

COLUMBIA WELCOMES ANTI-SEMITES

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on Columbia University welcoming an anti-Semite:

Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad will speak at Columbia University on September 25. He is not shy about using anti-Semitic slurs to attack Jews (calling them "hook-nosed"). Worse, he argues that "Jews rule the world by proxy."

Columbia has a track record of welcoming Jew haters. In 2007, I went on the "Today" show to criticize Columbia for inviting Mohmoud Ahmadinejad, the Iranian president, to speak on campus. It was the same Columbia president, Lee Bollinger, who hosted this anti-Semitic bigot.

Bollinger tells us that he deplores the anti-Semitism of the Malaysian Prime Minister. No doubt he does. To be sure, deploring someone's views is hardly a reason not to invite a controversial person to speak on campus—colleges should be places where freedom of speech is widely entertained. I hasten to say that as with all rights, making them absolute corrupts their value. Where Bollinger really goes wrong is in his failure to recognize the special status of a university.

Bollinger says that "it is in these times that we are most strongly resolved to insist that our campus remain an open forum and to protect the freedoms essential to our university community."

Bollinger is right to call a university a community. But he fails to recognize what that means. It means that its members are bound together, sharing norms and values that define who they are. As such, they are not simply a constellation of individuals.

An institution of higher learning is a community of scholars, men and women who are expected to be committed to the pursuit

of truth. That is the central purpose of a college or university. Accordingly, those who belong to the Flat Earth Society are not invited to speak on any campus, and no one complains. We know the earth is not flat. We also know, or should know, that Jews do not rule the world by proxy.

In other words, open forums are places such as Central Park. There are plenty of places that do not have any pretense of pursuing the truth, nor are they in any way a community: the Beacon Theater and Madison Square Garden are other examples. But a university has a different charge. Those who espouse malicious lies about Jews are not engaged in the pursuit of truth—they are engaged in hate speech.

Let Prime Minister Mohamad exercise his free speech rights in one of New York's open forums, venues where clowns and magicians populate. To invite him to speak at Columbia is to do violence to the principal reason why colleges and universities were founded in the first place.