

# GREENSBORO, NORTH CAROLINA SCHOOL DRAWS LEAGUE PROTEST

Grimsley High School, part of the Guilford County Schools in Greensboro, North Carolina, offended area Catholics by assigning a book to students that treats Catholicism in a despicable fashion. Dr. Donohue wrote a letter explaining the league's position. He made it clear that while he recognized the legal right of school authorities to assign such a work, he still felt it was an irresponsible act that deserved corrective action.

Donohue's letter, printed below, was sent to every member of the school board, as well as others.

Dr. Jerry Weast  
Superintendent, Guilford Co. Schools  
P.O. Box 880  
Greensboro, NC 27402  
Dear Dr. Weast:

I am writing with regards to the controversy surrounding the use of "The Old Gringo" in Grimsley High School. As president of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, the nation's largest Catholic civil rights organization, and as a life-long educator and author, I have special interest in this matter.

Let me begin by saying that I am opposed to any governmental edict that would bar the use of "The Old Gringo." But I am also opposed to the wisdom that found this book suitable for high school students. To put it differently, conceding the legal right to allow this book to be used does not exhaust the issue: there is a responsibility to the teaching profession and a moral obligation to the sentiments of the community that must weigh heavily in any educational

decision.

It is certainly true that educators need not avoid presenting works to high school students that may make them feel uncomfortable. But feeling uncomfortable is not the equivalent of feeling abused, and it is the latter sentiment that is operative here. Quite simply, there are parts of this book that are downright degrading and offensive to Catholic sensibilities.

According to a press report, William Buczinsky, who teaches the class wherein "The Old Gringo" is used, believes that "people in Latin America tend to use more references to sex and irreverence toward catholicism [sic] in their everyday language." It would be more accurate to say that the references are sexually explicit at best, and obscene at worst. It would also be more accurate to say that "The Old Gringo" is not treating Catholicism with irreverence, but with contempt. And since when was it considered anything but a slam on Hispanics to say that their literature is known for the liberties it takes with Catholicism, especially given the fact that Catholicism is the most commonly practiced religion in Latin America?

It is also interesting to read that in the responses offered by the Grimsley Site-Base/Media Advisory Committee, it was reported by one member that it is the business of Guilford County Schools Board of Education policies "to provide various points of view about issues, including those considered to be controversial—Many people will believe that the Catholic Church acted improperly in the colonization of Mexico and the U.S."

Books that defame Judaism are surely controversial as well, but no one who defends "The Old Gringo" would dare defend a Jew-baiting book on the grounds that the author has been well-received in some quarters. Perhaps more important is the incredible ignorance of this committee member: exactly

what historical evidence is there to support the charge that the Catholic Church colonized Mexico and the U.S.? If this is being taught in the schools, then there is more than anti-Catholicism at work, there is academic malpractice as well.

There are some who say that "The Old Gringo" can be defended because students can opt not to read it. But this is disingenuous: objections to the book are not relieved because the target audience of its offense, namely Catholics, may choose not to read it. A book that offended African Americans would not be selected with the proviso that blacks could choose to read something else. It simply would not be chosen.

The most responsible course of action would be for all those involved in the choosing of "The Old Gringo" to decide on another book by a talented Hispanic writer. At the very least, a statement to the students in their outline reporting that many Roman Catholics find "The Old Gringo" offensive to their religion should be approved by school authorities. Moreover, it would be a useful pedagogical exercise to discuss why Catholics feel this way. Not to do so would be to invite all students to think that anti-Catholicism is an acceptable "perspective."

It is amazing that those who would censor a book that taught the merits of Catholicism—funded with public monies—have no problem defending a book that maligns it. With public monies!

Just recently, Northern Kentucky University had the courage to stop an artistic exhibition that assaulted Catholicism. It would be refreshing to learn that the high school educators in North Carolina exercised the same courage in dealing with this issue.

Sincerely,

William A. Donohue

President

cc: School Board Members; Dr. Mike Priddy; Robin Bergeron

On September 26, Dr. Donohue received a letter from Dr. Weast stating that "You have presented interesting and valid points and I will forward your correspondence to appropriate school personnel for their review and consideration." The league is waiting to see whether Donohue's "valid points" will be validated by the school board.