(McKenna is a reporter for the Catholic Universe Bulletin in Cleveland. He also has taught journalism part-time at Cuyahoga Community College.)

Books En Route

By Richard Philbrick
Washington (NC) -- Here is a list of new books of particular interest to Catholic readers:

• "Earthy Mysticism," by Carmelite Father William McNamara, Crossroad, \$5.95, 110 pp., presents the spirituality of "the word made flesh," a spirituality that affirms and respects the sacredness of all matter.

• "Lightning East to West," by James W. Douglas, Crossroad, \$6.95, 98 pp., is a review of the nuclear age that led Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen of Seattle to say in a foreword, "I commend this book to all who are concerned with the promotion of peace in our time."

• "Blaze of Recognition," selected and edited by Thomas P. McDonnell, Doubleday, \$14.95, 226 pp., contains passages from the writings of Thomas Merton suitable for daily meditations throughout the year.

• "Tracing the Spirit," edited by Jesuit Father James E. Hug, Paulist Press, \$9.95, 314 pp., reflects from a theological standpoint the experience of small communities in the struggle for social justice.

• "Jesus in Focus," by Gerard S. Sloyan, Twenty-Third Publications, \$7.95, 212 pp., approaches its subject from the perspective of the way five different communities of Christians believed in him toward the end of the first century.

• "Living the Richness of the Cross," by Father John Dalrymple, Ave Maria Press, \$3.95, 128 pp., shows that the religious revolution brought by Jesus continues to involve us today.

• "Building God's People in a

Materialistic Society," by the Rev. John H. Westerhoff III, Seabury Press, \$8.95, 148 pp., presents the insights of practical theology as seen by an Episcopal priest applied to the concept of stewardship.

• "Ecology and Religion," by John Carmody, Paulist Press, \$6.95, 185 pp., outlines a new theology of nature that is meant to respond to humans' contemporary needs.

• "On Children and Death," by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, Macmillan, \$12.95, 279 pp., confronts the difficulties faced by parents of dying children and offers the loving and practical help the adults need.

• "The Existence and Nature of God," edited by Alfred J. Freddoso, University of Notre Dame Press, no price given, 190 pp., the third volume in the publisher's series on the philosophy of religion, contains fresh, varied contributions to the discussion of God's existence.

• "The Ecumenical Moment," by Geoffrey Wainwright, Eerdmans, \$8.95, 263 pp., presents the arguments of a veteran ecumenist that the opportune time for the visible expression of the unity of the church is now.

• "Three Minutes A Day," by Father John Catoir with Joseph R. Thomas, The Christophers, \$3.50, 370 pp., is the 22nd volume in a highly popular and much respected series of reflections arranged for daily use.

• "How Shall We Find the Father?" by Dominican Sister Mary Neill, Ronda Chervin and Don Briel, Seabury, no price given, 114 pp., is the third in a series of well-received books styled "meditation workbooks."

Sarah Child

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