

CARDINAL DOLAN VERBALLY ABUSED

Bill Donohue sent the following letter today to the parties noted.

March 14, 2025

Jelani Jefferson Exum
Dean, St. John's Univ. School of Law
8000 Utopia Parkway
Jamaica, NY 11439

Dear Dean Jefferson Exum:

A recent incident was brought to my attention about the conduct of one of your law school students, Vishai Balani. He is alleged to have attacked Cardinal Timothy Dolan, Archbishop of New York, on X (since removed). On February 22, he said Dolan was "a bootlicking disgrace with your nose up Donald Trump's ass." He also used derogatory language to smear New York City Councilman Robert Holden and New York City Councilwoman Vickie Paladino. (See the enclosed.)

I have spent many years in higher education, and have written several books on civil liberties, so I am well aware that student speech is given wide protection. I am also aware that with liberties come responsibilities, and this is especially true of Catholic institutions of higher education.

St. John's Law Mission Statement says the school strives to foster an "equitable" environment where "respect for the rights and dignity of every person" is maintained. The Student Code of Conduct proscribes "verbal," as well as "physical action," saying they are "inconsistent with the Core Values of St. John's University."

Regarding the Core Values, the Code says that "Students are required to engage in responsible social conduct and to model good citizenship in any community. Students shall not engage in any conduct that reflects a failure to live up to the expectations of all St. John's students." It ends by being specific: "Any behavior (verbal, written or physical) that abuses, assails, intimidates, demeans, and/or victimizes."

It seems plain that Vishai Balani has violated these norms. How you handle instances like this is not my business. But as president of the nation's largest Catholic civil rights organization, it is my business to combat attacks on individual Catholics and the institutional Church. Accordingly, I am asking that you take this situation seriously.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

William A. Donohue, Ph.D.
President

cc: Cardinal Timothy Dolan, Archbishop of New York
Fr. Brian Shanley, O.P. president of St. John's Univ.
Jack Flynn, Director of Student Conduct
Councilman Robert Holden
Councilwoman Vickie Paladino