

The Weed of Diversity Bears Bitter Fruit

By Nino Langiulli

From the classrooms of a taxpayer funded college in the state of New Jersey comes a report of a recent parody of the principles of academic integrity, academic freedom, and freedom of speech. We speak of words spoken and actions performed by a faculty member teaching a required course in the core curriculum of William Paterson College. The transmogrification of the first amendment right of freedom of speech into freedom of expression and the latter to flag burning and pornography does not readily prepare us for its next exquisite metastasis. Nor does exposure to logic textbook exercises in the fallacy of slippery slope arguments. Slippery slopes can and do occur in the moral and political order albeit not in the simplified and controlled world of the logic textbooks. Among the most slippery of slips on the slope has been that of academic freedom into freedom of speech – a slip made by many academicians. From the free speech movement at U. Cal., Berkeley, the slide has reached William Paterson College in Wayne, New Jersey. And the bottom of the hill has not been hit yet. Episodes abound whereby skeptics of the fallacy but not the reality of the slippery slope will even be able to predict, from the ground of their skepticism, what will come next.

With apologies to the citizens of New Jersey, we must wonder whether the soil of the academy there is rancid or not. For in November 1993 at Keane College in Trenton, we had the droppings of the former jailbird, Khalid Mohammed, leaching into the ground of the garden state – such droppings whose substance is anti-Jew, anti-Catholic, and anti-white. Mr. Mohammed, however, was at Keane College merely an invited guest whereas at William Paterson College it was a gen-u-ine

Professor who soiled the souls of black and other folk.

At any rate, in that soil the weed of diversity has borne bitter fruit. Dr. William Donohue, who is the President of the Catholic League, informs us at University Centers for Rational Alternatives that a certain Professor McClean is carrying on the noble tradition of the Reverend Louis Farrakhan and his faithful disciple, Khalid Mohammed.

The facts, so far as we have been able to ascertain them are these. On July 5, 1994, Professor Vernon McClean required all the students in his "Racism and Sexism in a Changing America" class to declare their religious affiliation on a piece of paper. Then in the course of his lecture, Dr. McClean alluded to the Reverend Farrakhan's description of Pope John Paul II as a "racist c_ s_ _ ." Without skipping a beat or blinking an eye (so open and casual has the level of classroom discourse become, thanks to the Free Speech Movement of 1964) Dr. McClean asserted that Farrakhan was right. The multi-pronged insult was aimed at the hearts of Karol Wojtyla, the man, John Paul II, the Pope, the Catholic people, the Catholic Church, and all decent people of good will. The shocking crudity of the remark is heightened by the casual manner in which it was made. Its setting – a college classroom – is no small memento of our public madness. Yet we would be foolish to deny the secret joy it will give to numerous hearts across America especially in such hallowed precincts as faculty rooms, Hollywood studios, and editorial offices. The snickers would be just too hard to smother. Honor and manners are as passe as the study of Greek and Latin.

When the mother of one of the students in the class learned about the episode, she wrote a letter of complaint to the President of the College, Arnold Speert. In a moment of enlightened governance which we have come to expect from college and university administrators, President Speert sent a copy of the parent's letter to Dr. McClean. The free-speaking Professor then engaged in some free-wheeling action. He copied

the parent's letter complete with her home address and distributed it to *his* students. So far as we know, no action has been taken either against Dr. McClean or President Speert. A statement released by Speert on July 27, "because of widespread publicity accompanying the complaint," declared that an investigation was completed and that "the College is satisfied that the matter has been resolved fully and completely." President Speert added that "the investigation itself was confidential, and no further specific information concerning the proceedings will be released." No mention is made about the other egregious aspects of the episode.

The statement has the appearance of administrative sophistry and a hasty dismissal of the serious nature of the events. With Dr. Donohue receiving several telephone calls from students, alumni, and even faculty members (*mirabile dictu*) on the extent of the bigotry and abuse of academic freedom at William Paterson College, the statement by the President does not appear to have resolved the matter "fully and completely."

If Dr. McClean is a tenured member of the faculty, then the other tenured members of the faculty should take the initiative and bring charges of professional misconduct against him. He acted improperly on at least three counts: he demanded a declaration of religious affiliation from the students; an act which is illegal even for the United States Census Bureau; he publicly insulted in a scurrilous manner the chief representative of the Catholic Church thereby abusing the principle of academic freedom (calling the Pope a c_-s__ hardly seems protected by academic freedom even in a racism and sexism course); he distributed to his class a private letter of complaint written to the President of the College by a parent of one of his students with a home address on it, making the parent vulnerable to attacks by mail and telephone.

If he is not tenured, he should be dismissed either at the end of the course or immediately. If he is an adjunct member of

the faculty, he should be dismissed immediately. President Speert should be investigated by the Chancellor of Education of the State of New Jersey and, if found also to have acted unprofessionally, then he too should be relieved of his duties.

A significant feature of this exercise in multicultural education is that the course is part of the core curriculum of William Paterson College and is, therefore, required for all students. It has often been said that courses such as these are in the interests of bringing harmony between the races and sexes. The objections of skeptical but prudent critics of these courses or orientations, foundations, politicians, and even corporate business executives (the purported tough-minded experts on the “real” world). These proponents maintain that the institutions of higher education must be the instruments of social transformation and the training grounds for currently fashionable skills rather than the institutions for the study of the arts, the sciences, and the humanities. Ideological courses in racism and sexism are what we get. If the diverse multiculturalists say that the situation at William Paterson College is “anecdotal” or “idiosyncratic,” they are lying in the way proponents of such courses have learned to engage in subterfuge for several years now. If they say that courses such as these are not becoming the focus of the core curriculum, they lie again, counting on their successful past deceptions as well as the academy’s penchant for smug self-deception.

It is time once again to give a wake-up call to honest members of the academy and interested citizens. How long are we going to let the educational predators have their way? Indeed if honest citizens inside and outside the academy do not act soon, it will become ever more evident that the sign hanging over the door – the sign from which we shield our eyes – says: “*Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch’ entrate!*” (Abandon all hope you who enter here).

Dr. Langiulfi is professor of philosophy at St. Francis College in Brooklyn and associate editor of Measure, the journal of the University Centers for Rational Alternatives.