

# VANDERBILT DODGES A BULLET

*The following letter by Catholic League president Bill Donohue to the president of Vanderbilt explains why the university dodged a bullet.*

September 22, 2022

Dr. Daniel Diermeier  
Chancellor  
Vanderbilt University  
211 Kirkland Hall  
Nashville, TN 37240

Dear Chancellor Diermeier:

In my role as president of the nation's largest Catholic civil rights organization, it is my responsibility to combat anti-Catholicism wherever it exists.

An incident allegedly occurred on your campus that was brought to my attention; I was about to address it when I learned that it had just been resolved. No matter, what allegedly was said, by someone who is a professor of pediatrics and law, is so disturbing that it merits a response.

Let me begin by commending officials at Vanderbilt University for acting so quickly to reply to internet stories regarding what appeared to be a very serious threat to the conscience rights of those who work at the Pediatric Transgender Clinic. To be specific, I am referring to comments attributed to Dr. Ellen Wright Clayton regarding staff members who invoke conscientious objections to performing sex-reassignment operations.

"If you are going to assert conscientious objection," she is said to have commented to staff members, "you have to realize that that is problematic." She is also quoted as saying, "I

just want you to take home that saying that you're not going to do something because of your conscientious—because of your *religious beliefs*, is not without consequences, and should not be without consequences (my italics)." She then apparently told them that "if you don't want to do this kind of work, don't work at Vanderbilt."

The statement released by Vanderbilt on September 21 says, "Our policies allow employees to decline to participate in care they find morally objectionable, and do not permit discrimination against employees who choose to do so. This includes employees whose personal or religious beliefs do not support gender-affirming care for transgender persons."

This is an excellent statement. My only concern is why Dr. Clayton would think that what she allegedly said could ever be seen as legal, never mind ethical. One would think that someone in her role as a health law expert would know better. I trust she has been told that conscience rights are integral to religious liberty and must be protected.

Thanks again for the professional response to this incident.

Sincerely,

William A. Donohue, Ph.D.  
President

cc: Steven A. Webber, Chair, Department of Pediatrics  
Chris Guthrie, Dean, Vanderbilt Law School  
Ellen Wright Clayton  
Gov. Bill Lee