

PUNISHING BIGOTED SPEECH ON CAMPUS



Bill Donohue comments on the decision by the University of Oklahoma to expel two fraternity students for making racist comments:

Racist speech on campus is unacceptable and should be addressed by administrators. But does it warrant expulsion? If it constitutes a “clear and present danger,” it should. For example, consider a racist speaker who gins up a crowd of supporters on campus, and then spots a few persons of the opposite race. Next he urges the crowd to attack them, and they do. That is not protected speech: it is an incitement to riot.

This analogy is not even close to what happened in Oklahoma. To be sure, two freshmen were on a bus acting irresponsibly, but no one was even remotely threatened by their speech. To expel them for speech that is merely objectionable, but not threatening, is more than problematic—it calls into question the rank duplicity of college administrators that is commonplace on campuses across the nation.

Anti-Catholicism is tolerated on campuses in a way that is not true of other expressions of bigotry. If anyone has any doubts about this, let him go to the websites of civil rights groups that represent gays, blacks, Jews, and Muslims, and then compare the findings to those found on the website of the Catholic League (check the Education section in our Annual Reports). Patently anti-Catholic plays, artwork, comments by instructors, cartoons, editorials, etc. abound. From professors who intentionally desecrate the Eucharist to students whose idea of art is to craft a huge vagina—in a

grotto-like shape (complete with human hair)—and then place a statue of Our Blessed Mother inside it—Catholics have had to endure more bigotry on campus than any other group.

In 1998, the anti-Catholic play “Corpus Christi” was performed in New York. I led a demonstration protesting it. Three years later when it was staged at a mid-western university, I again protested, but I also refused to join a lawsuit against the university.

In short, any discussion of bigoted speech on campus should begin by asking why anti-Catholicism is tolerated, but objectionable speech aimed at others is not.