



hospital workers come out or

Yes, Virginia, There Is
Such a Thing As An
Orderly Demonstration

On Friday, November 20, at 1:00 in the afternoon, a group called Gay Hospital Orderlies to Stop Torture planned to administer electro-shock therapy to a live puppy in front of St. Patrick's Cathedral to protest the inhuman treatment of homosexuals in places like Bellevue. The spot was well chosen, being a kind of mecca for puppy lovers and homosexual haters, and the shock of seeing a shocked puppy just conceivably might have driven home a valid point.

Not that the community is especially noted for its sensitivity. Before the demonstration I wandered into St. Paddy's (never ask for a men's room in a church) and passed by what passed for a religious service: the priest speedreading the gospel over a loudspeaker like a schoolmarm running through a spelling drill, with the nasal monotony of a taxi dispatcher or hog auctioneer; the assembled multitude kneeling, standing, sitting, then kneeling again on some secret cue that repeatedly escaped me; the handmen, key rings rattling on their belts, moving unnoticed through the flock to replace burnt-out spots and oil squeaky pew doors; a class of black kids bored and pissed with whitey's mumbo jumbo; a portly priestlet waddling down the aisle to the bathroom (truly does He make His children's tables plentiful); the lost souls in mink coats sampling the side shows along the walls, clutching their bags and gloves with one hand and crossing themselves with their fingers crossed with the other, pausing every five seconds to stoop and pray at some new relic; the priest again, directing the faithful to chapter and verse like an airport loudspeaker directing passengers to *Orient-bound jumbo jets*; with the whole illuminating spectacle spiced with the flickering flashcubes of *chubby girl snouts* from Kankakee getting snapshots of Christ in His agony. It would have been better on time lapse photography and, true, the organist played like a sentimental fool — but what of that? The stained glass murals are fab and the place must be worth a mint. Each gold plated coffee is a constant reminder of what is truly valuable in life.

Only a handful of gays showed up for the picketing, and no one seemed to care about forcing St. Patrick's hand. "You think Terence Cook gives a damn?" Even the puppy act was cancelled due to a mandatory one to three years for cruelty to animals. A special ASPCA cop, no doubt trained

to distinguish dogs from people, was on hand to nab any offenders, and the gays settled for placard waving and raps with passersby. A blond boy laid it on heavy:

"Gay people have a beautiful, free life style and this country is committing genocide on us every day. We're fed up with fascism. We're tired of liberal reform. All this about the Church rethinking its positions is irrelevant. I want to go into Patrick and light a reefer on the altar."

Someone asked if homosexuals didn't have their own churches to go to.

"Three people go to them. We don't need churches."

Most of those out on their lunch hours seemed to lose their appetites at first sight of the gays: *Verging on panic and growing faint*, they careened and bumped into each other, *their dull eyes staring straight*, their tight lips buttoned. (Blessed are they who have nothing to say and cannot be persuaded to say it. No wonder the silent majority keeps its mouth shut.) Older homosexuals who had long ago made their peace with the straight world also felt out of place, and one whispered to his friend in mock desperation, "Let's get out of here." Younger gays beamed proudly at their brothers and sisters on parade; still others seemed not to notice.

There was a queer rapport between a manic young cop and several gays standing inside the wooden barricades. Each side was trying to outdo the other in being friendly and funloving. The humor was forced (imagine tricky Dick playing up to college freshmen), and the sideburned rookie's use of the vernacular to gay hangers-on was clumsy, miraculously managing to combine bad grammar with bad taste.

"Okay, let's get it together now, boys. Move on, get it on, move on, get it on..." Cha cha cha. Like a cheerleader in drag.

A cheer went up and a troupe of drag queens joined the parade with a big banner that read "Street Transvestites Action Revolutionaries." It didn't mean anything but it spelled STAR, which may have explained the red star on the banner. The teevies were more noisy and merry, and rather uplifting or upsetting, depending on your point of view.

Naturally the older female passersby, the uptight dried-up dames with funeral parlor makeup who could never be more than pale caricatures of the show-stopping

queens, all had heart attacks on the spot and swore oaths of revenge under their breaths. One breastless windbag treated them to a dissertation on the penal system:

"You oughta be goddamn locked up, ya hear me?"

As for the demonstrators, they had known all along that they were in enemy territory. The show was a hit and run affair, and they were all in it together like the Kent guardsmen who decided to stick to the same silly story. *How honest can you be in front of an intimidating dinosaur like St. Patrick's Cathedral?* And if you can't use the persuasive power of truth, what's left? The contagious delusions of paranoia? Chants, liturgies, slogans? No, that was as bad as the witch-doctoring going on in the church across the street, and what chanting there was was half-hearted at best. Sending out good vibes? No, crewcut admen don't know a good vibe from a toilet bowl. Disseminating information?

The leaflets said that homosexuals were once burned at the stake and that faggot means a bundle of sticks or twigs. The sympathy ploy has its charms, but the facts needed to judge homosexuality were not footnoted. The blond boy told everybody that he had a beautiful free life style, but all he wanted to do was light a reefer on the altar and talk about fascism, genocide and his beautiful free life style. Brave talk and flamboyant posturing had sanitized his cynicism and contempt. The politics of paranoia had risen him starry-eyed to his feet. Praise the Lord and pass the ammunition. It was the pledge of allegiance all over again.

Yet from the resentful cracks and visible wincings of the passersby, it seemed about time that homosexuals stood up for themselves and talked back. The crewcuts, walking Fuller brushes with their bristles raised, seemed chastened and resigned to the fact that homosexuals have the right to picket, to shout, to be proud, to love each other shamelessly. Their cracks were masochistic, like the last bitch of a loser leaving the ring. Young straights tried to feel good about the whole thing, to accept what they couldn't quite understand, to let go of the pursestrings of prejudice and let a little sunshine in. And with the help from their friends on the other side, a point indeed seemed to have been made. Gay liberation had taken one more baby step.

—Dean Hannotte