

April 7, 2009

Reverend John I. Jenkins, C.S.C.  
President  
University of Notre Dame  
460 Main Building  
Notre Dame, Indiana 46556

Dear Father Jenkins:

Today I write to add my voice, thoughts and opinion regarding your decision, as President of Notre Dame University, to invite President Barack Obama to deliver the commencement address to the May graduates of Notre Dame and to confer on President Obama an Honorary Doctorate of Law.

This decision has attracted a great deal of attention in the news media and I think rightly so. There is plenty of reaction, both negative and positive. As a Catholic Bishop, I join those who are opposed to this decision.

As one of the premier Catholic universities in the country, one dedicated to Mary our Mother (Notre Dame), I can see no justification for the invitation to speak nor the granting of an Honorary Law Degree to one who, with the power of his office, is pro-choice (death).

By both word (in the primaries), and now in action (signing a bill providing federal funding for stem cell research on aborted babies), and promising that in the future FOCA would also be signed and become law as soon as it crosses his desk, it is clear that President Barack Obama espouses and promotes a culture of death as opposed to a culture of life.

Under the pretext of so-called "freedom of academia", I believe Father Jenkins that you chose to sacrifice the Church's teaching concerning the sacredness of all life for the prestigious distinction of hosting the first African American President to grace your campus. On a Catholic campus, the dignity and rights of all life should be paramount. To invite and honor one who publicly promotes the death and destruction of infants to be used for stem cell research is in direct opposition to the position taken by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. No Catholic university should provide a

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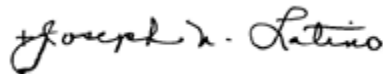
pulpit or platform to anyone who directly opposes and contradicts the Catholic Church's teaching on so vital an issue as the sacredness of all life.

In my opinion and belief, I can see no reason or excuse to justify your action. I ask you for what Law will Notre Dame recognize President Obama and honor him? Is it for the Law of Life or the Law of Death? The Catholic Church believes in the Law of Life and any college or university that claims the name 'Catholic' should and must espouse and defend life – all life – if it is indeed Catholic.

My fear, Father Jenkins, is that you have seriously damaged the name and reputation of Our Mother's university. I know you have compromised the unequivocal teaching of Pope John Paul II's *Evangelium Vitae* and the constant and clear teaching of the Catholic Church, both by our present Holy Father Benedict XVI and throughout the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

As a Catholic Bishop, I am embarrassed and ashamed of the regrettable decision you and the University have made. I pray that any damage done to the Church's teaching and the high regard that Notre Dame has had may, through God's grace and good will, be repaired and reaffirmed. Yours is a sacred trust – teach the truth in both word and action.

Sincerely in the Lord,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Joseph N. Latino".

+Joseph N. Latino  
Bishop of Jackson