

PRINCETON HOSTS ANTI-CATHOLIC ART

Princeton University showed that despite its public declarations against bigotry, it makes an exception when it comes to anti-Catholicism. This is one form of prejudice it has no problem tolerating. Indeed, it even sponsors it.

“Ricanstructions” is an art exhibit by Juan Sanchez that was sponsored and hosted by the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University this past spring. Included in the exhibit was a display called “Shackles of the AIDS Virus,” a 1996 work by the artist that features such devotional items as scapulars and images of the Virgin Mary arranged in a circle. Another display showed naked female torsos arranged in the shape of a cross; it was labeled “Crucifixion No. 2.” And there was a display of torn up images of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Many students expressed their objections to university officials, including the school’s dean, Anne-Marie Slaughter. But she defended the exhibit by claiming, falsely, that it was shown at a Catholic school, St. Bonaventure University. While she said she was sorry that the exhibit has “caused pain for some of our students and faculty,” she maintained that it was proper to allow works that “have educational value.”

One faculty member, Dr. Robert George, confronted Dean Slaughter on this issue. Dr. George is a member of the Catholic League’s board of advisors and one of the most brilliant Catholic scholars in the nation. Slaughter is no match for George. He got her to admit that a display that offended Islam wouldn’t be tolerated on the campus. But she still defended the anti-Catholic art for its alleged “educational value.”

On May 30, we were contacted by three Princeton students—one Catholic, one Protestant and one Jewish. They wrote a sober yet impassioned letter registering their outrage. In a press release, William Donohue said of the students, “They deserve a serious response and it should come from Princeton President Shirley Tilghman.”

Donohue also corrected the record. The offensive display Princeton hosted was not part of the St. Bonaventure exhibit. “Ricanstructions” is the generic name of the artist’s work; the displays under that name vary widely. We received confirmation of this from an official at St. Bonaventure.

“More important,” Donohue continued, “is Dean Slaughter’s comment that ‘some’ students and faculty have experienced pain at the display and that it is nonetheless of ‘educational value.’” He then challenged her to a debate: “I would like to have her explain to me, in a public forum on the campus, whether she considers it problematic that only some students and faculty are offended. Are there some who take delight in it? If so, what is she prepared to do about it? Also, it would be instructive for her to educate me on the educational value of hate speech. I have put my request in writing to her.”

In response to Donohue’s letter and news release, Dean Slaughter sent him a copy of the same statement she had previously sent to the press. In the meantime, the national media picked up the story, giving Princeton bad publicity. On June 2, producers of the MSNBC TV show, “Scarborough Country” (hosted by Joe Scarborough), called Donohue asking if he would appear on TV that evening to debate someone from Princeton. He agreed. When no one would go on, the producers called asking Donohue to give them another day to try to find someone. He agreed.

On June 3, Donohue appeared on “Scarborough Country.” But no one from Princeton would go on against him, so a controversial artist who had nothing to do with the offensive Princeton

exhibit was on against him. In his opening remarks, Donohue said, "The people at Princeton have already admitted they wouldn't do this to the Islamic religion. Why is it okay, then to have open season on Catholics?" Donohue added, "And indeed, if these great free speech enthusiasts at Princeton University were worth their salt, why aren't they on the show right now to debate me?"

Following the show, Donohue answered Slaughter in a letter. Here is what he said:

"Your statement is unpersuasive: I still need to be enlightened about the educational value of hate speech. But I take it you have no more interest in debating me at Princeton on this subject than you did in showing up to debate me Tuesday night on the MSNBC show, 'Scarborough Country.' For the record, the Sanchez exhibit at St. Bonaventure was not identical to the objectionable one shown at Princeton. To verify, please call Suzanne English, Director of Media Relations at St. Bonaventure; she can be reached at 716-375-2376."

Donohue sent a copy of the letter to Princeton President Tilghman. No one responded.