

BUSH INVITE TO IAN PAISLEY OFFENDS CATHOLICS

On March 16, President George W. Bush held a St. Patrick's Day reception for Irish-American leaders. He also invited leading members from the various parties in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Among the attendees was Ian Paisley, the Northern Ireland activist known mostly for his hatred of the Catholic Church.

William Donohue was invited to attend the reception but turned down the offer due to a scheduling conflict. That was before he learned of the invitation to Paisley. Once this was known, he released the following statement to the press:

"There is no bigger Catholic basher in all the world than Ian Paisley. And this is the guy deemed worthy of attending a St. Patrick's Day reception in the White House.

"We would have no problem with anyone from the Bush administration discussing the peace accords in Northern Ireland with Ian Paisley, useless though the exercise would be. But to invite this hate-monger to a reception that honors a Catholic saint is on the order of inviting Yasser Arafat to a Hanukkah party. It's insulting.

"It is not clear why this invitation was extended. After all, Paisley's only following in the U.S. is limited to the folks at Bob Jones University. Be that as it may, it is not just Irish Catholics who are offended by this move, it is Catholics of all ethnic stocks."

Several media outlets picked up this news release. As we emphasized, it was the timing and the nature of the occasion that troubled us more than anything. We were also troubled by the comment from the Bush administration that Paisley's presence was a tribute to the "inclusivity" of the event. Why

it makes sense to include a notorious anti-Catholic bigot at an event that celebrates a Catholic saint is something we don't understand.

In the end, Paisley refused to meet with Irish Prime Minister Bertie Ahern and other leaders from the Republic of Ireland. But this didn't stop Ahern from saying it was "a positive step" for Paisley to be there. How did not explain how he reached this conclusion.