

NEW YORK TIMES EXPLOITS SMITHSONIAN ISSUE

On January 26, there was a front-page article in the *New York Times* Arts Section regarding the video that was pulled by the Smithsonian after a Catholic League protest. It was remarkable on several fronts.

To begin with, by publishing a large still from the ants-on-the-crucifix video, the *New York Times* helped to convince the public that our protest was justified. Most people, certainly most practicing Christians, do not want their money going to fund venues that exhibit such fare. Moreover, it is clear that those who label this stuff “art” have lost all powers of discernment. As such, we reasoned, they should pay for their leisurely pursuits on their own dime.

The reporter, Michael Kimmelman, accused Bill Donohue of embarking on an “awfully well-choreographed pas de deux to rekindle the culture wars.” He pointedly commented that Rep. John Boehner, now the Speaker of the House, and Rep. Eric Cantor, “capitalized on Mr. Donohue’s protest” by registering their own complaints. Because this was allegedly choreographed by Donohue, in Kimmelman’s mind this surely smacked of a conspiracy.

But had Kimmelman bothered to call Donohue, he would have learned that the Catholic League president has never met, nor spoken to, Rep. Boehner or Rep. Cantor. This entire controversy started when Donohue fielded a phone call at home on a Monday night from a reporter for the *New York Post* who asked his opinion of the vile video. The next day, Donohue saw the video online and put out a statement.

Kimmelman also accused Donohue of feigning outrage, citing the Catholic League 1999 protest of the “Sensation” exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum of Art as another example. He said Donohue engaged in the “same paroxysm of orchestrated grief over a work combining an image of the Virgin Mary with elephant dung,” mentioning how our protest was joined by Mayor Rudolph Giuliani. It was telling how the reporter failed to mention the pornographic cutouts that adorned the painting. At any point, it was interesting to learn that Kimmelman claims to

know Donohue's motive, yet cited no evidence for his conjecture.

The arrogance of Kimmelman, which is quite common in the artistic community, came shining through. After unfavorably comparing the United States to Britain, he says that in America, there is "the presumption that *ordinary taxpayers* have a right to intervene via their political representatives in curatorial affairs because museums get tax breaks." [Our *italic.*]

Kimmelman should know that museums don't get tax breaks—they get money from those "ordinary taxpayers." The term "ordinary" is a give-away: Kimmelman looks down his nose with contempt at the average American. Why? Because, like their friends in the professoriate, the artistic community feels unappreciated. They also exude anger at those who would dare challenge their competence. They believe they are entitled to the taxpayers' money, and that it should be a one-way street: the "ordinary taxpayer" is too stupid to pass judgment on what qualifies as art, and that is why people like Kimmelman should be entrusted to make such determinations.

Kimmelman is hardly alone in never once showing any interest in why Christians might reasonably be offended by this "art." Indeed, there were protests and forums galore, on both sides of the Atlantic, on this controversy, but never once did we read about any artist who stood up and said, "Maybe we should try to look at this from the perspective of a practicing Catholic."

Instead, all we heard is how *we misinterpreted* the video. But if motive counts, then the artist, as we have seen, could easily be indicted for intentionally attacking Christians; he had a particularly disturbing track record of promoting hate speech.

What was really hard to read was Kimmelman's characterization of the artist, David Wojnarowicz, as a man who wielded a cudgel to "fight bigots." Is that what he was doing when he made a video showing Jesus' head exploding? Was he also fighting bigotry when he called John Cardinal O'Connor a "fat cannibal," and labeled the Catholic Church a "house of walking swastikas"?

Much of the sympathy for the bigoted artist stems from homosexuals—not a small segment in artistic circles.

Wojnarowicz died of AIDS. Donohue did not shy away from addressing this issue. "Had he followed the teachings of the Catholic Church on sexuality," he said in a news release, "he would be alive today. Instead, he blamed the Church."

Kimmelman was confronted by Donohue directly: "It was not the Catholic Church that killed the artist, David Wojnarowicz: it was gay activists, many of whom are in the artistic community. They were the ones who demanded that the bathhouses be kept open, even as their brothers were dying left and right. To exploit this tragedy any longer is sick. Catholicism is the answer, not the problem."

It all comes together in the end. The same people who do not take responsibility for their own personal behavior, and expect the taxpayers to fund research that might establish a cure for their behaviorally induced diseases, expect the taxpayers to underwrite their work absent any voice in how the money is to be spent. This is narcissism on steroids.