

ASHCROFT AND BOB JONES UNIVERSITY: MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

Senator John Ashcroft, who has been selected by President-elect George W. Bush to be attorney general, has come under fire for accepting an honorary degree from Bob Jones University. Catholic League president William Donohue explained the league's reaction today:

"Prior to George W. Bush's address at Bob Jones University last year, most Americans were unaware of the school's religious and racial philosophy. Once it was brought to light, Governor Bush expressed regret for leaving the impression that he condones bigotry of any kind, thus putting the issue behind him. Now the issue is back, and this time the focus is on Senator John Ashcroft.

"If Senator Ashcroft had accepted an honorary degree from Bob Jones *after* Bush's address, that would be cause for concern. But when he received the degree in 1999, the school was not under a national microscope and most people had no idea that it was anti-Catholic.

"If Senator Ashcroft had *defended* Bob Jones University once Bush's talk drew attention to the school's philosophy, that would be cause for concern. But just the opposite was true. 'I didn't really know they had these positions,' he said. 'Frankly, I reject the anti-Catholic position of Bob Jones University categorically.'

"Finally, Senator Ashcroft did the right thing by criticizing his senatorial challenger, the late Governor Mel Carnahan, when Carnahan sought to exploit the issue. Ashcroft pointed out that Carnahan received campaign donations from anti-Catholic groups such as NARAL; this group was active in the

'See Change' effort to downgrade the Vatican's U.N. status.

"In short, the controversy over Ashcroft is much ado about nothing as far as the Catholic League is concerned."