

[< Back](#) | [Home](#)

Dissenters criticize Jenkins' statement

Bishop, professors ask University president to reconsider decision

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Three weeks after University President Father John Jenkins issued a largely well-received closing statement permitting "The Vagina Monologues" on campus, prominent voices of dissent are beginning to emerge - including that of South Bend-Fort Wayne Bishop John D'Arcy, who issued a nine-page statement Thursday denouncing Jenkins' decision.

Jenkins' April 5 decision to not prohibit the "Monologues" came 10 weeks after he appealed to the University community to engage in dialogue about academic freedom and Catholic character at Notre Dame.

D'Arcy, who said three weeks ago he was "deeply saddened" by the decision, criticized Jenkins Thursday for not "adequately and fully" including Catholic teaching in his closing statement.

"My pastoral concern is not only because of the decision not to ban the play, but because of the rationale that accompanied the decision," D'Arcy said Thursday in a statement that will appear in the April 30 edition of Today's Catholic. "It fails to give room to the great truths of the faith."

D'Arcy is not alone in his sentiments. At Notre Dame, a series of letters to the editor by University professors printed in The Observer have criticized Jenkins' decision, several asking for Jenkins to reconsider.

Jenkins responded in a statement Thursday, saying the public dissent - which heightened when an April 25 column written by law professor emeritus Charles Rice called for Jenkins' resignation - is part of a productive, ongoing dialogue.

The University, he said, "benefits from fruitful discussion of difficult issues."

"Often, the voices of dissent present themselves louder than those of support," Jenkins said. "I continue to respect the opinions of those who have shared their views publicly and privately with me and other members of the University."

D'Arcy, who spoke at Notre Dame Law School on April 21 regarding the pastoral role of a bishop and his relationship to a Catholic university, also said it is his responsibility "as a shepherd" to point out that Jenkins' decision requires more informed consideration.

"Otherwise, our beloved Notre Dame will go down a road which it has always resisted traveling," he wrote.

Rice, like D'Arcy, not only denounced the decision on the "Monologues" but also criticized Jenkins' rationale, writing that Jenkins "distorted the meaning of a Catholic university" with "persistent

incoherence."

On Thursday Rice told The Observer Jenkins' decision "destroyed his effectiveness as a president." He again said Jenkins should step down, leaving the decision for his replacement to the University Board of Trustees.

Rice's piece appeared two weeks after Father Wilson Miscamble's 1,500-word letter to the editor in the April 11 edition of The Observer said Jenkins "was asked to be courageous and settled for being popular."

Miscamble said Thursday he received a stream of supportive responses from alumni after his letter was published.

"[They were] broadly supportive, [and] worried about the direction of Notre Dame," Miscamble said.

Miscamble, a history professor, wrote his letter "to alert our faculty, colleagues and our treasured students that not all members of the Congregation of Holy Cross, to which we belong, endorse [Jenkins'] decision."

Another dissenting letter to the editor - this time by theology department chair John Cavadini - was published in the April 19 edition of The Observer. The next day, a letter to the editor was printed from Father John Coughlin, who said he was "stunned" by Jenkins' decision.

Cavadini declined to comment to The Observer Wednesday, and Coughlin was unavailable for comment Thursday.

Despite the consistent appearance of the dissenting letters to the editor, Rice said there was no coordination between the authors. His colleagues have said little in response to his piece, Rice said.

Referring to John Paul II's 1999 papal document, Rice said the recent letters to the editor reflect a "studied reaction on the part of the people who have a concept of a Catholic university which is in accordance with *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*."

Miscamble said he has spoken with priests on both sides of the issue about both his letter and Jenkins' statement. He said he feels he is most distinctly in the minority among Arts and Letters faculty and said their differing opinions stem from opposing views on how to best enhance the academic reputation of Notre Dame.

"They [Arts and Letters faculty in support of Jenkins' decision] are deeply worried about what they think a decision to restrict 'The Vagina Monologues' would mean for our academic reputation," he said.

But Miscamble sees it differently. He said not prohibiting the "Monologues" surrendered "our distinct identity and a great opportunity to contribute to American higher education precisely because we are somewhat different because we are a religiously based institution."

D'Arcy said he is not seeking control over Jenkins' decision-making. In his 21 years as bishop, he said he has never "interfered with [University] governance, and I have never required the University to adopt any particular policy, nor have I ever asked, required or demanded any particular action of the University."

But his statement added more weight to a growing opposition to campus events that dissenters say are

inconsistent with Catholic teaching.

"Notre Dame, with its vast resources, can do better than this," D'Arcy said. "I believe it will. Its responsibility to its students and to the position it has attained in higher education calls for it to do better."

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