

PENN STATE GETS WORSE

In the January-February edition of Catalyst, we reported on an incredibly vulgar and blasphemous piece of student "art" at Penn State. The work in question was a huge man-made bloody vagina, adorned with human hair, with a statue of Our Blessed Lady placed inside; created in the shape of a grotto, this was displayed on the grounds of the campus by the offending student. After Catholic students complained, it was removed by the student.

The league let Dr. Graham Spanier, the president of Penn State, know just how angry it was at this flagrant abuse. And Dr. Donohue brought this incident to national attention by mentioning it on the CNN show, Crossfire. Catholic League members responded with vigor by writing to Dr. Spanier about this matter.

Because the initial response of the university was unsatisfactory, the league continued to press its case. In a letter to Donohue on February 17, Dr. Spanier indicated that remedial action had been taken to prevent similar abuses in the future and that he was entirely "sympathetic" with the league's concerns. But no sooner had the letter arrived when the same student struck again.

The female student who is responsible for all this (she is alleged to be Catholic) has now displayed more of her creativity in an exhibition entitled, "Twenty-Five Years of Virginity." On display at the Zoeller Gallery of the School of Visual Arts at Penn State is her five by five matrix of panties in various colors with a cross stitched on the crotch.

What makes this all the more outrageous is that her work is part of a jury exhibition under the tutelage of Jim Stevenson, the Director of Visual Arts; he reports to Dean Neil Porterfield, the person who president Spanier said would be

contacting the league about the first case, but never did. The student's contribution was scheduled to be on display until March 23.

The university's response to this latest incident shows just how callous the school is to Catholics. Dr. James B. Stewart, Vice Provost for Educational Equity, has said of the Zoeller display that "while there are perhaps two pieces that express criticism of religion, two other pieces express very positive views of religious life." He concluded that "taken together, the exhibit was balanced."

But since when is it acceptable to "balance" indecency with decency? Imagine if this were some other religion and a vulgar attack on it were "balanced" with a admirable display? Would Dr. Stewart consider the case closed?

Even worse is the reaction of the Staff of the Penn State Catholic Community, anchored by its director, Rev. Frederick Byrne. Father Byrne, while professing "deep unhappiness" with the offending student's behavior, nonetheless wrote to Dr. Stewart saying "our Community is not suggesting that the artist's intention was to be offensive." He also wrote to president Spanier assuring him that he did not think that the university was anti-Catholic.

The Catholic League considers this latest assault to be unconscionable, especially since it has occurred under the auspices of the university. The league will take its complaint to the public, to the university's trustees, to the accrediting body of the school and to state legislators who vote on funding for Penn State. We encourage our members to write directly to the following individuals.

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