

CATHOLIC PROFESSOR QUILTS JEWISH POST UNDER PRESSURE

Thomas E. Bird, a professor at Queens College, has resigned under pressure as the new director of the college's Jewish studies program. Though Bird received the support of many prominent Jews, and has a distinguished record of accomplishment serving Jewish causes, he felt that he was "the object of primitive religious bigotry" and decided to resign. At question was whether a non-Jew should serve as the head of the Jewish studies program.

Catholic League president William Donohue commented on this development today:

"The president of Queens College, Allen Sessoms, has described what happened to Professor Bird as 'shameful' and labeled the move against him as 'a campaign of intolerance.' It would appear that President Sessoms is right.

"A legitimate argument can be made that in certain academic programs it makes sense to give considerable weight to the ascribed characteristics of candidates seeking to direct the program. But insistence on a litmus test is not acceptable, and that is precisely what Professor Bird's critics are arguing. If a Catholic can be summarily challenged on the basis of his Catholicity from directing a Jewish studies program, what is to stop the displacement of merit from other academic posts? This refeudalization is at odds with academic excellence and that is reason enough to oppose it."

The Catholic League is the nation's largest Catholic civil rights organization. It defends individual Catholics and the institutional Church from defamation and discrimination.