

# Regent University Regrets Hosting Anti-Catholic Bigot

*But the Sponsoring Rutherford Institute Does Not*

On October 26, Regent University hosted Rev. Ian Paisley, the man most responsible for inflaming anti-Catholicism in Ireland. To those unacquainted with Paisley, he is a man who refers to the Vatican as "Harlot City" and the Pope as "the Antichrist." Invited by the student chapter of the Rutherford Institute (a Christian legal defense organization), Paisley spoke on "Religious Liberty: Its Role in International Politics." The student group is fully recognized by Regent but is not funded by the school.

Pat Robertson is the founder and chancellor of Regent University and is founder and president of the Christian Coalition.

The Catholic League issued the following statement on this matter to the press:

"Rev. Ian Paisley is, unquestionably, the most notorious anti-Catholic bigot in all of Europe. For decades he has provoked warfare between Catholics and Protestants in Ireland, even to the point of organizing his hooded Third Force para-military thugs. It is therefore outrageous that any American university would extend to Paisley the right to legitimize his demagoguery. Moreover, to ask Ian Paisley to speak on religious liberty is akin to asking Mark Fuhrman or Louis Farrakhan to speak on racial harmony.

"The most disturbing aspect of this affair is the nature of the school that is hosting Ian Paisley. In the November edition of the *Atlantic Monthly*, Baptist minister and Harvard theologian Harvey Cox describes Regent University as 'the intellectual and theological center of the Christian

Coalition' (Cox also notes the presence of anti-Catholicism on the campus). It is important, therefore, that the Christian Coalition condemn the decision to extend a forum to Paisley.

"It is doubly important that the newly-created auxiliary of the Christian Coalition, the Catholic Alliance, join with us in denouncing Regent's role in this affair. After all, the Catholic Alliance advertises itself as an organization that 'was formed this year as Christian Coalition's largest and most important affiliate to speak out against anti-Catholic bigotry....' That being the case, we anxiously await the response of the Catholic Alliance, as well as the Christian Coalition."

The initial response from Regent administrators was to defend Paisley's visit, though that was quickly reversed by the president of the university. After Paisley spoke, J. Nelson Happy, dean of the law school, offered the following remark to a reporter from the Associated Press: "I guess Ian Paisley wouldn't have been my poster boy for Regent University," adding that Paisley's presence "shows a maturing of the institution, a willingness to permit different opinions."

The Catholic League's objections to this event were taken seriously by the president of the university, Dr. Terry Lindvall, who was not on the campus when the incident took place. He apologized to Dr. Donohue and denounced the statement by Dean Happy. Dr. Donohue accepted the apology and this effectively ended the dispute between the Catholic League and Regent.

The situation with the Rutherford Institute, however, was quite different. On October 27, Dr. Donohue faxed a letter to Rutherford director John Whitehead asking whether he, personally, agreed with the decision of the Rutherford student chapter at Regent to sponsor Ian Paisley.

The Rutherford reply was written by Rita Woltz, their

Education Coordinator.

Never once did she criticize Paisley or the decision of the Rutherford student chapter to invite him. Instead, she took the occasion to defend the students by making a free speech argument.

In reply, Dr. Donohue said, "I find it absolutely incredible that as a lawyer representing a legal organization that you do not know the meaning of the term censorship. Censorship is something that *only government* can engage in, not private institutions. That is precisely why the First Amendment says that "*Congress shall pass no law...abridging the freedom of speech...*" He then proceeded to explain his position, challenging Rutherford to make good on its "free speech" pledge by inviting Mark Fuhrman or Louis Farrakhan to speak at Regent.

*The following article puts this incident in a wider context, raising some disturbing questions about Catholic-Protestant relations.*