

**Reflections of an Alumna Regarding
Recent Events at the University of Notre Dame**

<http://www.projectsycamore.com/pages/shearer.php>

(February 2005)

Note: Dr. Shearer's statement was composed prior to Father Jenkins's decision to allow the Vagina Monologues to continue.

For those of us who treasure the University of Notre Dame and the symbolism and Catholic truth the University has sought to exemplify since its founding, these past few weeks have challenged both the foundations of that affection, and, for many of us, the extent to which “tolerance” has meant abdication of our responsibility to uphold Church teachings regarding the beautiful gift of sexuality with which God has gifted mankind. We have been silenced by the intellectually shallow charges that questioning the appropriateness of showcasing a “queer film festival” at Notre Dame meant that we were homophobic. We have additionally endured the pornographic and undoubtedly vulgar assault on young women’s modesty aptly titled “The Vagina Monologues,” the objective of which is to contradict virtually every aspect of the Church’s teachings regarding both the sanctity of women and all that is beautiful regarding sex as an expression of love, commitment, and the gift of life which may result from this expression. Cleverly disguised across campuses nationwide within the context of protesting violence against women, “The Monologues” then proceed to inflict the worst kind of violence one can perpetuate against young men and women, who, while physically mature, are still in the process of moral and character formation. Specifically, it attempts to eradicate their sense of right and wrong and numb their consciences by the deliberate stripping away of any sense of propriety and modesty. Thus desensitized, one redefines moral truth, and all behavior which is physically gratifying in the short term and soul-killing in the long term becomes acceptable. Reduced to the level of animals that simply mate or self-gratify, God’s context for the gift of human sexuality becomes irrelevant. Moreover, both men and women are no longer elevated but debased, functioning simply as mammals rather than creatures with minds, hearts and souls that are meant to strive towards what is right, true, and purposeful regarding their creation.

One cannot improve upon Bishop D’Arcy’s beautifully crafted and theologically flawless position statements regarding the University of Notre Dame’s decision to host the Queer Film Festival, “The Vagina Monologues,” and the panel discussion which accompanied the latter. One can, however, point out other aspects of these decisions which warrant introspection regardless of whether one supports or does not support the University’s decisions to disregard the Church’s teachings in these matters.

In 2003, “Monologues” producer Eve Ensler and her cadre announced the targeting of 45 Catholic colleges for both the play’s production and its accompanying discussion groups and panels. People of reason ought well ask what agenda might have been behind her decision to do so. With no shortage of secular institutions available to showcase her

dubious talents, why the focus, -indeed insistence- upon inclusion within religiously oriented schools which, by their very nature, will thus have their theological perspectives degraded? Secondly, we ought well ask of the institutions which have chosen to allow “The Monologues” to be shown within their facilities who, specifically, has made the decision regarding the appropriateness of this performance on their respective campuses. The recent coverage of the Queer Film Festival indicated that its organizers had full administrative backing. Indeed. As a graduate of Notre Dame and the parent of two potential Notre Dame students, one wonders if this particular ship has a navigator and, if so, in which particular direction is he heading the vessel? Third, universities have missions, and those of us who are privileged to work within higher education have both a moral and contractual obligation to conform to the tenets of those missions. Let us examine some of the elements of the University of Notre Dame’s mission in its own words:

“The University encourages a way of living consonant with Christian community and manifest in prayer, liturgy and service... Notre Dame’s character as a Catholic academic community presupposes that no genuine search for truth... is alien to the life of faith... There is, however, a special obligation and opportunity, specifically as a Catholic university, to pursue the religious dimensions of all human learning.”

In addition, in its closing synopsis regarding its mission, the University states: “In all dimensions of the University, Notre Dame pursues its objectives through the formation of an authentic human community graced by the spirit of Christ.”

There is nothing about either of those recent events- the Queer Film Festival or “The Vagina Monologues”- which exemplifies the spirit or letter of that mission. One then asks why they were allowed on campus, much less purportedly welcomed by the administration.

Fourth, in the case of the University of Notre Dame and the departments of English, Theater, and Gender Studies, the deliberate defiance of the University’s mission via the lack of respect shown to it or the stated objectives of Notre Dame necessitate a thorough appraisal of what, exactly, compromises academic freedom on that campus. Both the students who are entrusted to the University and their parents have a right to expect that the faculty and leadership will strive to embody the University’s stated mission in all they teach and do.

Lastly, with regard the University’s leadership and its faculty, how very odd and telling is Father Malloy’s deafening silence in this critical matter. True leaders do not duck tough issues and decisions regardless of the flack which will ensue regarding firm stances on critical dilemmas which may face an institution. As for the faculty, its perspective regarding the release of a football coach was well documented, as were Fr. Malloy’s comments regarding this issue. However, in the critical matter of the recent moral hostility shown towards the University and the teachings of the Church it is committed to represent, comments are conspicuously absent. The moral depravity and intellectual

shallowness of Ms. Ensler and her associates is left unchallenged by those with an obligation to protect and embody the truth.

In closing, it is apt that the production organizers gifted Ms. Ensler with a “vaginal football” prior to her leaving the stage. Not content to debase the University of Our Lady with mere denigration of Church teachings regarding sexuality, the “in your face” inclusion of one of its most treasured traditions within this travesty speaks volumes about the intent of its organizers. All responsible for these events owe those who have walked before them, walk with them now, and will walk after them on that beautiful campus your deepest apologies for, in fact, the infliction of violence upon our minds, hearts, souls, and religious and moral sensibilities.

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