

Christian University Claims Unions Are Against Its Religious Mission



Hamilton Nolan

Filed to: HIGHER LEARNING 8/05/15 10:34am



Duquesne is a Catholic University in Pittsburgh with nearly 10,000 students. The school's adjunct professors would like to unionize. Conveniently, Duquesne does not believe Jesus would be in favor of that.

Adjunct professors across America tend to be poorly paid with little job security. Unionizing is one of the few things they can do to try to improve their tenuous positions. As Colleen Flaherty details in an excellent *Inside Higher Ed* story today, Duquesne's adjuncts have spent several years trying to gain recognition as a union, being opposed by the university the entire time. Currently, Duquesne is trying to convince the National Labor Relations Board that it should be allowed to block the union based on the school's religious affiliation. As if that is not bad enough

conceptually, the school also argues in a recent filing (first reported by *In These Times*) that it should be allowed to fire two adjuncts who have been actively trying to organize the union.

Inside Higher Ed explains the menace contained in a single footnote of Duquesne's argument:

Then comes the alleged threat: "Regardless, today Duquesne reserves the right not to rehire both professors and replace them with professors willing and/or better able to incorporate Duquesne's Catholic, Spiritan mission into their courses."

The note goes on to say that if [history of science professor Adam] Davis, for example, "improperly denigrated the sacrament of the Eucharist" because his textbook mentions transubstantiation (which it does), "Duquesne would have the right to take adverse action."

To be clear: Duquesne is arguing that is poorly paid adjunct professors should not be allowed to form a union in part because such a union might impede the school's ability to fire a history of science professor for teaching un-Catholic science.

Deuteronomy 24:14 says, "Do not take advantage of a hired worker who is poor and needy." Jesus added, in a footnote, "But please do anything to prevent poor and needy hired workers from organizing for their collective good, because the most important thing is maintaining a sufficient budget for the Duquesne men's basketball team."

Do not take advantage of a hired worker who is poor and needy: FB]



burlivesleftnut > Hamilton Nolan
8/05/15 10:42am



Do Catholic grade school teachers have unions? Or any christian school?
Legitimately curious.



benjaminlover > burlivesleftnut
8/05/15 10:46am



They sure do up here in Canada. Our teachers have pretty powerful unions, and our politicians know not to fuck with them. Untenured profs on the other hand? They get the short shrift here too.



ARP2 > burlivesleftnut
8/05/15 10:48am



Not really. They also tend to be underpaid compared to public school teachers.

Source: Grew up in NW of Chicago with lots of friends, family and neighbors attending or teaching at Catholic schools (until many were consolidated or shut down).



GeorgeGeoffersonLives > burlivesleftnut
8/05/15 10:48am



I'm not even sure it's about religion. Most private schools, religious and non-religious alike, don't have unions, mostly because they are usually small and independent organizations.



NewYorkCynic > burlivesleftnut
8/05/15 10:52am



I don't know if it's true everywhere, but the teachers at my Catholic high school in New York were.



Blown Didion > Hamilton Nolan
8/05/15 10:39am



I adjuncted at a Catholic university for seven years before landing a tenure-track job this past year. Adjuncting is dehumanizing, awful and unjust, and it is especially so when you're doing it at an institution that carries on at length about the Catholic values of "social justice."



The Noble Renard > Blown Didion
8/05/15 10:41am



I had a relative adjunct at Brandeis University and it was equally dehumanizing and the talk there was about the Jewish values of social justice.

So, yeah, adjuncting fucking sucks, no matter where, for no matter who.



benjaminlover > Blown Didion
8/05/15 10:43am



I imagine that in addition to being a union organizer (which, sorry but he's going to have to explain to my catholic-raised union-town ass how this is a catholic sin) I bet there's some tension in how they taught The History Of Science. That would be a nightmare to try to teach without insulting the catholic church.



Francois > Blown Didion
8/05/15 10:46am



There is talking and walking. That is why Pope Francis is disturbing so many conservative Catholics and institutions; he's arguing that its time to live up to Christ's teachings.



The Hammock District > Blown Didion
8/05/15 10:47am



Aw man, I've been adjuncting for a year and I'm gearing up for another cycle of hope and shame when the job lists come out this fall. I don't know if I have seven years in me.

I'll just go the Walter White route and cook/sell meth if things get really bad. But, surprise! My meth is green.



SweetJennieLee > Hamilton Nolan
8/05/15 11:04am



One of the main ways to lift standards for adjuncts would be to eliminate tenure and "tenure track." It has led to a France-like situation (in the overall job market, where employers are hesitant to hire full-time workers because they are impossible to shed once hired) where tenured faculty are so expensive and

entrenched that schools are limited in their ability to pay decent, full-time wages and benefits to the teachers who do most of the classroom teaching. Colleges and universities pay \$200,000 in wages and benefits to tenured professors who do little or no undergraduate teaching (and commonly, no “research” of use to anyone except their own circles) , leaving the scraps left over for the adjuncts.



caekislove-thereunion > SweetJennieLee

8/05/15 11:24am

Better yet, students should raise their standards and not tolerate paying \$10k a semester to be lectured by glorified grad students. Something like “no tenure = drop”.



The Gray Adder > SweetJennieLee

8/05/15 11:33am

\$200,000? Where do I sign up? I might actually be tempted to pursue a Ph.D. if I could pull down that kind of money.

Seriously, where are the professors on this board? Come hither and laugh derisively at Sweet Jennie here because she is completely full of shit. There’s a reason these people wear jackets with patched elbows, and it’s not because patched elbows look “scholarly.”



Rhacodactylus > The Gray Adder

8/05/15 12:02pm

Yeah, SweetJenny has no idea what responsibilities professors have or how they are compensated. These are just anti-higher-ed talking points/lies that get passed around committee meetings chaired by Republican legislators.



The Gray Adder > Rhacodactylus

8/05/15 12:12pm

This, and the main reason some people want to do away with tenure is so they can fire professors for whatever reason, including and especially their politics.



m9105826 > Hamilton Nolan

8/05/15 10:46am



Uhhh... it's been a while since I was in Catholic high school, but I'm pretty sure they believe in transubstantiation...



Cherith Cutestory-Chapman > m9105826

8/05/15 10:56am



I think their (stupid) point is a history of science professor talking about transubstantiation is not going to be talking about it in a positive light. Since, it's impossible, scientifically.

Catholic Church isn't against science. Many of the greatest scientific discoveries (like the big bang and our understanding of genetics) have been done by members of the clergy. But I think their stance here is that the science is separate from the religious stuff.

Not that I agree with any of their stance. It is bull shit.



m9105826 > Cherith Cutestory-Chapman

8/05/15 11:01am



Considering that transubstantiation is some kind of cannibalistic alchemy, I can't believe the church has held onto it for so long. Like... talk about things that immediately discredit all of your beliefs. I can understand some people believing that magical stuff happened thousands of years ago on faith, but to hand someone a shitty cracker and dime store wine and tell them that it is LITERALLY flesh and blood of some dead guy because a priest said some magic words and expect them to believe it is a stretch.



Cherith Cutestory-Chapman > m9105826

8/05/15 11:03am



It's the thing that separates it from Protestantism. They can't just ditch it.

And it's really not any different from believing Jesus walked on water or rose into heaven and all of that. If every religion began weeding out the crazy stuff there wouldn't be much left.



m9105826 > Cherith Cutestory-Chapman

8/05/15 11:09am



The difference is that those things supposedly happened in the past, and (logic aside) aren't independently verifiable. On the other hand, even a dunce can look down at the cracker in his hand and say "Nah, bruh; that's just a cracker." It's one thing to accept crazy as it's told to you. It's another thing to see something with your own eyes, touch something with your own hands, and ignore that because someone says you're wrong. That's a special kind of cognitive dissonance.



The Ghost of Cecil the Lion > Hamilton Nolan

8/05/15 10:41am



US Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2007: Catholic social teaching supports the right of workers to choose whether to organize, join a union, and bargain collectively, and to exercise these rights without reprisal

USCCB, 1986: No one may deny the right to organize without attacking human dignity itself

USCCB, 1986: All church institutions must also fully recognize the rights of employees to organize and bargain collectively with the institution through whatever association or organization they freely choose

Pope Leo XIII, 1891: The most important of all [workplace associations and organizations] are workingmen's unions



crispyduck > The Ghost of Cecil the Lion

8/05/15 10:51am



What the...then how the hell are these Catholics able to say this shit??



ARP2 > The Ghost of Cecil the Lion

8/05/15 10:52am



To add a few more:

Yet Pope John Paul II in his encyclical on labor, *Laborem Exercens* (1981) asserted the fundamental principle of “the priority of labor over capital.” While in actual fact capital has organized itself against labor in our society, John Paul II insists that capital exists to serve labor: “There is a need for ever new movements of solidarity of the workers and with the workers...The Church is firmly committed to this cause, for it considers it to be its mission, its service, a proof of its fidelity to Christ...”

...and we all know how “cool Pope” feels about unions.



Facebones > crispyduck
8/05/15 10:55am



Becuase they believe in Supply Side Jesus.



The Ghost of Cecil the Lion > crispyduck
8/05/15 10:58am



Most Catholic schools are now run by the same corporate mercenaries that run all the other colleges/universities.



BurnedAtTheSteak > Hamilton Nolan
8/05/15 10:40am



Of course Jesus hated unions. Clearly someone hasn't read the Parable of the Pinkertons, with its classic moral of “get fucked and stay poor, you dirty commies.”



Charityb > BurnedAtTheSteak
8/05/15 11:02am



What's funny is that even Allan Pinkerton himself support labor unions in his code of conduct:

“The Agency will not investigate [...] traee-union members in their lawful union activities; they will not report union meetings unless the meetings are open to the public without restriction...”

It's kind of interesting the parallels actually. When Pinkerton died his sons turned his agency into the number one union-busting tools of government and industry, leading to so many abuses that even Congress was forced to act to formally ban the government from using them at all. And the Catholic Church has a long history of supporting union activity, but individual Catholics apparently can go their own way on this issue (unlike, say, with abortion or contraception...)



Stenchofaburner > BurnedAtTheSteak
8/05/15 11:14am

Today I learned that there is a Dutch Christian cult operating in Greece who refuse to pay taxes because they claim "The Holy Spirit didn't instruct them to do so". I know this whole sentence sounds like something out of The Onion but I promise, every bit of it is real. Bonus unhinged rhetoric: their Facebook and their website (brace yourself for the Geocities throw back).



OMG!PONIES! > Stenchofaburner
8/05/15 11:28am

Except that that goes against actual scripture. Specifically, the part where Jesus, noting Caesar's face on a denari, instructs his followers to render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's.



dothedew > Stenchofaburner
8/05/15 11:33am

It seems like no one in Greece is paying taxes, so is the only difference that these guys are saying God has exempted them?



LordBurleigh > Hamilton Nolan
8/05/15 10:46am

Fuck American academe.

Signed: someone not on the tenure track.



Rhacodactylus > LordBurleigh

8/05/15 11:55am



Would it make you feel better if I told you that *we need you*? I work at a public, primarily undergraduate university, and our classes are so overcrowded that the listed course cap is typically exactly what the fire code will allow. The TT faculty are underpaid and (because there are no TAs or graders and the sections are overcrowded) they are overworked. Budgets are so thin that adding additional, potentially underfull class sections would break departments. Course offerings, and the associated adjunct hirings, have to be determined on a quarter-by-quarter basis, sometimes at the last minute.

All of this makes you feel like an exploited resource, I understand, but *we need you* to help keep our students on track in their programs.



story645 > Rhacodactylus

8/05/15 12:44pm



I'd ask if you're also at CUNY, but sadly I'm pretty sure the situation you're talking about is pretty consistent across the public uni landscape.



LordBurleigh > Rhacodactylus

8/05/15 12:47pm



Ultimately I imagine we're on the same general side here, but, yeah—I don't really care who "needs" me if they're not going to pay me a living wage. No student "needs" an instructor who can't pay his rent, bills, get medical care, etc. Which, fortunately, I can right now—at a very, very wealthy private university, where I'm doing the service teaching the TT faculty who make 2-3 times as much as I do (if not more) doesn't want to do.



Rhacodactylus > LordBurleigh

8/05/15 1:10pm



You are not obligated to accept my expression of solidarity, of course.

Good luck to you.





SpringSpring > Hamilton Nolan

8/05/15 10:43am

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs. But *more* blessed is a seven foot tall player who can sink a three point shot from downtown. Amen”.



GeorgeGeoffersonLives > Hamilton Nolan

8/05/15 10:42am

I’m surprised that this is coming from a Catholic university, quite honestly. I expect this stuff from backwater fundie evangelicals. They are shitting all over their mid-20 century social justice leanings.



Cherith Cutestory-Chapman > GeorgeGeoffersonLives

8/05/15 10:51am

Duquesne fucking sucks. It’s the absolute worst. And its students are the absolute worst.

They are just using their religion as an excuse. The Catholic Church for its many, many flaws has been pro-union for well over a century. The working class makes up the vast majority of Catholic membership in countries like the US. They’ve always been cognizant of that.



benjaminlover > GeorgeGeoffersonLives

8/05/15 10:52am

Many diocese never got any memo about social justice.



Cannikin_MK3 > GeorgeGeoffersonLives

8/05/15 11:03am

A Catholic university in *Pittsburgh*. People literally fought and died in the streets in Pittsburgh for the right to be in unions. We take that shit seriously.



FauxhemianRhapshody > Hamilton Nolan

8/05/15 10:39am

It's just really awkward since Christianity is against my religious mission.



caekislove-thereunion > FauxhemianRhapshody

8/05/15 11:25am



My blood god demands blood and it's a violation of my religious liberties for you to refuse to give blood to my blood god!!



FauxhemianRhapshody > caekislove-thereunion

8/05/15 11:28am



My nap god demands naps. So your blood god better be napping regularly, otherwise your blood god is violating my religious liberties.

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