

# "Saint" of a Different Persuasion

In his speech accepting the Academy Award for best actor for his part in the movie *Philadelphia*, Tom Hanks indicated that all those who have died of AIDS are presently enjoying angelic status in heaven. This presumptuous claim, presented without even an attempt to draw moral distinctions among AIDS victims, summarizes the approach of the film, which offers "paint by numbers" politically correct pedagogy regarding AIDS "discrimination."

Hanks portrays Andrew Beckett, an attorney who is fired from his firm after contracting AIDS. Denzel Washington, who was an Oscar nominee for his performance in the title role of the 1992 film *Malcolm X*, plays Beckett's attorney, Joe Miller. Beckett is depicted as an incomparably gifted attorney who is also relentlessly selfless — in short, a martyr-saint. Miller begins the film as a macho "homophobe" whose submerged decency is brought to the surface by Beckett's plight.

## Shameless Manipulation

Ironically, it is Washington's performance, rather than Hanks', that dominates the film; aside from Miller, who is given depth as a matter of dramatic necessity, every other principal in the film is merely a prop. The law firm that fires Beckett is represented by caricatures skimmed from Marxist agitprop — flabby, cigar-chomping bigots. Beckett's mother, portrayed by Joanne Woodward, is the very model of saint-like, non-judgemental support, a posture affected by the rest of the Beckett family.

The film's shamelessly manipulative nature is captured in one important juxtaposition. Early in the film, Miller and his wife are shown having a kitchen debate about homosexuality; in the course of that argument, Miller approaches his infant daughter and utters a "homophobic" remark — only to be rebuked by his wife, who seeks to insulate her child from such "evil." Later in the film, Andrew Beckett is seen cradling a newborn infant in his arms as the child's parent beams in approval. The message:

"Homophobia" is more contagious than AIDS, and just as lethal — and children should be protected from it.

*Philadelphia's* screenplay offers an elaborately embroidered set of false alternatives. Throughout the courtroom scenes that occupy most of the film, the question posed is this: Can Miller prove that Beckett was fired because of



Hanks portrays an AIDS-infected homosexual battling discrimination

"AIDS discrimination" rather than for professional incompetence, as his erstwhile employers claim? The fact that in a free society a private business has the right to establish its own employment guidelines is not given a hearing in the film.

The audience is shown clearly that Beckett's work had suffered as a result of his sickness. To conceal his affliction from his employers, Beckett works out of his home; this results in the temporary loss of an indispensable file. Beckett's boss has a solid case when he complains about the deterioration of the young lawyer's performance.

In matters of both business discipline and morality, the film makes no reference to the concept of personal accountability. Through a courtroom flashback, the audience is informed that Beckett

contracted AIDS during an anonymous sexual encounter in a pornographic theater; he did this, furthermore, while he was supposedly in a "committed relationship." When these revelations are coaxed out by the prosecution, Beckett's saint-like family is visibly disgusted — not by Andrew's personal behavior, but rather by the prosecution's "intolerance."

## Act of Contrition

Director Jonathan Demme made *Philadelphia* as an act of contrition. Demme's 1991 film *The Silence of the Lambs* (which earned Anthony Hopkins a best actor Oscar for his performance as serial murderer Hannibal Lecter) provoked criticism from "gay rights" activists because the film depicted the pursuit of a murderous homosexual. But many in the implacable sodomite lobby have criticized *Philadelphia* for its lack of distinctly homosexual content. But the film was not intended to preach to the converted; it is intended to proselyte the larger public.

The February 14th issue of *Newsweek* used the modest box-office success earned by *Philadelphia* as an opportunity to preach about the evils of "homophobia." Complaining about the movie's heavy-handed caricatures, the magazine urged that a more comprehensive approach is necessary to extirpate the more oblique forms of the supposed pathology. *Newsweek* warned those yet to embrace the new gospel of tolerance that "history sometimes advances at its own uneven speed. But it advances nonetheless."

Government grows in power and presumption every time it helps "history" to be made, and *Philadelphia* is designed to encourage public acceptance of such power grabs in the name of "compassion." Significantly, a source at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission told THE NEW AMERICAN that on February 23, 1993 the EEOC became involved in a lawsuit filed by an AIDS-carrying attorney who had been fired from his Philadelphia law firm because of his "disability." ■

— WILLIAM NORMAN GRIGG