

April 5, 2009

Rev. John I. Jenkins, C.S.C.
400 Main Building
Notre Dame, IN 46556

Dear Father Jenkins,

I was surprised and saddened when I learned about the invitation extended to President Obama to speak at Notre Dame's commencement exercises and to receive an honorary degree. Your statements in defense of the award and invitation have only deepened my dismay.

We know by science and reason that human life begins at the moment of conception. That includes your life, President Obama's life, my life and every human being's life. Faith enhances reason and science by revealing to us that every human being is created in the image and likeness of God and has inherent dignity and value.

The teaching of the Catholic Church on the dignity of human life from the moment of conception to natural death is fundamental to our Catholic identity. I know you are a man of integrity and believe in the Church's witness. I also know as a priest and a president of a Catholic University, you are well acquainted with *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* and the 2004 statement of the Bishops of the United States on "Catholics in Political Life." Even though President Obama is not Catholic, he clearly rejects the truth about human dignity through his constant support of a so called "right to abortion." He also tolerates the inexcusable act of letting aborted children die who are born alive. He promotes an intrinsic evil which must always be resisted by a just and civil society.

Inviting President Obama to award him a degree and to speak at a Catholic University implicitly extends legitimacy to his views on these issues in the minds of the average onlooker. Your actions and that of the Board of Trustees of Notre Dame do real harm to the mission of Catholic education in this country and further splinters Catholic witness in the public square. Your actions provide a forum for an advocate of abortion, in a university which is committed to teaching the truths known to reason and science, and most of all to our faith in Jesus Christ and the teachings of His Church. This places commitment to these truths on an equal plane with a commitment to an intrinsic evil which destroys innocent human life. Your judgment in this matter is seriously flawed, with damaging consequences, for "...you are not on the side of God, but of men" (Mt 16:23).

I know that many wonderful Catholic students, faculty and administrators at Notre Dame support the clear teaching of Jesus Christ and His Church. Unfortunately, your action and that of your Board diminishes the reputation of Notre Dame and makes one wonder what its mission truly is. I pray that you will see the gravity of Notre Dame's error in this matter and most especially how it undermines the Gospel of Life, who is Christ Himself.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Samuel J. Aquila
Bishop of Fargo