

*THE FOLLOWING OP-ED COLUMN APPEARED IN THE FRIDAY, JANUARY 25, 2019 WALL STREET JOURNAL BY ALEJANDRO BERMUDEZ. THE HEADLINE IS HARD TO TAKE—BUT IT'S A GOOD READ AND WE RECOMMEND IT TO YOU –*

### AGAINST COLUMBUS

In covering a mural, Notre Dame gives in to the far left's assault on Western history.

Father John Jenkins, president of the University of Notre Dame, announced Sunday that the school would cover a dozen murals depicting the life of Christopher Columbus. The murals' depiction of Columbus as beneficent explorer and friend of the native people hides from view the darker side of this story," he asserted in a letter. While this decision may give the university a brief respite from its critics, it will never be enough. Columbus may be the momentary object of hatred, but the real target is the Catholic faith itself.

What exactly is the dark side of the Columbus story? The facts do not add up to rash charges of genocide and murder made up by his critics. If anything, they reveal a man who was not perfect, but still ahead of his time.

Brown University anthropologist Carol Delaney has defended the explorer's reputation extensively, noting that his interactions with Native Americans tended to be "benign". And Bartolome de las Casas, the most outspoken defender of the Native Americans in the colonial period, also supported the explorer's intentions and motivations.

The colonial experience was often traumatic and certainly had its faults. But as a Peruvian-American of color, I still believe there is much to celebrate in how the Americas have changed over the past 500 years. As a Catholic I particularly value Columbus for bringing the first of many missionaries who showed millions of people the path of salvation.

Any reasonable analysis also must acknowledge that the indigenous was not perfect either. Take one example.

Human sacrifice was not unusual in my home country, as in much of the Americas. In what is now Peru, children were sacrificed by the Incas in a practice known as Capacocha. Should any positive depictions of the Incas be covered up in light of this heinous practice? Of course not. And those who hate Columbus and his legacy still must acknowledge that this indigenous practice vanished thanks to the advent of Christianity in our hemisphere.

The notion that indigenous life was perfect and that Western culture is the locus of all evil is as absurd as white supremacy. Colonial violence was terrible, but it was not the first violence encountered by Native American cultures. Beyond human sacrifice, tribal and civilizational conflicts existed long before Columbus set foot in this hemisphere. History is nuanced, and seldom does it present binary choices between pure evil and pure good. An academic institution should understand that and not cave in to an a historic understanding of the past.

In his letter, Father Jenkins mentioned Martin Luther King Jr. Apparently he was unaware of the irony: Tearing down Columbus monuments has been the work of hateful fringe groups in this country for decades. The Ku Klux Klan pioneered the practice, and antifa has taken up the mantle in recent years. This is the company that Notre Dame chooses to keep.

As Catholic universities across the U.S. have become more secular, many hoped that they would at least remain safe for Catholic ideas. But this incident raises a troubling question: If murals that portray Columbus bringing the faith to this hemisphere are not welcome at a Catholic university, what part of Catholic identity is?

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