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THEATER REVIEW | 'CATHEDRAL'

Priest With a Reporter Problem

By ANDY WEBSTER

The [Roman Catholic Church](#) wrestles with temptation in Joe Pintauro's one-act "Cathedral," but while the play's characters suffer dearly, they don't suffer nearly enough.

Jacob Hansen (Jon Ecklund), a priest known as Jake, has lost his faith and is leaving his order. Angelo Rosetti (Vincent Marano), another priest, doesn't want him to, and an aging cardinal (Tom Godfrey) objects even more.

What has precipitated his fall from belief? Disillusionment and his own sexual awakening, stemming from his involvement with a young, erratic and needy hustler, Will (Cary Woodworth). Now Jake is the subject of an investigative article by a reporter, Katherine McGuire (Kate Middleton), who has discovered the liaison.

Mr. Ecklund is a handsome, soft-spoken and dignified, if troubled, Jake, haunted by a vision of his younger self (also played by Mr. Woodworth) and his own impulses. Mr. Marano makes a fine, steady and supportive Angelo, sounding the alarm at McGuire's approach. And Mr. Godfrey adroitly alternates among imperiousness, sagacity, brittleness and willful denial. (Their efforts benefit from Jason Jeunette's lighting and Ien DeNio's sound design, both capturing a refined, cloistered tone.)

Poor, brave Ms. Middleton, whose character must flail against all the men. Her resolute McGuire is pilloried as cold and — because she's a member of the press — part of an institution as guilty as the church, according to the cardinal. Of course, Mr. Pintauro drops faint suggestions that she has hidden feelings for Jake.

You would expect insight into the church from Mr. Pintauro, a former priest and a seasoned playwright, who also directed this Manhattan Theater Source production. Here he revisits issues in "The Dead Boy," his play inspired by the case of the Rev. Bruce Ritter, the Franciscan behind Covenant House, a shelter for homeless teenagers. After he was accused of financial improprieties and of having had sexual relations with young men in his charge, Father Ritter resigned from Covenant House in 1990.

Mr. Pintauro does refer to the church's charitable works, but "Cathedral" ultimately discloses little more. Though it wants to be balanced, it is coy about the priesthood's inner workings and almost never addresses the myriad cases of sexual abuse by members of the clergy. The play even paints Jake, an authority figure, as the victim, the target of a 20-year-old's entreaties, ultimately elevating him to a kind of sainthood. And that is a sin.

"Cathedral" continues through May 16 at Manhattan Theater Source, 177 Macdougall Street, Greenwich Village; (212) 352-3101, theatermania.com.