

One Thought on the Stewart/Colbert Rally

Michael Sean Winters | Nov. 1, 2010 | Distinctly Catholic

I am not sure the rally last Saturday merits much more than a single thought. Maybe if I had indulged an extra martini or five Saturday night I could wax eloquent about the cultural significance of the event. In a culture dripping in irony, bring irony to the Mall just doesn't seem to me like a significant event.

I will, however, confess a worry, a worry that requires the reader to take a test. Quick, now, who is the President of Harvard University? Yale? University of Chicago? We all know Fr. Jenkins at Notre Dame because of his invitation to President Obama last year, but would you have known his name before that?

A. Bartlett Giamatti was the last university president who functioned as a public intellectual on the national stage. Today, the culture is shaped not by university presidents but by comedians like Stewart and Colbert, and entertainers like Glenn Beck who merely pretend to gravitas. And, university presidents are tasked primarily with fundraising. Is it any wonder that our culture has become more silly and supercilious when comedians replace professors as arbiters of the national ethos?

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