

ANTI-CATHOLIC INCIDENT AT WILLIAM PATERSON COLLEGE

On July 5, 1994, Professor Vernon McClean required all students in his Sexism and Racism class to identify their religion on a piece of paper. When the lecture began, Dr. McClean commented that Louis Farrakhan had once called Pope John Paul II a "racist cock-sucker." Dr. McClean then said that Farrakhan was right. When the mother of one of the students learned about this incident, she wrote a letter of protest to President Arnold Speert. Copies of private correspondence were then distributed by Dr. McClean to his students. No action has been taken against Dr. McClean and no statement admitting wrongdoing has been issued by any college official.

In a statement on this affair, Dr. William Donohue, president of the Catholic League, had this to say:

"What happened at William Paterson College is a serious violation of students' rights and grave abuse of academic freedom. No professor at a state college has any business asking students to identify their religion. It is even illegal for the U.S. Census Bureau to require Americans to identify their religion, never mind a state college professor. If separation of church and state means anything, it means the right of citizens to insulate their religious affiliations and beliefs from inquiring government agents.

"When the demand for religious identification is juxtaposed with a vicious anti-Catholic remark, the outcome is nothing less than pernicious. If the same vulgar characterization had been made about Martin Luther King, or some other widely revered person, college officials would have been quick to respond. But their silence in the wake of this anti-Catholic statement suggests that Catholic bashing is tolerated at

William Paterson College. That this comment was made in a required multicultural course is all the more telling: respect for diversity and tolerance for all religions apparently do not extend to Catholics.

"The classroom distribution of private correspondence was an egregious impropriety. Despite the fact that the woman who complained has a private listing for her home address and phone number, everyone in the Sexism and Racism course was given a copy of her letter, complete with her home address.

"College officials know what has to be done: the school needs to issue an apology and disciplinary action must be taken against Dr. McClean. To do nothing is to sanction illegality, vulgarity, bigotry, a double standard of justice and a flagrant abuse of power."

The Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights is the nation's largest Catholic civil rights organization. It defends the right of Catholics—lay and clergy alike—to participate in American life without defamation or discrimination.