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Notre Dame President Approves Vagina Monologues

University of Notre Dame President, Father John Jenkins, C.S.C., announced yesterday, March 10, that he has approved campus performances of the lurid play *The Vagina Monologues* on March 24-26. It will be the sixth year since 2002 that Notre Dame has hosted the play.

The Vagina Monologues is a sexually explicit and offensive play that favorably describes lesbian activity, group masturbation, and the reduction of sexuality to selfish pleasure. In one scene, the lesbian seduction of a teenage girl is described as the girl's "salvation" that "raised her into a kind of heaven."

"The announcement comes as a grave disappointment given the status Notre Dame holds as America's most prominent Catholic university—albeit not the most consistent in its Catholic identity," said Patrick Reilly, President of The Cardinal Newman Society. "This play is a scandal in every sense of the term."

For seven years, The Cardinal Newman Society and its more than 20,000 members have urged Catholic colleges to ban *The Vagina Monologues*, resulting in a significant decline from 32 Catholic campus performances in 2003 to just 19 this year.

Father Jenkins released the statement only weeks prior to the much-anticipated visit of Pope Benedict XVI to the United States, including an address to the presidents of America's 213 Catholic colleges and universities on April 17. The statement also comes after the U.S. bishops' doctrine committee snubbed Notre Dame by moving a February 11 meeting off campus, because Father Jenkins would not assure Bishop John D'Arcy of Fort Wayne-South Bend that plans for *The Vagina Monologues* would be canceled.

"By approving performances of the *Monologues*, Notre Dame is in blatant defiance of Catholic morals and basic civility," Reilly said. "Given the imminent arrival of Pope Benedict next month, the refusal of the U.S. bishops' doctrine committee to meet at Notre Dame, and Bishop D'Arcy's repeated condemnation of this play at a Catholic institution, this decision amounts to a public thumbing of the nose to our Catholic leaders."

A Notre Dame policy, "The Common Proposal of the Chairs of Arts and Letters and Fr. Jenkins," makes allowances for almost any event on campus, so long as "a knowledgeable presentation of Catholic teaching is included."

In the March 10 statement, Father Jenkins said: "Notre Dame's policy on controversial events rests on the conviction that truth will emerge from reasoned consideration of issues in dialogue with faith. ... [I]t is, in my judgment, the action that best serves the distinctive mission of Notre Dame."

Reilly countered: "Reasonable consideration of issues—even of perversity—can hardly mean that a Catholic university should put perversity on display and scandalize its students. Catholics have been discussing and lamenting this play for seven years. It's time to move on to both a new discussion and much better campus entertainment."

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