

COLUMBIA PREZ APOLOGIZES FOR TAUNTS AT FORDHAM GAME

An anti-Catholic incident at Columbia University began with an apology that William Donohue deemed “inadequate” and ended with one he declared satisfactory.

On September 21, at a Fordham-Columbia football game played at Columbia, a band announcer at the Ivy League school commented during the half-time show that “Fordham’s tuition is going down like an altar boy.” The crowd loved it. Two days later, a Fordham student, Elizabeth Kennedy, contacted the Catholic League.

Donohue’s first response was to request an apology from Columbia president Lee Bollinger. He was quoted in the New York Times saying, “It angers me because I know the multicultural mantra is so much the rage on college campuses, and for elite institutions like Columbia to provide an enthusiastic response to bigotry is disturbing.”

On September 23, a spokeswoman for Columbia extended an apology for what happened. But Donohue wanted more: he wanted to hear from Bollinger and thus branded the apology “inadequate.” Donohue was particularly disturbed to learn that the offending student, Andy Hao, had his script approved by a Columbia staff person, Catherine Webster.

Donohue then sent a letter to the 16 members of Columbia’s board of trustees, to the presidents of select New York-area colleges, and to the presidents of all Ivy League colleges, expressing his concerns. He contrasted Bollinger’s inaction to the meritorious response that was provided by Stanford’s past president, Gerhard Casper, when a like incident occurred at Stanford in 1997.

In 1997, there was an anti-Catholic and anti-Irish incident during the half-time of a Notre Dame-Stanford football game. Following complaints lodged by the Catholic League and others, President Casper publicly apologized for what happened and wrote a personal letter to Donohue expressing his sincere regret. Casper also barred the band from field shows during the next three Stanford-Notre Dame games and ordered a review of its procedure for approving band scripts.

“President Casper acted responsibly,” Donohue said. “President Bollinger has not.” The Catholic League president concluded by saying, “I hope you would agree and would therefore use the example of President Casper as a role model in the event that bigotry—of any kind—were to unfortunately strike your campus.”

On October 8, at Bollinger’s request, Donohue met with the Columbia president. An apology was granted and measures have been instituted to prevent such an occurrence again. Thus did the issue end on a good note.