

# OKLAHOMA OFFICIALS ADDRESS FLAP AT ROGERS STATE

In June, Oklahoma Governor Frank Keating, along with state lawmakers and education officials, jumped into the fray at Rogers State University. The school came under fire by the Catholic League for offering an art appreciation telecourse that features anti-Catholic imagery. The resulting media fanfare, which hit big in the Sooner state, led public officials to get involved.

The league went directly to the Oklahoma media after learning of a depiction of “a Madonna with an exposed potbelly dragging a cross into a religious ceremony being led by a priest with two Devil’s horns”; cannibalism was also shown. The video is from the “Temple of Confessions” segment in an art series titled, “A World of Art: Works in Progress.”

We responded by writing to the two governing boards of Rogers State University asking them to consider the appropriateness of this telecourse. The Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education and the Oklahoma Board of Regents exercise considerable authority over this public institution and therefore have an obligation not to violate the public trust. “Surely there can be no public interest in using public monies to assault the sensibilities of minority groups,” we said, “and that would certainly include Oklahoma Catholics.”

We also contended that it was a perverse use of public funds to pay for a course that was designed to counter the prejudicial attitudes that some whites harbor against Latinos, and then bash Catholics in the process. “If there were a course designed to check anti-Semitism that featured art that offended Native Americans,” we countered, “everyone would see the hypocrisy in a New York minute.”

The Catholic League was pleased with the forthright response of Governor Keating. He wrote to us explaining that he is in the process of obtaining a copy of the video, adding that "I do not believe state institutions should be in the business of broadcasting patently offensive material of any kind." We also heard from state representative Kevin Calvey who promised to take a serious look at the matter.

As for Rogers State, the school fell back on the tired excuse of academic freedom. That there is such a thing as academic responsibility seems to be forgotten. The league has explicitly asked the State Regents "to get beyond legalisms" and do what is right.