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One loyal daughter's dissent

Letter to the Editor

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In the thirty-some years since my graduation from Notre Dame, I have been embarrassed to be associated with the University only once: on April 5, 2006, when the new University President Father John Jenkins issued his profoundly disappointing "closing statement" on "Academic Freedom and Catholic Character." From Jenkins, the philosopher, I had hoped for so much more.

For the last five years, when contemplating Notre Dame's sponsorship of the sexually degrading "Vagina Monologues," I thought perhaps philosophically serious people had not considered the work's implications. As Father Wilson Miscamble points out in his clear-eyed open letter to Jenkins, the production is an insult to the dignity of women and men alike ("An open letter to Father John Jenkins," April 11). It reduces women to their body parts and pretends to define their identity and worth in terms of their sexual experiences (an attitude associated until now only with testosterone-driven alpha-males). It exalts lesbian relationships. It is man-hating. It separates sex from relationships and love. It directly contravenes Pope John Paul II's important work on the integral nature of body and spirit in what has been called Theology of the Body.

The young woman who will supposedly spearhead "Loyal Daughters," a soon-to-be-created version of "The Vagina Monologues," believes the objections to the original production are fundamentally "political." What? The objections are philosophical. The issue is not Republicans versus Democrats - it is the sort of idea and mindset promoted on the Notre Dame campus and what it means to have a Catholic identity.

Jenkins intuited this with his initial statements, and then he caved. Amazingly, he has been lauded for his "courage" to stand by the status quo. Real courage is the virtue it would take to do the right thing - to say, "I was wrong" and reverse course. That would be a model of courage this loyal daughter would not soon forget.

In the meantime, could we please not label another sexually debasing performance, written by women who currently attend Notre Dame, "Loyal Daughters?" Some of us are offended enough already.

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Class of 1975
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