

National Coalition Against Censorship

275 Seventh Avenue, Suite 1504
New York, NY 10001
tel: (212) 807-6222
fax: (212) 807-6245
e-mail: ncac@ncac.org
web: www.ncac.org

Joan E. Bertin
Executive Director

NCAC PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

Actors' Equity Association
American Association of
School Administrators
American Association of
University Professors
American Association of
University Women
American Booksellers Foundation
for Free Expression
American Civil Liberties Union
American Ethical Union
American Federation of Teachers
American Federation of Television
& Radio Artists
American Jewish Committee
American Jewish Congress
American Library Association
American Literary Translators
Association
American Orthopsychiatric Association
American Society of Journalists
& Authors
Americans United for Separation of
Church & State
Association of American Publishers
Authors Guild
Catholics for Choice
Children's Literature Association
College Art Association
The Creative Coalition
Directors Guild of America
The Dramatists Guild of America
First Amendment Lawyers Association
International Reading Association
Lambda Legal
Modern Language Association
National Center for Science Education
National Communication Association
National Council for the Social Studies
National Council of the Churches
of Christ
National Council of Jewish Women
National Council of Teachers of English
National Education Association
The Newspaper Guild/CWA
Office of Communication,
United Church of Christ
PEN American Center
People for the American Way
Planned Parenthood Federation
of America
Screen Actors Guild
Sexuality Information & Education
Council of the U.S.
Society of Children's Book Writers
& Illustrators
Student Press Law Center
Union for Reform Judaism
Union of Democratic Intellectuals
Unitarian Universalist Association
United Methodist Communications,
United Methodist Church
Women's American ORT
Writers Guild of America, East
Writers Guild of America, West

Free speech surrendered: *Corpus Christi* at Tarleton State Statement by the National Coalition Against Censorship Opposing Cancellation of Controversial Play

March 29, 2010

The cancellation of Terrence McNally's play *Corpus Christi* by Tarleton State University, under pressure from the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights and others, is an affront to academic freedom and First Amendment principles of free speech.

The play was denounced by Tarleton's president, Dominic Dottavio, who called it "crude and irreverent." Texas Lieutenant Governor David Dewhurst opined that "no one should have the right to use government funds or institutions to portray acts that are morally reprehensible to the vast majority of Americans."

Even a play that depicts conduct considered "morally reprehensible" or "irreverent" by some is fully protected under the First Amendment, which prohibits the enforcement of any specific view of religion or morality. It is deeply troubling that people in leadership roles – a university president and high elected official – should display such disregard for, if not ignorance of, basic constitutional principles.

The University claims that the play's cancellation was due to concerns over "safety and security" because of threatening emails. Even if that were the real reason for the cancellation, it is hardly a legitimate excuse. By giving in to threats of violence, the University only encourages them. Our constitution envisions reasoned discourse as the way to resolve disputes, not threats designed to intimidate and silence discussion and debate.

The Catholic League has been in the business of attacking *Corpus Christi* since 1998 when the play premiered at The Manhattan Theater Club; threats of violence were also reported then, but the play was presented without incident. *Corpus Christi* has since been produced on college campuses many times without incident, even in the face of a lawsuit to halt production at Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne and legislative threats to cut Florida Atlantic University's funding. In these and other cases, the play was, correctly, allowed to go on. Tarleton State's cancellation of the play stands in marked contrast, as an affront to our constitutional right to speak freely and to make our own decisions about the value of a painting, book, or play.

We urge Tarleton State University to re-schedule the play, not only to salvage its reputation as a university that supports the American tradition of intellectual freedom, but to demonstrate its refusal to cave in to the threat of political and religious attacks.

For more information, please contact Teresa Koberstein, Communications Coordinator:
media@ncac.org, (212) 807-6222 ex 19.