

Impressions of Temptations of the Father

“Temptations of the Father takes a seemingly black and white issue and adds shades of grey, [showing us] the human side of a very serious issue.”

— Pamela Banning, Co-Artistic Director of Hydeware Theatre, St. Louis, MO

“Temptations of the Father hits at the core of a truly topical issue and impassioned debate with great sensitivity and new insight. Bravo!”

— Charlie Robin, Executive Director of the Edison Theatre, St. Louis, MO

“I found Temptations of the Father both novel in its approach and emotionally moving and satisfying. The playwright, DJ Sanders, has found a new angle on the Catholic priest sex scandal by examining not only the victims of sexual assault, but the other victims—the innocent priests who fall victim to suspicion and unwarranted scrutiny because of the conduct of a few bad apples in their midst. In this way, Mr. Sanders has done for the Catholic priest sex scandal what Arthur Miller did for McCarthyism in The Crucible—turning a social issue on its head and finding the fresh perspective of forgotten casualties of a witch-hunt. This is not the first play about the sex scandal, nor will it be the last, but it may be one of the most innovative—and, because of its snapshot of human nature itself, will still be fresh long after the sex scandal itself is a nightmare relegated to history books.”

— Derek Tarson, Director for Elmwood Playhouse, Nyack, NY

“[Temptations of the Father] refuses to let the audience off the emotional hook and the result is extremely unsettling, extremely provocative theatre. We’re allowed to see [the Catholic priest sex abuse scandal] both from the priest’s point of view as well as that of the victim and the victim’s brother, who’s also a priest. It portrays the situation as complex and messy and non-black-and-white, just as it is in the real world. It takes us behind the headlines and gives us real insight into why these things happen. ...it makes the issue as personal and intimate as possible, using just three characters, and dramatizing how one incident of sexual abuse by a priest can destroy so many different lives in so many different ways. But the priest character is so funny and charming that it really tears the audience in two, as they find themselves both charmed by this guy and horrified by the abuse. It left me so unsettled, so conflicted, and I LOVED IT.”

— Scott Miller, Artistic Director of New Line Theatre, St. Louis, MO

Temptations of the Father

by DJ Sanders

Temptations of the Father explores how the childhood sexual abuse scandal of today's American Catholic Church has destroyed the lives of priests and crushed the faith of those who revere them. Two priests—one young, one old—struggle to understand the solemn promises taken at their ordinations. In an awkward meeting between these two life-long friends, Fr. Anthony explains to the now retired Fr. Ryan why the bishop is forcing him out of the diocese. Emotions over the untimely death of Anthony's younger brother, John, help these estranged friends find the common ground needed to communicate. But darker secrets about what led to John's death plague both of these men of God with guilt and regret.

Six scenes highlight and explore critical events in the lives of three men each attempting to recover from their pasts. John spends over a decade trying to deny what happened near the lake he once tossed rocks in. Throwing himself into the hectic business world of Manhattan, he flees his Midwestern roots and finally finds an escape in a different lake. Anthony pushes himself to complete his father's dream of being a priest, taking guidance from his father's closest friend, Fr. Ryan. But one night of desperation destroys Anthony's dreams, forcing him into bureaucratic exile or loss of clerical duties.

Local headlines alleging sinful acts from Fr. Ryan shatter a small southern Illinois community, destroy life-long friendships, and undermine the trust of devote Catholics. Still grieving over the loss of his brother and the aftermath of Ryan's forced retirement, Anthony finds himself face to face with the man who mentored and molded him into a priest but who crushed his faith and credibility. In order to heal and forgive, they must recall and reconcile the events of one late August evening when a trusted family friend gave into temptation and shattered two boys' lives forever. Inspired by the headlines of the Catholic priest molestation scandal, Temptations of the Father offers audiences a mature look at the psychology, guilt, and healing behind the sins of our religious fathers.

Cast and Set Breakdown for
Temptations of the Father
by DJ Sanders

CHARACTERS

ANTHONY – older brother to JOHN, a dogmatic and steadfast Roman Catholic priest
(Male, ages 30, 28, and 15)

RYAN – old family friend to ANTHONY and JOHN’s family, a charismatic and
introspective Roman Catholic priest
(Male, ages 58 and 43)

JOHN – younger brother to ANTHONY, a sarcastic and self-assured business consultant
(Male, ages 24 and 11)

SET

A unit set to include the basics of the following locations:

Scene One – Outside RYAN’s lake house in rural Southern Illinois

Scene Two – Inside JOHN’s apartment in Manhattan

Scene Three – Inside RYAN’s lake house

INTERMISSION

Scene Four – Inside RYAN’s lake house (Same as Scene Three)

Scene Five – The living room of ANTHONY and JOHN’s parents’ house

Scene Six – Outside RYAN’s lake house (Same as Scene One)

RUNNING TIME

Approximately one hour and forty minutes.

Scenes One through Three – approximately one hour

Scenes Four through Six – approximately forty minutes

Sample Scene from
Temptations of the Father

By DJ Sanders

Scene Five

(The Christmas Eve after the action in Scene Two, in the living room of ANTHONY and JOHN's parents' home. There is a sofa, television, and a coffee table. On the coffee table is a newspaper.

JOHN is lounging on the sofa watching television. JOHN is drinking from a large plastic cup. JOHN is slightly drunk.

Offstage ANTHONY is heard entering the house)

ANTHONY (offstage)

Mom, dad, I'm here.

(ANTHONY enters the living room bundled up in a coat, scarf, and gloves. ANTHONY is carrying a bag of presents)

ANTHONY (Cont'd)

Oh. Hey, John. Merry Christmas.

(ANTHONY sets his bag down)

JOHN

(raising his glass)

And Happy Hanukah.

(ANTHONY begins taking off his gloves, scarf, and coat)

ANTHONY

So how's life been in the Big Apple?

JOHN

You know, people who live there don't really call it the Big Apple.

ANTHONY

Oh. Then how are things in New York?

JOHN

(sterile)

Things are good.

ANTHONY

How did that project come together?

JOHN

What?

ANTHONY

There was a project you were working on when I was out there. Someone lost a file and you were in a rush.

JOHN

Oh, yeah. That one. They promoted that fucking bitch. Can you believe it? She screws up everything, we ended up delivering the product two weeks late because of her, but it all gets pegged on me. They said I wasn't being a "team player."

ANTHONY

I know I don't work in the business world, but I would imagine that people appreciate it when you use a little more finesse.

JOHN

Finesse?

ANTHONY

Well, I'm not trying to criticize, but...some people may perceive your style of communication as a little...abrupt.

JOHN

Abrupt. We're working on projects worth hundreds of thousands of dollars that have to be delivered on time, no excuses, no slip-ups. Who gives a fuck about "finesse" when you've got clients who won't think twice about taking their business across the street and leaving us high and dry because we can't deliver? Fuck finesse!

ANTHONY

Hey, I was just trying to give you some insight.

JOHN

Thanks, I feel enlightened. Can we talk about something else?

ANTHONY

Oh, sure.

(ANTHONY tries to think of another topic)

ANTHONY (Cont'd)

At my parish we're all set for a great Christmas morning service. The school kids are doing a Christmas play for the gospel. There's this little girl playing the angel who's singing "What Child Is This?" She has the most beautiful voice. It should be a really nice service. Mom and dad are coming. You're still invited.

JOHN

I'm allergic to kids.

(JOHN feigns a cough)

ANTHONY

Fine. Be that way. Where are mom and dad?

JOHN

Mom is at the store and dad had a meeting to go to.

ANTHONY

A meeting?

JOHN

Yeah.

ANTHONY

On Christmas Eve?

JOHN

You'll have to ask him when he gets back.

ANTHONY

John, is something bothering you?

JOHN

(sarcastic)

No, Fr. Anthony, I'm fine. But thank you for asking.

ANTHONY

John, I'm trying to be serious.

JOHN

God, give me a break. It's a fucking holiday. I'm just trying to unwind and relax.

ANTHONY

What are you drinking?

JOHN

Something I brought along with me, to make me feel at home.

ANTHONY

Why are you doing this?

JOHN

Here comes the sermon. Sorry, when this one's empty I'll switch to holy wine to wash all my sins away.

ANTHONY

Can we just have one nice family dinner? At least do it for mother. Besides, Ryan is coming over too.

JOHN

Not any more.

ANTHONY

Did he cancel?

JOHN

He's been dis-invited.

ANTHONY

What?

JOHN

Your friend Ryan's been a bad boy.

ANTHONY

What are you talking about?

JOHN

Like you don't know.

ANTHONY

What did you tell mom and dad?

(pause)

What did you tell mom and dad!?

JOHN

I didn't tell them shit! Fuck you, Fr. Anthony. Maybe you should read the newspaper every once in a while.

ANTHONY

What does that have to do with anything?

JOHN

Just forget it.

(ANTHONY pauses a moment)

ANTHONY

(picking up the paper on the coffee table)

Is this today's paper?

JOHN

Hey, you're blocking my view.

(ANTHONY takes the paper and sits down to read it)

JOHN (Cont'd)

"Alleged abuse, area priest accused." Nice headline. Isn't that called alliteration or something? No, that would be "Alleged abuse, area asshole accused."

(beat)

Great article. It's a keeper all right. Dad's even mentioned in there.

ANTHONY

What?

JOHN

All he's quoted as saying is "no comment." Real articulate man our dad is. You should have been here last night. That was a fun night.

ANTHONY

Quiet. I'm trying to read this.

(ANTHONY quickly skims through as much
of the article as he can in shock)

JOHN

I told you he was a fucking pervert.

ANTHONY

Ryan is a decent man. These are only allegations.

JOHN

Yes, Anthony, let's blame the victim. Isn't that what they
teach you in priest school? Hate the accuser, love the
sinner.

ANTHONY

Ryan would never do this. People are just getting caught
up in all this--this stuff in the diocese. It's a
misunderstanding.

JOHN

Didn't you read what he did to that boy?

ANTHONY

This is only one newspaper article. I think we should wait
until we have all the information before jumping to any
conclusions.

JOHN

You just don't see what's going on, do you? It's in the
paper, on TV, the Internet, but you're still gonna turn a
blind eye? How can you stand beside these--these people of
God? You, dad, Ryan, you're all the same. All you care
about is your fucking church and traditions and fake
values. It's all bull shit, Anthony. Are you ever gonna
wake up and see that?

ANTHONY

You're jealous.

JOHN

What?

ANTHONY

That's what this is all about. You're jealous because we have something that matters to us and brings us together. And you're not part of it. But that was your choice.

JOHN

(sarcastic)

Ooo, you're onto me now, Fr. Anthony. You're right, I'm so jealous. I wish that I got to eat stale bread and drink cheap wine every Sunday, because that's gonna make me feel closer to God, my family, and myself. Thank you for showing me the error of my ways.

ANTHONY

You never change.

JOHN

Oh, that hurts.

ANTHONY

Look at yourself, John. Have you ever taken a good look in the mirror at yourself to see what you've become?

JOHN

I make more money than you could even dream of making.

ANTHONY

It's not about money. It's about helping others, it's about serving others. I help people.

JOHN

No, you betray people. With your lies. You pass around the collection plate every week and then use that money to shut people up so that the truth won't get out. Because if people did find out how many of God's chosen were touching their children's lives in ways that the District Attorney might object to, then we'd have a real scandal.

(ANTHONY stops speechless)

JOHN (Cont'd)

You saw what Fr. Ryan did. I saw you at the door. But here you stand defending him.

(beat)

If I were you, I'd really watch myself, Fr. Anthony, because one of these days you're gonna be tried and found guilty by association. And when they crucify you for your undying faith, I don't think anyone's gonna see you as a martyr.

(gulping down the rest of his drink)

I need a refill. It's gonna be a long fucking Christmas at the Pearson house.

(JOHN exits.)

ANTHONY sits for a moment holding the paper speechless. ANTHONY then refolds the paper and carefully sets it down on the coffee table so that the article he was reading is facing down.

ANTHONY begins to cry.

Blackout)

For more information or to obtain the full script, please contact

DJ Sanders

dj@djsanders.com

<http://www.djsanders.com>