



William H. Dempsey
President
Joseph A. Reich, Jr.
Vice President
George L. Heidkamp
Secretary Treasurer

Directors
Richard V. Allen
Dr. Daniel M. Boland
Timothy M. Dempsey
Lauren J. Galgano
Dr. John A. Gueguen, Jr.
Dr. Susan Biddle Shearer

July 10, 2008

Rev. John I. Jenkins, CSC
President
University of Notre Dame
Main Building
Notre Dame, Indiana 46556

Dear Father Jenkins:

Thank you for your response of March 26, 2008, to my letter on behalf of the Sycamore Trust respecting The Vagina Monologues.

I would ordinarily not prolong this exchange, but I note that you wrote before the performances and accordingly could not measure what actually happened against the criteria you established as the warrant for your approval. Since we think it clear that your stated criteria were not met, I write to express our sincere hope that this past year's production will be the last.

The fact that most of the students -- between eighty and eighty-five percent, according to witnesses -- left before the panel discussions began should be dispositive. The panelists were, in your words, charged with "engaging students" in a "serious and informed discussion" "within a Catholic framework." With 900 or so members of the audience having walked out over the three evenings, the panelists faced a largely emptied hall each night. This mass exodus completely undermined the rationale upon which your approval rested.

If it were necessary or useful to consider also what happened during the panel discussions, your decision should be the same. I base that conclusion on the accounts in The Observer and information provided by a number of students who were present as well as by Lisa Everett, the Diocesan representative.

While the Church's position was very well presented by both Mrs. Everett and, on two of the three evenings, by Sister Ann Astell, other panelists made plain their disagreement.

On the first evening, for example, a Notre Dame theology professor spoke dismissively of the "narrow" view of the Church in contrast to the broader view of many theologians under which homosexual and lesbian sexual relations are licit. On another evening it was a St. Mary's professor who took issue with Mrs. Everett's "rigid approach" and her "perpetuation of a sense of shame." Overall, except for Mrs. Everett and Sister Astell, all panelists were united in their acclaim of the play.

This was to be expected. The Notre Dame theologian who declined to support the Church's position has written in opposition to that teaching. "Homoeroticism," she has declared, "is seen as wrong or unnatural because it interferes with, violates, the superior status of men." Turning to Notre Dame, she has charged that its "administration has chosen to maintain homophobia and the rule of the fathers." Mary Rose D'Angelo, "Common Sense," March, 1997. She and another panelist, moreover, are members of the Advisory Committee of "Watch," an association of Notre Dame women faculty whose website urges the hiring of more lesbians and homosexuals to the faculty and also promotes a host of pro-abortion organizations.

For those few who stayed for the panel discussions, then, the message was that the view of the Church was simply one choice among several held by faculty members. This replicates what happened after the previous campus production when panels were required for the first time. Then, Father Odozor's lone voice was drowned out by a chorus of praise of the play by faculty members that reached its peak in a prominent professor's comparison of the play to St. Augustine's "Confessions."

Surely this cannot be what you meant when you authorized performances of this play on condition that they be "brought into dialogue with Catholic tradition through panels " that would engage with the audience in "serious and informed discussion" in "an academic setting." The "academic setting" consisted of a 450 person auditorium simply indistinguishable from a large theater; the time devoted to these important issues was severely truncated; the panelists in combination sounded an uncertain trumpet; and the audience's contributions included assaults on various of the Church's positions, a characterization of Bishop D'Arcy as a "Nazi" because of his protests, condemnations of the "penis culture" of Church and society, and even a near-sacrilegious suggestion that Mrs. Everett's reference to the mutual love of the "male" Persons of the Holy Trinity called to mind such a "penis culture."

I close this account on a distinctly distasteful note, but one that I think should be sounded. The play is bad enough as written. It was made much worse by the producers' adaptations. In an especially obscene monologue in which a dominatrix describes in graphic detail the pain she inflicts upon, and sexual pleasure she derives from, other women, she tells of her special passion for eliciting orgiastic moans from her patrons. She concludes with a page describing a long series of different moans. One example -- "the surprise triple orgasm moan" -- will doubtless suffice here.

According to *The Observer* (3/27/08), in the student production the monologist added "the Notre Dame moan " and "the Notre Dame moan (after parietals)." Thus, by this flip but deliberate stroke, the perverse drives of these sex-obsessed women of the play were linked to Notre Dame women and christened with the name of Our Lady and of the University. With respect, I suggest that this is a repellent but fitting sign of the consequences of extending the mantle of academic freedom to so patently pernicious a play as *The Vagina Monologues*.

In view of your determination several years ago that the *Vagina Monologues* are indeed contrary to Catholic teaching regarding sexual morality, it is unnecessary for me to dwell on the nature of the play. The claim of its apologists that its dominant theme is violence to women is a transparent fabrication. Most of the monologues of any length are extraordinarily explicit accounts by women of highly charged sexual episodes, typically but

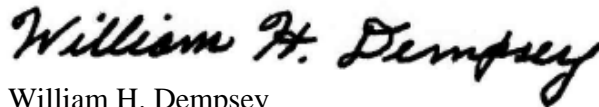
not exclusively lesbian intercourse (including seduction of a minor) and masturbation. By page count, no more than some 25% of the play deals with violence. The play is, and is plainly intended to be, a celebration of the joys of sexual gratification through actions gravely immoral in the eyes of the Church.

This was apparent to the students who, doing credit to the University, handed out copies of Bishop D'Arcy's statement in front of DeBartolo Hall, to those who quietly walked out of the auditorium in protest, and to those who joined in prayer at the Grotto. It is hard to believe that anyone who has seen or read the play really misses its defining theme.

Notre Dame is now the foremost member of the small and shrinking band of Catholic institutions hosting this play. Only sixteen remain. The universities recently ending their sponsorship of this production include St. Louis University and Santa Clara University. At Santa Clara, an "educational component" had been added, but it did not serve. The President, Paul Locatelli, S.J., said that the play had "run its course."

We pray that it has at Notre Dame as well. The episode involving the bishops' moving their conference away from Notre Dame because the play might be performed later in the year magnified the leading role of Notre Dame, with major articles in the national Catholic and secular press. As Professor Lawrence Cunningham, a prominent member of the Theology Department, has observed, The Vagina Monologues has "become a kind of code word to identify Notre Dame." We urge that experience has taught that the play's assault on virtue is accompanied by no compensating educational values, but rather only by a coarsening of sensibility and a degradation of the reputation of Notre Dame as a Catholic institution.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "William H. Dempsey". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

William H. Dempsey
President

cc: Richard C. Notebaert, Chairman
Dr. Thomas G. Burish, Provost
The Most Reverend John M. D'Arcy
The Most Reverend Daniel R. Jenky, C.S.C.
E. William Beauchamp, C.S.C.
Peter A. Jarret, C.S.C.
Timothy R. Scully, C.S.C.
David T. Tyson, C.S.C.