

# TENNESSEE TECH PRESIDENT CHECKS BIGOTRY

Catholic League president Bill Donohue explains why he is not going to contact Tennessee public officials about an anti-Catholic event on the campus of Tennessee Tech University:

Kudos to the president of Tennessee Technological University, Philip Oldham, for taking a strong stand against an anti-Catholic event that took place on his campus. I wrote the letter that follows yesterday afternoon and it was scheduled to be sent this morning. Now the only person whom we are contacting is the president.

The letter explains what happened and what we were planning to do. Oldham issued a statement that was posted last night on wsmv at 11:05 p.m. denouncing the event. Here is part of what he said.

"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."

President Oldham has acted responsibly, which is why I am tapping the brakes. But Catholics should know what we were about to do.

September 9, 2022

Dr. Philip Oldham  
President  
Tennessee Technological University  
1 William L. Jones Drive  
Campus Box 5007

Cookeville, TN 38505-0001

Dr. Katherine Williams  
Dean of Students  
Tennessee Technological University  
RUC, Room 230  
Cookeville, TN 38505-0001

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.

Sincerely,

William A. Donohue, Ph.D.  
President

cc: Gov. Bill Lee; Sen. Marsha Blackburn; Sen. Bill Hagerty; Members of the Tennessee House Subcommittee on Higher Education; Members of the Senate Standing Committee on

Education