

Apocalypticism has good, bad elements



Patricia Schoelles, SSJ

The Moral Life

Apocalypticism, a worldview represented in both the Old and New Testaments, is a religious imagery that emerged from early Jewish traditions and carried over to Christianity. It still carries a strong influence in both the Christianity of the United States and the secular culture of the Western world.

The apocalyptic worldview originated from people who believed in God and his providential care for them, but who endured incredible persecution and oppression. They tried to understand and live in God's love even while suffering incredibly. Some characteristics of apocalypticism seem reasonable if we remember these origins.

Characteristics of apocalypticism include seeing the world as permeated by dualism, particularly the stark contrast and radical separation of the forces of good and evil. There is also the expectation of a final cosmic conflict between these two forces. God and the forces of good will ultimately triumph, and the forces of evil will be vanquished.

In our lifetime, we've seen radical religious movements strongly given to an apocalyptic worldview, such as the colonies of Jim Jones in Guyana and David Koresh in Waco, Texas. These and other similar movements shared with early apocalypticism an extremely negative view of the world outside of the cult, seeing it as evil. Some cults believed that contact with

thing to address the crisis, while some forms of religious apocalypticism hold that we can do nothing except attend to our own personal salvation.

Apocalypticism is good in that it links human history to God's purposes and provides a way for people to interpret their suffering in relation to God. The bad part is that it invites people to see the world in terms of opposing forces of extremes, underwriting a divisive view of reality that calls for those outside a group of "true believers" to be seen as evil and threatening. It allows conflict and war to become "ordinary" tools necessary for self-protection and final elimination of the enemy.

I am still very much opposed to the United States attacking Iraq. I don't think the world can tolerate a new policy that authorizes nations to attack others on the grounds that the other nation has the means to attack them. And I think that some of the United States' worldviews that are keeping alive the drive to go to war with Iraq derive from an apocalypticism that keeps us from moving into a new way of dealing with the real forces that threaten us in these times.

Let's beware of its strains when we hear them, and let us not be tricked by divisive imagery that distorts reality rather than clarifying it.

Sister Schoelles is president of St. Bernard's School of Theology and Ministry.



Karin von Voigtlander/Catholic Courier

Art created by students at St. John of Rochester School — including this work by Alex Martens — is on display at Perinton Square Mall in Fairport through Feb. 28.

guilty ones. The victims are innocent.

Donna Carson
Valley Brook Circle,
Rochester

Feminist play is an affront

To the editor:

I would encourage the Catholics of this diocese to investigate a play called the "Vagina Monologues" that was scheduled to be performed January 31 and February 1 at St. John Fisher College and Nazareth College March 1, 5 and 6, 2003.

The "Vagina Monologues" is a collection of monologues by women describing their personal stories, but the play is lacking in more than just good taste. These performances which represent a global movement to stop violence against women is devoid of integrity and should be considered harmful to the souls of our young women. It is a production replete with vulgarity, explicit discussion of sexuality and sexual encounters, lesbian activity, and masturbation. There is reference to a lesbian conquest of a 13-year-old girl proudly called "a good rape."

The content of the play contradicts solid moral Catholic teaching and is de-

structive to character and spiritual formation. I know this because, too late, I read the results of the "v-monologues" visit in the campus newspaper of my son's college and researched this show on my own after.

To even allow this play on a Catholic campus is an assault and affront to the true dignity of women and the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. Although the women supporting and presenting this play think themselves to be champions for violated women, they indeed degrade themselves and other young women by falling prey to acts of debasement.

Please investigate this matter and speak out to the proper authorities.

We must voice our discontent with this kind of machination taking place within the halls of our Catholic institutions.

Karen Kilpatrick
Hickory Street
Big Flats

EDITOR'S NOTE: Although performances at Fisher and Nazareth — as well as several other colleges with Catholic connections — are listed on the "Vagina Monologues" Web site (www.v-day.org), the production does not appear on the calendar pages of either college's Web site.

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