

SMITHSONIAN STILL DOESN'T GET IT

The dustup over the hosting of a vile video of ants crawling over Jesus at the Smithsonian, spilled over into the new year. There were several panel discussions in several American cities and in Europe discussing the decision of the Smithsonian to remove the video from the National Portrait Gallery and the role that the Catholic League played. But at none of these panels did anyone involved make any sort of genuflection that indicated they could see how some Christians were offended by David Wojnarowicz's video, "A Fire in My Belly."

At the Town Hall Los Angeles forum that was held recently, Smithsonian Secretary Wayne Clough had a chance to address the concerns of Christians, but he took a pass. Instead he defended the video as a "work of art." He did say that "there is a concern, absolutely," that the Smithsonian may lose donors because he bowed to our pressure and had the video removed. As usual, it is the cash that consumes these people. And who are "these people"? They are basically the same people that we dealt with in 1998 when the Catholic League protested the play, "Corpus Christi," and again the following year when we protested the "Sensation" exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum of Art: they are narcissists who worship at the altar of art. The artistic community is without doubt the most self-absorbed segment of the American society. They believe they have a right to pick the pockets of the taxpayers to fund their "art," but the taxpayers have no right to complain when their religion is assaulted.

"Corpus Christi" depicted Christ having sex with the apostles. "Sensation" showed a portrait of Our Blessed Mother with elephant dung and pornographic cutouts on it. "A Fire in My Belly" features large ants running all over Jesus on the Cross. Never have any of those who defended these masterpieces shown one degree of empathy for Christian sensibilities.

At the end of January, Smithsonian officials met and discussed the fallout over "A Fire in My Belly." Although they stood by Clough's decision to pull the video, they offered a few

recommendations thus creating a smokescreen.

"Culturally sensitive exhibitions should be previewed from a diverse set of perspectives," said the Regents Advisory Panel. What exactly does this mean? If a swastika is painted on a synagogue, should those who find it endearing be consulted? If "KKK" is plastered across a portrait of Rev. Martin Luther King, must those who can't decide if this is offensive be summoned for advice? Now imagine if there was a video of large ants running all over an image of Muhammad, would it be incumbent on Smithsonian officials to find someone who likes such fare? Would it change things if we substituted the crucified Jesus for Muhammad?

Speaking of the artist who made the video, the Smithsonian's John W. McCarter Jr., said, "I believe, in his mind, that [the video] was not sacrilegious." Did he happen to stumble upon Wojnarowicz's diary? Has he been channeling him? McCarter also asked us to consider the possibility that the video "might have been very deeply religious."

McCarter's subjectivism was unwarranted. We know some things about the artist, and what we know is that he branded the Catholic Church a "house of walking swastikas." So why is it so hard to connect the dots? Isn't it obvious the artist was a raging anti-Catholic bigot? Let's face it: if an artist offended Jews, African Americans or Muslims—as in the examples cited above—the artwork alone would be cause for censorship, never mind investigating any harbored prejudices he may have had.

If a man like Wojnarowicz can insult Christians the way he did, knowing full well his sentiments on Catholicism, and he is still given the benefit of the doubt—even to the point of entertaining the fiction that his video is "very deeply religious"—then it is obvious what is going on.