

SMITHSONIAN HOSTS SERRANO

The Smithsonian Institute recently invited artist Andres Serrano to begin Hispanic Heritage Month. Serrano is most known for his artistic contribution of placing a crucifix in a jar of his own urine, an enterprise that was funded with federal money. Bill Donohue wrote the following letter of protest over this issue.

September 18, 1996

Mr. David Umansky
Communications Director
Smithsonian Institute
1000 Jefferson Dr., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20560

Dear Mr. Umansky:

As president of the nation's largest Catholic civil rights organization, I am outraged that the Smithsonian would invite Andres Serrano to open Hispanic Heritage Month at the Smithsonian. It is no secret that Serrano is most famous for his profoundly vulgar and anti-Christian work, "Piss Christ." Anyone who drops a crucifix in a jar of urine to make a statement obviously is not worthy of the honor that the Smithsonian has bestowed on him.

The Hispanic community does not lack for serious artists, and therefore the selection of Serrano strikes me as being not only offensive, but politically motivated as well. Serrano is known for his exhibitions involving dead animals, brains, blood and urine and now the Smithsonian finds him deserving of even more kudos. Had he dropped the Star of David in a jar of urine, it is doubtful that the Smithsonian would ever invite him to speak. So why the double standard?

You are quoted as saying that Serrano was selected "because

of the body of his work." But the body of his work is degrading and his only claim to fame is blasphemous. If this is your idea of multiculturalism, it is pretty sick.

What is particularly obnoxious about all this is that the federal government is actually giving legitimacy to bigots. First Serrano gets public funding for his assault on Christianity and now the Smithsonian gives him center stage. Yet if an artist were to reverentially treat a symbol held sacred by Catholics and Protestants, would he or she receive public funding or recognition by the state? No, then all we would hear is the chorus about church and state. Again, the duplicity is obvious.

I would enjoy seeing your response. Meanwhile, we'll let our members, the Congress and the U.S. Bishops know of the Smithsonian's quality of discernment.

Sincerely,
William A. Donohue
President

At press time, we still had not heard from the Smithsonian.