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Bishop blasts Notre Dame's decision to show play

April 28, 2006

BY TOM COYNE

SOUTH BEND, Ind. — A northern Indiana bishop is criticizing the University of Notre Dame president's decision to allow "The Vagina Monologues" to continue to be performed on campus.

Bishop John D'Arcy, in a nine-page "pastoral response" issued Thursday, faulted the Rev. John I. Jenkins' choice and his reasoning for allowing the play.

"What I found to be missing in the decision at Notre Dame and in the rationale of Father Jenkins that accompanied it is any sense that critical decisions for a Catholic university must be based on truth as revealed by Christ and held by the church," he wrote. "Also, I could not find there any mention of the essential link between freedom and truth."

The bishop of the Fort Wayne-South Bend Diocese wrote that Roman Catholic teaching on academic freedom "was not brought to bear on the wide-ranging dialogue and did not seem to find adequate room in the president's closing statement. Notre Dame, with its vast resources, can do better than this."

University spokesman Dennis Brown said Jenkins has met with D'Arcy and read his statement and will continue to reflect on the bishop's observations. But he said Jenkins has "no interest in discussing their differences in the



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media."

Jenkins announced April 5 that the school will allow the play and other events that may go against Roman Catholic teachings on campus because universities should be places where debate is promoted. The play has been staged at the school in February in recent years.

The announcement came 10 weeks after Jenkins, who took over as president on July 1, said he wanted a campuswide discussion on whether the play, an annual gay film festival and other events some might view as objectionable should be allowed.

No room for 'great truths'

"The Vagina Monologues," written by Eve Ensler, is based on discussions with 200 girls and women and includes graphic descriptions of women's anatomy, homosexuality and orgasms. The debate between academic freedom and religion has raged at Catholic schools nationwide, as they decide whether to allow the play.

When Jenkins announced he would allow the events, D'Arcy said he was "deeply saddened." In Thursday's retort, which also appears in the April 30 issue of Today's Catholic, D'Arcy said he could not fully respond at the time because he was preparing for Holy Week.

D'Arcy said Jenkins' decision fails to give room to the "great truths of the faith."

"The teaching of the church on sexuality, on academic freedom, on the relationship between a man and a woman and on the human body is hardly mentioned, except to admit that the play stands apart from, and is even opposed to, Catholic teaching," he wrote.

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