

MILITANT ATHEISM UNLEASHED

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When I spoke to a reporter from Providence about a play that mocked the Eucharist, I unloaded. Fortunately, he listened to me explain the source of my anger. "Because this is the fourth incident this summer of someone playing fast and loose with the Eucharist," I told him. He understood.

The first incident occurred when *Washington Post* religion editor Sally Quinn decided she would show how much she cared about the late Tim Russert by doing something she hated to do—receive Communion; Quinn is not Catholic. The second incident was worse: a brazen student from the University of Central Florida walked out of Mass with the Eucharist to protest some innocuous school policy. The third was obscene: University of Minnesota Professor Paul Z. Myers desecrated a consecrated Host to protest my criticism of the Florida student. So when the reporter called to ask why I was unhappy with some woman who decided to mock the Eucharist in a play, he touched a raw nerve.

For fifteen years I have been president of the Catholic League, and never have I seen such a series of assaults on the Eucharist. What's going on? And what accounts for the total failure of the University of Minnesota to hold Myers accountable?

What's going on is that militant atheism is all the rage. Books by Richard Dawkins (a personal friend of Myers who lies about me the same way Myers does), Sam Harris, Daniel Dennett and Christopher Hitchens have all sold well, and what they are selling is hate. Hatred of religion in general, and Christianity in particular. The bulls-eye, of course, is Roman Catholicism. I'll give them this much: At least the religion bashers are smart enough to know who's on top.

What these authors do is embolden their base. To be specific, they energize atheists to be more in-your-face about their convictions, the result of which is an agenda to attack Catholicism. And what better way to do so than by trashing the Eucharist? This may not explain what Quinn did, or for that matter what the Florida student and the playwright did, but it sure explains Paul Z. Myers' boldness.

The sick climate that these zealots have created could not have succeeded without a little help from their friends. In the case of Myers, that means the administrators at the University. They had several options available to them, and they passed on every one of them. Predictably, they hid behind academic freedom, claiming they were impotent to do anything about Myers' off-campus behavior.

This is utter nonsense, and I will prove it right now: Does anyone believe that the University of Minnesota would do absolutely nothing about a white professor who packed them in at a local comedy club on weekends doing his racist rendition of "Little Black Sambo"? Would the very same administrators plead helplessness about a professor who spoke to community groups off-campus about the mythology of the Holocaust?

Lest anyone not be convinced, need I remind you that Larry Summers was driven out of his job as president of Harvard University for remarks that radical feminists found objectionable. It cannot go unsaid that Summers' comments were made off-campus. Moreover, when Summers spoke, it was made explicitly clear that he was not speaking as president, but as an academic. But that didn't matter to the ever-tolerant ones on the faculty—he offended them because he disagreed with them, and that was enough to get him kicked out.

Academic freedom was instituted to protect contrarian professors from being hounded out of the academy for challenging the conventional wisdom on a particular academic subject. It was not instituted to protect hate speech. Myers

is free to say whatever he wants about his specialty, which is zebrafish, but he has no moral right to assault the sensibilities of any religious group. So what should the administrators have done?

At the very least, the president should have convened an assembly, with members of the press invited, to unequivocally condemn what Myers did. Even if what Myers did was outside the purview of the president's authority, there was nothing stopping him from holding such a forum. And there was certainly nothing stopping the chancellor of the Morris campus from doing the same. She was actually worse—she tried to play both sides of the street.

As I said to Ray Arroyo, this may not be over yet. Over the summer, Myers' personnel file ballooned: everything that happened regarding this issue is in it. Which means that he'd better be careful about bringing his religious bigotry to bear in the classroom. If just one Catholic student complains that he is being treated unfairly because of his religion, Myers will have to answer.

Because of the hate-filled milieu that Myers and his ilk have created, all kinds of copy-cats have come forth. Some have put videos of themselves up on the Internet. They all go after me big time, and that is as it should be. They know who the enemy is, and for that I am eternally grateful.