

Editorial

Publication's incendiary cartoons miss their mark

Available on campus, around the Eugene community and in a prison near you, the latest edition of *The Insurgent* student newspaper was intended to "provoke dialogue," according to the subscription's editorial. In the same vein as the *Oregon Commentator's* decision to print the 12 Danish cartoons that recently stirred global rioting and violence over depictions of Islam, *The Insurgent* decided to shock the community with the publication of 12 hand-drawn comics insulting Christianity.

Arousing dialogue is an admirable goal for any newspaper, yet *The Insurgent* staff is mistaken in many of their premises in printing these anti-Christian cartoons.

The Insurgent editorial indicates a desire to show Americans why the original cartoons were so offensive to the Muslim world. According to the editorial, "What is 'not a big deal' in the US (sic) is apparently a humongous big deal to others. Why should we assume it would not be?"

However, printing home-grown cartoons depicting Jesus on a cross/pogo stick or Jesus on a cross/hangliding apparatus are not inflammatory in the same manner as the anti-Islam cartoons, and therefore fail to produce the intended empathy from Christians to Muslims.

The comics printed in Europe (and later reprinted by the *Oregon Commentator*) were offensive and riot-producing because they touched on relevant religious and social issues, such as the notion that all men in turbans are terrorists and the very real problem of European discrimination and violence toward the Muslim community.

The cartoons created by *The Insurgent* were not only irrelevantly offensive (why should a Christian care that an amateur liberal cartoonist has drawn Jesus listening to an iPod?), they were printed in a nation where many citizens identify with some sect of Christianity and rarely experience the kind of widespread oppression felt by Muslims around the world. Trying to make an equal comparison between the Muslim anger toward European cartoons and potential Christian anger toward homoerotic Jesus cartoons printed in *The Insurgent* is a careless dismissal of why Islamic communities felt under attack because of the offensive comics. Unlike the Danish cartoons, *The Insurgent* drawings seem intended to simply incite controversy for controversy's sake rather than making specific social commentaries.

Interestingly, *The Insurgent* was not the only publication to respond to Danish cartoons by printing cartoons intended to provoke Christians. A student newspaper at the University of Saskatchewan in Canada published a comic involving Jesus and bestiality.

As *The Insurgent* itself has stated, promoting dialogue is one of the most important jobs of a newspaper. Nevertheless, rather than encouraging readers to discuss the shock value of publication decisions, the media should strive for an educated, civil dialogue concerning significant ideas and current events. If sparking outrage is truly a publication's goal, that newspaper ought to keep in mind that poking fun at the religious beliefs of the majority is inherently different from attacking an already oppressed minority.

A frog in his throat

O'Reilly takes a swing at Frohnmayer and misses

This just in from the Things We Wish We'd Said Department:

In response to Fox News commentator Bill O'Reilly's charge that University of Oregon President Dave Frohnmayer is "a disgrace" and "a coward who needs to be fired," Frohnmayer shot back, "Being called names by him is like being called ugly by a frog."

The only problem with using the bombastic O'Reilly and a frog in the same simile is the disservice it does to a defenseless amphibian's reputation. Be that as it may, we come not to bury O'Reilly, but to praise Frohnmayer for his appropriately balanced effort to condemn deliberately offensive cartoons published in a campus newspaper while trying to help the public understand the important free speech principles involved in the debate.

Taking a page from the Jeffersonian bible on free speech, Frohnmayer said, "The best response to offensive speech often is more speech." He quickly added, "I am strongly opposed to speech that makes individuals feel that they or their beliefs are unwelcome or belittled."

The Insurgent is not a university publication, nor is it university supported, but it does receive student incidental fees — \$18,349 for this school year. Those student fees have been mischaracterized by critics, including O'Reilly.

Let's be clear: The Insurgent should never have published the utterly reprehensible cartoons debasing Jesus. One cartoon depicted Jesus on the cross with an erection. Another showed a sexually aroused Jesus kissing a man. The decision to run a dozen gratuitously offensive

drawings and two related Christian-bashing opinion columns was the product of deplorable insensitivity and stunning immaturity.

But the U.S. Supreme Court also has spoken with clarity on the issue of the rights of publications and organizations funded with student fees. In a landmark, unanimous decision in March 2000, the high court upheld the ability of mandatory student fees to fund student services and activities. The court stipulated that these fees must be allocated without regard to an organization's viewpoint in order to protect the First Amendment rights of students.

There is an inescapable irony in the Christian outrage provoked by The Insurgent's cartoons and the international uproar over the caricatures of the prophet Muhammad that swept the Muslim world last February.

During the Muslim riots, critics never missed an opportunity to point out that such violence was virtually unthinkable in the Christian world, given Western traditions of religious pluralism and freedom of expression.

But the Muslim hysteria was designed to produce the same result as the pressure being applied to Frohnmayer by angry Christians: complete suppression of the offensive speech.

Frohnmayer is clearly appalled by The Insurgent's tasteless shenanigans, but he also understands that The Insurgent's shoddy wares aren't selling in the UO's marketplace of ideas. Protecting that marketplace from the myriad forces that seek to limit its inventory is one of a university president's most important jobs.

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**UO's true colors emerge
in Insurgent controversy**

I am still stunned that my little grievance kicked off a campus-wide movement garnering national attention from the likes of Bill O'Reilly and the lovable William A. Donahue. I have had a rocky relationship with the newly formed coalition Students of Faith since its inception, but regardless, I believe the members' hearts are in the right place. I am glad to see other students on campus care enough about respect and decency to combat the abuses by The Insurgent.

The Insurgent gets off from offending and insulting others, and the real shame is that their March issue squandered an opportunity to intelligently discuss Christianity. They provided us with pointless sexual images and a rant against Christianity that was full of factual errors and logical fallacies. Don't get me wrong, there is nothing wrong with debating the impact Christianity has had on society, but the ignorant, immature and arrogant content of the March issue only served to make people mad and offend people's deeply held religious sensibilities.

Something I have noticed that has reassured me of the sanity and goodwill of the University is that virtually no one has come out and defended the content of The Insurgent. Some have defended The Insurgent's legal right to publish with the incidental fee, but I have not encountered anyone who has actually defended the content of the paper. Students and faculty at the University seem unified in the opinion that The Insurgent's March issue was offensive, obnoxious and simply mean-spirited. The issue of legality is one that I raised and one that will be debated in the weeks and months to come, and whatever the outcome, I can say that I have a renewed faith in the University because of the unified reaction of disgust I have seen toward The Insurgent's March issue.

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