

Georgetown Faculty Offended by Cardinal's Speech

by Tim Drake

WASHINGTON — A Vatican cardinal repeating Catholic doctrine during commencement exercises at a Catholic university does not seem a recipe for controversy. Yet when Cardinal Francis Arinze explained Church teaching at Georgetown University on May 17, students and faculty complained. One Georgetown theologian, Theresa Sanders, walked off Stage in protest during the ceremony. Sanders teaches such Georgetown courses as "Religion and Film," "Saints in Film" and the popular general-education theology course "The Problem of God." She did not return the Register's calls for comment.

"In many parts of the world, the family is under siege," said Cardinal Arinze in the section of his speech that appeared to have offended Sanders and students who walked out of the commencement exercises. "It is opposed by an anti-life mentality as is seen in contraception, abortion, infanticide and euthanasia. It is scorned and banalized by pornography, desecrated by fornication and adultery, mocked by homosexuality, sabotaged by irregular unions and cut in two by Divorce."

The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* reported that a letter protesting the speech was signed by about 70 faculty members and delivered to Jane McAuliffe, dean of the university's school of arts and sciences. McAuliffe, a specialist in Islamic studies, invited Cardinal Arinze, president of the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, to speak at the school's graduation ceremonies. In the only public comment made by the university, McAuliffe stated, "A number of students and faculty members have been in touch with me to express their reactions, both negative and positive, to Cardinal Francis Arinze's address at the college commencement [May 17]. As an academic community, vigorous and open discussion lies at the heart of what we do and there are many different voices in the conversation."

Ed Ingebretsen, a professor of English at Georgetown and an openly homosexual priest in a schismatic "Catholic" church, told Cox News that Cardinal Arinze's remarks seemed out of place during commencement. A professor at Georgetown since 1986, Ingebretsen offered a course in 1995 titled "*Unspeakable Lives: Gay and Lesbian Narratives*." "These things are exactly what he's paid to say," Ingebretsen told Cox News. "[But] it's a graduation; why he decided to do the pro-family thing no one seems to know."

Stephen Feiler, a 2002 graduate of the university, thought the speech was spectacular. "Cardinal Arinze's address was one of the finest that I've heard at Georgetown in some time," Feiler said. "While some were deeply offended by Cardinal Arinze's speech, Ex Corde Ecclesiae reminds us that a Catholic University must have the courage to speak uncomfortable truths which do not please public opinion but which are necessary to safeguard the authentic good of society." Cardinal Arinze also received support from the Archdiocese of Washington. "Here was a Catholic cardinal speaking about a Catholic topic at a Catholic university. It does seem appropriate," said Susan Gibbs, director of communications for the archdiocese. "His message was, 'Turn to God. Put your faith first.' That's a wonderful message for graduation."

Danielle DeCerbo was one of at least two graduates who walked out during Cardinal Arinze's Speech. "American Catholicism is kind of different from where Cardinal Arinze is coming from," DeCerbo said of the Vatican cardinal. "It seemed to me that he was associating pornography with homosexuals. I felt like it was an inappropriate thing to say at a graduation." DeCerbo, who identifies herself as a Catholic, currently works for the New York City Council. "I have worked for the past two years — as someone having a gay or lesbian identity — to offer services to all students at Georgetown," DeCerbo said. "Cardinal Arinze's comments weren't in line with the dignity aspect that the university is trying to integrate into the Georgetown experience."

Dean McAuliffe held a meeting May 23 in response to the student and faculty protests. According to 2002 graduate Feiler, who was in attendance, approximately 40 students and faculty were present. "Students are going to have a variety of opinions," said Patrick Reilly, president of the Falls Church, Va.-based Cardinal Newman Society, a national organization dedicated to strengthening Catholic identity at Catholic colleges and universities. "The major issue is the faculty. Faculty are coming out publicly suggesting that discussing Catholic doctrine doesn't belong at a Catholic university," Reilly said. "Even at Georgetown, which has a myriad of problems regarding Catholic identity,

we're not giving up on Catholic identity and surrendering to the mission statements of individual faculty members. Georgetown still has a mission statement that identifies it as a Catholic university. If faculty members have a problem with that, they don't belong there."

Copyright © 2003 [National Catholic Register](#)

Tim Drake writes from St. Cloud, Minnesota

Posted on StayCatholic.com