

Is Notre Dame still Catholic?

by *Patrick Buchanan*

By inviting Barack Obama to deliver the commencement address and receive an honorary degree at Notre Dame, the Rev. John Jenkins has polarized the Catholic community nationwide — and raised a question. What does it mean to be a Catholic university in post-Christian America?

Are there truths about faith and morality that are closed to debate at Notre Dame? Or is Notre Dame like London's Hyde Park, where all ideas and all advocates get a hearing?

To Catholics, abortion is the killing of an unborn child, a premeditated breach of God's Commandment "Thou Shalt Not Kill." The case is closed for all time. Any who participate in an abortion are excommunicated. Catholic politicians from Nancy Pelosi to Joe Biden who support a "woman's right to choose" have been denounced from pulpits and denied Communion.

Obama, however, is the most pro-abortion president ever. On his third day in office, by executive order, he repealed the Bush prohibition against using tax dollars to fund agencies abroad that perform abortions.

He supports partial-birth abortion, where a baby's soft skull is sliced open with scissors in the birth canal and its brains sucked out to ease its passage, a procedure Sen. Pat Moynihan said "comes as close to infanticide as anything I have seen in our judiciary."

In the Illinois legislature, Obama helped block the Born Alive Infant Protection Act, a bill to save the lives of infant survivors of abortion. He voted to allow doctors and nurses to let these tiny babies die of neglect and be tossed out with the medical waste.

Barack is committed to signing the Freedom of Choice Act, which would repeal every federal and state restriction on abortion. He has smoothed the path for federal funding of embryonic stem cell research.

Notre Dame, a university that teaches that all innocent human life is sacred, will thus honor a leader determined to ensure that a woman's right to destroy her unborn child in the womb remains unrestricted.

There is thus a direct clash between what Notre Dame professes to stand for and what Notre Dame is doing.

Says Ralph McInerny, a philosophy professor since 1955: "By inviting Barack Obama to be the 2009 commencement speaker, Notre Dame has forfeited its right to call itself a Catholic University. ... (T)his is a deliberate thumbing of the collective nose at the Roman Catholic Church to which Notre Dame purports to be faithful.

"Faithful? Tell it to Julian the Apostate."

McInerny calls Father Jenkins' invitation to Obama worse than the "usual effort of the university to get into warm contact with the power figures of the day. It is an unequivocal abandonment of any pretense at being a Catholic university."

An honorary degree, writes Catholic author George Weigel, is a statement that here is a man we should admire and emulate. But how can a Catholic university say that about a man who means to appoint Supreme Court justices who will keep constitutional and legal the systematic slaughter of the unborn that has taken 50 million lives in 35 years?

Can Father Jenkins not see the contradiction here that renders Notre Dame a morally incoherent institution?

Diocesan Bishop John D'Arcy of Fort Wayne-South Bend has told Father Jenkins he will not be attending commencement because of Obama's support of embryonic stem cell research.

Said the bishop, "While claiming to separate policies from science, (Obama) has in fact separated science from ethics and has brought the American government, for the first time in history, into supporting direct destruction of innocent human life."

Pope Benedict has yet to be heard from. But on his visit to the United States, he declared that any appeal to academic freedom "to justify positions that contradict the faith and teaching of the church would obstruct or even betray the university's identity and mission."

Does not honoring the most visible pro-abortion advocate in America "betray the identity and mission" of Notre Dame?

Father Jenkins says the invitation "should not be taken as condoning or endorsing his positions on specific issues regarding the protection of human life."

But what Notre Dame is saying with this invitation is that Obama's 100 percent support for policies and programs that bring death to more than a million unborn children every year is no disqualification to being honored by a university dedicated to Our Lady who carried to term the Son of God.

Chris Carrington, a political science major, regards the opposition to Obama's appearance as un-Catholic: "To not allow someone here because of their beliefs would seem a little hypocritical and contradictory to what the mission of the university and church should be."

The obtuse Carrington has stumbled on the relevant question: Is Notre Dame still a repository, teacher and exemplar of eternal truths about God and Man, right and wrong, whose mission is to convey and defend those truths in a hostile world?

Or has Notre Dame joined the secularists in their endless scavenger hunt to seek and find truth in the marketplace of ideas?

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