

TENNESSEE TECH PRESIDENT CHECKS BIGOTRY

As soon as we learned of an anti-Catholic event at Tennessee Technological University, Bill Donohue wrote to the president, Philip Oldham (and to the dean of students, Dr. Katherine Williams), asking him to take a strong stand against this ugly episode. The letter was written late in the day and was scheduled to be sent the following day. But late that night a statement by Oldham was released to the press denouncing the event.

"I do not feel the activities in the video represent Tech's values, and I do not condone explicit activity where minors are present. I am also offended by disparaging mockery toward any religious group." He went on to say that "As of now, all public events scheduled on campus by those sponsoring organizations are cancelled pending a review."

In response, Donohue wrote, "President Oldham has acted responsibly, which is why I am tapping the brakes. But Catholics should know what we were about to do." Accordingly, we released the following letter that was to be sent to the press the morning after Oldham's announcement.

September 9, 2022

Dear President Oldham and Dean Williams:

In my role as president of the nation's largest Catholic civil rights organization, I am charged with the goal of combating discrimination against Catholics and defamation against the Catholic Church. Sadly, an event took place this year on your campus, two days after the start of classes, that was flagrantly anti-Catholic.

On August 20, Upper Cumberland Pride presented "DRAG at the

Backdoor.” The drag queen show at the Backdoor Playhouse featured a performance by a man whose stage name is Witchcrafted (his real name is Joshua Lancaster) that was totally indefensible.

He came on stage dressed as a Friar, making the Sign of the Cross. He then proceeded to take off his religious garb, wearing what appeared to be a corset and striped tights. The YouTube video that is posted online shows young people, including children, throwing cash at him as he paraded about the stage.

Backstage Playhouse bills itself as an organization that fosters “creativity, critical thinking, excellence, and professionalism through the integration of courses, productions, workshops, and other activities.” Why, then, would it be home to an anti-Catholic event?

Nothing can be done to undo the damage already done to Catholic sensibilities. But it is not too late to see to it that it doesn’t happen again.

The next drag queen performance featuring Witchcrafted is September 24. It is being sponsored by TN Tech Lambda and Tech Players.

I spent 16 years as a college professor and 20 years on the board of directors of the National Association of Scholars. I have wide tolerance for academic freedom and artistic expression, but I also have no tolerance for those who abuse these rights by intentionally, and obscenely, insulting people of faith. I also object when children are being exploited by sexual activists.

Tennessee Tech is a state-funded university, and as such is expected to abide by the First Amendment. Chief Justice Warren Burger, writing for the majority in *Lynch v. Donnelly* (1984), said the U.S. Constitution “affirmatively mandates accommodation, not merely tolerance, of all religions, and

forbids hostility toward any" (my italics). That would seem to include trashing Catholicism the way Witchcrafted did.

Justice demands that Witchcrafted be disinvited from performing on September 24, and that this kind of bigoted stunt not be repeated by anyone. That way we won't have to revisit this issue again, opting for a different strategy.

I am copying senior government leaders so that they can monitor what happens next. I trust that this ugly chapter can come to an end now.

I look forward to hearing from you.