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# The Franciscan Legionnaire

Newsletter of the Friars Legion of St. Peter's Church in the Loop  
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## GOD, COUNTRY, NOTRE DAME

Yes, those words really are carved in stone at Notre Dame, above one of the entrances to Sacred Heart Church, or "Basilica" as it is now styled. When I was a student there this trio of words was most often spoken with a facetious tone or an ironic twist, but then irony was much in vogue in the early 70's and we wore that intellectual fashion of the day as if we had invented it. We were not much given to acknowledging, or even seeing, profundity of thought in the statements of earlier generations of Notre Dame men – these were the last years that the university was for men only – and so did not much catch that here, in remarkable balance and fascinating tension, was a hierarchy of values and a unity of feeling, a symphony of competing and interlocking loyalties, a center and a fulcrum where we might be still and still moving.

That's the kind of phrases we wrote into our term papers in those days, never noticing how lame our cleverness was alongside something like *God, Country, Notre Dame*. Words like that should be in stone. And yet in the spring of this year the solidity conveyed by that motto seemed to be replaced by division, as the controversy over President Obama and the May 17 graduation overtook students, faculty members, alumni, bishops, ordinary Catholics, and just plain interested citizens. Fr. John Jenkins, C.S.C., the president of the university, invited the U.S. president to come to Notre Dame and offered him the double honor of the commencement address platform and an honorary doctor of laws degree. Approve or disapprove of Fr. Jenkins' action, no one can deny that it both revealed, and added to, stress fractures inside and outside the university.

Polls and numbers can only take us so far, but they are suggestive. A Pew Research poll showed a clear majority of Americans and American Catholics approved the invitation. A Rasmussen poll issued the same week, however, told a very different story. The Rasmussen poll question began by quoting from the 2004 Catholic bishops' statement on Catholics in public life (see below) and then asked respondents whether, given this statement, they approved or disapproved of the invitation. Here the majority of Americans and 60% of Catholics disapproved, which suggests that many, maybe most, Catholics are unaware of what their bishops are saying about matters such as this. Notre Dame graduating seniors and faculty members were in the unique position of being able to vote with their feet, and they overwhelmingly supported Fr. Jenkins by attending the convocation, and by giving both him and the president standing ovations. The Notre Dame alumni were not nearly so supportive. An on-line protest petition quickly gained over 360,000 signatures. Then, as we will see, there was the reaction of the American bishops. So it is clear that there are lots of fences that need mending: between Notre Dame and the hierarchy, between the university and large sections of its own alumni, and within the general U.S. Catholic population.

How then did it come to this? If we want to understand a protest, it helps to listen to the protesters, and in this case there are three chief protesters: Professor Mary Ann Glendon; Bishop John D'Arcy; and "ND Response," the coalition of twelve Notre Dame student organi-

zations that planned and carried out the on-campus demonstrations of April and May.

Mary Ann Glendon, currently a professor at Harvard Law School, has served as a member of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, as the Vatican's representative to the 1995 U.N. Beijing Conference on Women, and as U.S. ambassador to the Holy See. She was a part of the controversy before there was a controversy. In December 2008 Fr. Jenkins chose her to receive the university's Laetare Medal, the highest honor that Notre Dame can bestow. She accepted and began work on her speech. In March 2009 Fr. Jenkins informed her that she would be sharing the podium with President Obama, who had accepted the invitation to give the commencement address. Apparently, Fr. Jenkins did not mention the honorary degree at this point. She indicated that she would remain on the graduation program, but she informed Fr. Jenkins that she would be rewriting her speech.

When the president's coming to Notre Dame was announced, all eyes turned to Mary Ann Glendon to see what she would do. A woman whose integrity and fidelity to the Church are unquestioned, she was urged by many who were already protesting Fr. Jenkins' action to reject immediately the university's award. For nearly a month she said nothing. Then on April 27 she wrote to Fr. Jenkins and released a copy of the letter to the public. "With great sadness" she informed him that she could not accept the Laetare Medal, nor could she participate in the May 17 graduation ceremony.

She gave three reasons for this. First, she was dismayed at the university's decision to award an honorary degree to President Obama, "a prominent and uncompromising opponent of the Church's position on issues involving fundamental principles of justice," which action was in disregard of the 2004 request of the American bishops. She cited the relevant passage of that document: *The Cath-*

*olic community and Catholic institutions should not honor those who act in defiance of our fundamental moral principles. They should not be given awards, honors or platforms which would suggest support for their actions.* This request, she went on to say, does no injury to academic freedom; Catholic universities are free to invite and engage in debate whomever they wish. An honorary degree, however, is, well, an honor, and a graduation ceremony is no appropriate forum for serious engagement or debate. All of this indicated that the university was not going to follow this reasonable request of the bishops.

Second, some statements by the Notre Dame public relations office made it clear to her that the university was using her presence at the graduation in an attempt to deflect the mounting criticism for its action by suggesting that she would somehow "balance the event."

And third, she was concerned that Notre Dame was setting a bad example, one that would have "an unfortunate ripple effect" on other Catholic schools, prompting them to disrespect the bishops' 2004 request just as Notre Dame was doing.

Turning from Professor Glendon to Bishop D'Arcy, we see many of the same ideas at work. The bishop of Ft. Wayne-South Bend also referred to the 2004 bishops' directive, stating that Notre Dame had obviously decided to ignore it. When Fr. Jenkins later objected that there was doubt and ambiguity in the 2004 document and that the university had not in fact acted contrary to it, the bishop responded with a letter that left no doubt as to the clear intent of the 2004 document. More tellingly, Bishop D'Arcy was not the only bishop to condemn the

university. To date over eighty bishops have publicly voiced their objections to the university's action and nearly all of them quoted the same two lines from the 2004 declaration.



Not a single bishop has voiced support for Fr. Jenkins.

Bishop D'Arcy has been Notre Dame's bishop for a quarter of a century and he clearly knows the school well. In a line from his initial web posting that must have made every alumnus smile, he gently suggested that Notre Dame ask itself if by its action it hadn't chosen prestige over truth. Notre Dame hungry for prestige? The place is ravenous for it. In my time I heard the complaint often of how this was really a great university but there were always two persistent obstacles to its getting the respect that it should have had. First, there was the success of the football team, for everybody knew that a truly great university is not, cannot be, a great football power. And then there was that Catholic identity thing, which always aroused suspicion in the faculty rooms of the country's top tier universities, as everyone knew that the Catholic Church laid down too many laws and curtailed too many freedoms to allow a really great university to flourish. Well. In recent years then, Notre Dame seems to have made great strides in resolving the football team success problem. Perhaps this year's contretemps will help a bit in the Catholic identity matter, too.

Important as the professor and the bishop were as protesters, the key people were always the students of ND Response. At the very start they made several decisions that set the course for the protest. First and foremost, they were crystal clear that this was not a protest directed against President Obama or his appearance at Notre Dame. Of course they disagreed with his positions on abortion, embryonic stem cell research, and other crucial life issues, but so did Fr. Jenkins, as the Holy Cross priest never tired of saying. That was not the point. The point of the protest was Notre Dame's action of honoring a person, any person, with Barack Obama's track record on the fundamental issues of life and justice. The protest was always aimed at Notre Dame, especially the university's leadership, and was a call to the university to stand up for its pro-life principles as vigorously as the president has stood up for his pro-choice agenda.

The students also decided that all demonstrations must be peaceful, respectful, and prayerful. And everything that they ran in April and May was. The problem, of course, was that they had no control over outsiders, like Randall Terry who came to Notre Dame with the expressed purpose of bringing "a circus" to campus. The media covered this. On graduation day, others gathered at the Notre Dame Avenue entrance to the campus with their signs and chants. The media covered them too. And there were the hecklers at the graduation. They made it on TV.

The ND Response events were quite different and the media gave them hardly a notice. In the era of the internet, however, we don't have to abide by the decisions of editors and network news directors as to what is newsworthy, and most of what happened Saturday evening and Sunday can be seen at [www.ndresponse.com](http://www.ndresponse.com). It is worth a look, a long look. Saturday night was a prayer vigil before the Blessed Sacrament, the which does not, admittedly, make for exciting viewing. On Sunday, however, there was a mass and a rally on the South Quad, and that was something else again.

There were a half dozen speakers, and it was less like a rally, and more like a teach-in. I especially recommend the speech by Fr. Wilson Miscamble, C.S.C for those who have an interest in the history of Notre Dame and how the current controversy flows from it. Elizabeth Naquin Borger and Lacy Dodd show what can be done if an institution wants to do pro-life and not just talk about it. Borger has run fourteen crisis pregnancy centers in northern Indiana, and in every county where her organization is active abortion rates have come down. Dodd has founded Room at the Inn, a program to support university students who have unplanned pregnancies so that they can have their babies and continue their education. She challenged Notre Dame to set up a similar program in South Bend, if it wants to get serious about putting its professed pro-life principles into action.

A great talk, sermon really, was given by Fr. John J. Raphael, S.S.J., an African American alumnus of Notre Dame, now principal of St. Augustine High School in New Orleans. He met

head-on the nasty innuendo that had been floating about that the opposition was motivated at least in part by racism, and also challenged the notion that you can reduce the number of abortions by making abortion more widely available and by funding it with tax dollars. And finally, there is Prof. David Solomon on the situation at Notre Dame, and why Notre Dame matters and is worth fighting for, even at this late date.

By the numbers, there were about 3,000 people on the South Quad, forty faculty members out of 950, and about forty graduating seniors out of a class of nearly 2,000. Everyone else was at the Joyce Center for the graduation. And I did not see a sad face that day. Not one.

Early in the rally the MC stopped things to report that Bishop D’Arcy had been spotted in the crowd, and he was asked to come up. He had been on campus at the start of the prayer vigil the night before, as announced, but his presence on Sunday was a surprise. He said that he had not intended to come to Notre Dame on graduation day, but his mind was changed by the students and prayer of the night before. I saw I had to be here, he said. John D’Arcy is not important, but the office of bishop is very important, and the place for the bishop to be today is with these students. In the past weeks, he continued, I’ve been saying that all this is too sad and there are no winners, but I was wrong – the heroes are the young people on campus who acted with love, prayer, dignity, and respect, but with firmness also as to what is the right – so there are heroes... and I am proud to stand with you.

Perhaps the best and only thing that the old can bequeath to the young is a good fight, a truly good struggle in something that matters, a fight that carries a person beyond the confines of a little, self-serving life into something deeper and more lovely. This is not over, however much some may claim that the fight has already been won by the pro-abortion camp. The life issues are not settled. This is that good fight, it goes on, and if it outlives us then that’s fine too.

—Fr. Bob Sprott, O.F.M.

**APPLICATION FOR YEAR-LONG MEMORIAL CANDLE**

*(Please print, leaving a space between each word.)*

To be lit in honor of: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Living\_\_\_\_\_ Deceased\_\_\_\_\_

Requested by: \_\_\_\_\_

Date candle is to be lit: Immediately\_\_\_\_\_ Specific Date\_\_\_\_\_

The offering for the Memorial Candle is \$150.00. Please enclose a check for the full amount with this form.

**APPLICATION FOR PERPETUAL ENROLLMENT IN THE FRIARS LEGION**

*(Please print, leaving a space between each word.)*

Please Enroll: \_\_\_\_\_  
 as a Perpetual Member of the Saint Peter’s Friars Legion.  
 Living\_\_\_\_\_ Deceased\_\_\_\_\_

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

OFFERING: Individual, \$25.00\_\_\_\_\_ Family, \$100.00\_\_\_\_\_ *(Immediate family, parents and children)*