

CHRONOLOGY OF A DESECRATION

The following is a chronological account of how the issue of the desecration of the Eucharist unfolded. For related issues, see Bill Donohue's piece, "Militant Atheism Unleashed."

• **July 10:** Professor Paul Z. Myers, a professor of biology at the Morris campus of the University of Minnesota (UMN), pledges to desecrate the Eucharist; he asks the public to give him some consecrated Hosts. His decision is in retaliation to Bill Donohue's criticism of a student at the University of Central Florida who walked out of a June 29 Mass on campus with the Eucharist; the student was protesting student fees going to religious events. Donohue accuses Myers of violating UMN's policy governing the school's electronic pages (there was a link on the university's website to Myers' personal blog) and violating UMN's Code of Conduct regarding uncivil behavior. UMN's President, Board of Regents and Minnesota's public officials are contacted.

Myers goes on a Houston radio show (KPFT) charging that Donohue "declared a fatwa" against him. Donohue responded by saying of Myers, "He should know better—I don't need others to do the fighting for me. I'm quite good at it myself. But he'd better be careful what he says, because if I get any death threats, it won't be hard to connect the dots."

• **July 11:** Donohue receives a letter from UMN President Robert Bruininks thanking him for bringing this issue to his attention. "Let me assure you that the views expressed by biology professor Paul Myers on his personal blog do not reflect those of the University of Minnesota, Morris or the University of Minnesota system," he said. "Per the University's Web policy, the link to Myers' personal blog from the University's Web site has been deactivated."

Donohue issues a news release, "Hysteria Marks Myers and His

Ilk," drawing attention to all the hate mail the Catholic League was receiving from around the world. "Myers, who claims expertise in studying zebrafish," Donohue says, "has quite a following among the King Kong Theory of Creation gang." In another development, Thomas E. Foley, a Virginia activist and delegate to the Republican National Convention, makes a public statement about the need for additional security at the upcoming convention in Minnesota's Twin Cities; he cited the hatred drummed up by Myers against Catholics.

- **July 14:** Myers says, "I have to do something. I'm not going to just let this disappear." He says that he acquired a Host on July 11: "Something will be done. It won't be gross. It won't be totally tasteless, but yeah, I'll do something that shows this cracker has no power."

- **July 15:** Donohue accuses Myers of previously showing deference to Islam and asks him to treat Catholicism the same way.

- **July 17:** Myers grants an interview to Catholic Radio International. He says that his planned desecration is "an issue of civil liberties." He reasons that because he is not Catholic or a believer of any kind, he is free to do what he wants to the Eucharist. In fact, he goes so far as to say that there is "an orchestrated campaign by Bill Donohue to demand that secular people...have the same reverence for this object." Myers then attacked Donohue: "I would make a deal here to return these wafers to the nearest Catholic church if the Church could come out and disavow the tactics of Bill Donohue and the people who have threatened my job and who have threatened my life." *[Note: No one from the Catholic League ever threatened his job, never mind his life.]*

- **July 21:** Myers responds to Donohue by saying, "Thanks to all those who have demanded that I treat that silly book [the Koran] with disrespect, I'll have to treat both equally."

- **July 22:** Donohue says “The latest threat by Myers only makes matters worse....This is his idea of equal treatment.”

- **July 24:** Myers desecrates the Eucharist, posting a picture of it on his personal blog. He explained: “I pierced it [the Host] with a rusty nail (I hope Jesus’s tetanus shots are up to date). And then I simply threw it in the trash.” He also tore pages from the Koran, and, in a failed attempt to show impartiality, he included a few pages from Richard Dawkins’ *The God Delusion* and nailed them to the Host. He then said, “They are just paper. **Nothing must be held sacred.** (His emphasis.) Question everything. God is not great, Jesus is not your lord, you are not disciples of any charismatic prophet.”

The Catholic League contacts UMN’s president, Board of Regents and the Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action Office at the school, as well as Minnesota’s governor and both houses of the state legislature. Also contacted are Minnesota’s Catholic community and Muslim groups nationwide. “Just as African Americans would not tolerate the burning of a cross, and Jews would not tolerate the display of swastikas, Catholics will not tolerate the desecration of the Eucharist.”

- **July 25:** UMN Chancellor Jacqueline Johnson issues a statement condemning religious intolerance. She cites UMN’s Code of Conduct that “prohibits such behavior in the workplace—of course this includes the classroom—and I expect those who work and study here to comply with that policy.” But she hastened to add that UMN “affirms the freedom of a faculty member to speak or write as a public citizen without institutional discipline or restraint...” She ended by saying that Myers’ views were his own and that “The University deactivated the link between this blog and the University of Minnesota, Morris website...” The Catholic League appealed to UMN’s Board of Regents citing a previous incident wherein a faculty member was brought up on charges of violating the Tenure Code for possessing images of child porn on his computer.

• **July 31:** Chancellor Johnson faxes a letter to Donohue saying she needed to clarify his “misunderstanding” of her July 25 statement. She said it was not her intention to say that Myers had violated UMN’s Code of Conduct. Indeed, she claimed that since Myers posted his comments on his personal blog, he did not violate the Code.

“I am sorry for my generosity,” Donohue answered. “I took it that the reason you began your statement of July 25 with a citation of UMN’s Code of Conduct as it applies to religious intolerance was your way of acknowledging Myers’ delinquency. I now stand corrected: Your comment was simply a ploy—a cute way of acknowledging that something was wrong, but certainly not anything that would demand your attention. And just so you don’t misunderstand me: You could have issued a statement saying that while UMN has no authority over what Myers says in his blog, it is morally indefensible for anyone to intentionally desecrate the Eucharist. But, no, you couldn’t even say that. Instead, you hide behind legalisms. We will let the Catholic community know of your decision.”

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