

CATHOLIC BASHING ON CAMPUS

If I had to name the one place in the U.S. where Catholic bashing is most prevalent, it would be in higher education. Sure, the media love to bash Catholics, and so does Hollywood. There is bias on the job, in the arts and even in some government programs and regulations. But anyone who has spent much time in the academy knows that the typical college campus is more a hotbed of anti-Catholicism than anyplace else. Here's just two recent examples of what I mean; both cases triggered a strong response from the Catholic League.

In 1991, Patrick Mooney was fired as a resident assistant (dorm counselor) from Carnegie Mellon University. His offense? He refused, on the basis of his Catholicism, to wear a pro-lesbian button during in-service week training. CMU's punitive retaliation meant that Mooney was to lose thousands of dollars that he was counting on to defray tuition costs. But it was not for financial reasons that Mooney sued CMU: it was for the denial of his constitutional right to freedom of speech, freedom of association and freedom of religion. Having spoken with him, I am convinced that Mooney's cause is justice, not money. His case is still undecided in the courts.

More recently, Mooney and CMU administrators have clashed on two other occasions. The first instance involves a protest that Mooney lodged against a particularly offensive attack on Catholics and on John Cardinal O'Connor, in particular. The second matter concerns the pressing of "harassment" charges against Mooney for the crime of disagreeing with a visiting professor about homosexuality.

The bigoted attack against Catholics came from a campus gay and lesbian group called cmuOUT. In both fliers and videos, Catholics were portrayed in a manner that would make the average professor apoplectic if the subject had been African-Americans. But since it was Catholics that were being abused,

the bigotry was met with no resistance, save from Mooney and a student friend, Mark Sullivan. The vile movie, *Stop the Church*, was shown, and viciously obscene fliers were made about Cardinal O'Connor, complete with the inscription "Public Health Menace" printed on the top of a photo of New York's Archbishop. The clash between Mooney and the professor occurred on March 3rd. Mooney simply expressed to visiting professor Tim Saternow his feelings about the gay assaults on Cardinal O'Connor. Professor Saternow, who is gay, defended the group and then pressed "harassment" charges against Mooney for having the temerity to express his sentiments. Mooney said nothing inflammatory, nor was he charged with making any incendiary remark. But he is being brought up on charges nonetheless.

The other case involves classroom behavior. On February 16th, Stephen Hilker walked into his doctorate course in public administration at Western Michigan University with an external religious symbol clearly marked on his forehead; it was Ash Wednesday. It didn't take long before Dr. Ralph Chandler began an extensive diatribe against Catholics. Oh, yes, Dr. Chandler was careful not to mention Catholics by name, but a tape of the class (which we have in our possession) makes it clear that the "myths" that Dr. Chandler set out to debunk happened to be the central teachings of the Catholic Church.

Dr. Chandler's behavior has been defended, quite naturally, as freedom of speech. That Chandler knew that Hilker was a deacon is not something that impressed the administrators. Nor did they give much credence to the idea that lengthy tirades against an established religion have no legitimate educational value. And apparently they feel that Dr. Chandler's opinions on the Trinity are of significant import to doctoral students in public administration.

Hilker's case not only illustrates the presence of anti-Catholicism on campus, it shows the degree to which academic fraud is tolerated and indeed defended. When students enroll

in a course, they expect to be taught the subject matter that is listed in the course bulletin. For example, if they purchase a course in accounting, they do not expect a lecture on hammertoes. If they buy a course in astro physics, they do not expect a lecture on cognitive dissonance. And if they contract for a course on public administration, they do not expect to be lectured on the “myths” of the Roman Catholic Church.

Actually, the fraud is worse than this. Not for a minute would any college administrator tolerate a long dissertation on the irrational and incredulous religious beliefs of Native Americans. Were such an exercise to take place, it would quickly be labeled academic abuse, not academic freedom. Moreover, charges of insensitivity would be brought by the office of multiculturalism. And in all likelihood the offending professor would be subjected to a sensitivity training workshop wherein the mantra “respect for diversity” would never cease. But when it’s Catholics who are the target of invective, the rules have a way of changing.

The reason why Catholic students are victimized for refusing to wear buttons that offend their conscience and are then prosecuted under trumped up charges is the same reason why Catholic students can be insulted with impunity by academic bullies: Catholicism is seen as oppressive by college faculty and administrators. Those who act on their religious convictions and those who openly identify themselves as Catholics are seen as the enemy, pure and simple. To be sure, not everyone on campus feels this way. But too many do and not enough is done to assure equal rights.

I’ve been in touch with the appropriate authorities at both CMU and Western Michigan. What happens next is their call. We’ll keep you posted.

-William A. Donohue