



PROJECT SYCAMORE

ALUMNI PRESERVING NOTRE DAME'S CATHOLIC IDENTITY

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February 25, 2008

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

Dear Father Jenkins:

I write on behalf of the 940 signatories of a Project Sycamore petition asking that the University not authorize the on-campus student performance of *The Vagina Monologues*.

The signatories, whose number continues to increase, consist mainly of alumni, but also include parents and other members of the Notre Dame family. The text of the petition and the names of the signatories are posted on our web site at www.projectsycamore.com.

We have corresponded with you before on this matter, and I will not burden this letter with an extended restatement of the reasons for our petition. Our objections, which are set forth at length on our web site, mirror those of countless others, including Bishop D'Arcy and his fellow bishops who refused to meet on the campus because of the play. Our protest centers upon the meretricious nature of *The Vagina Monologues*, its conflict with core Catholic teachings, and its lack of any redeeming value. Surely it has no literary merit. A New York Times drama critic dispatched the play summarily: "Given a choice between seeing that play again or having *Beowulf* read to me in Croatian, I would unequivocally choose the latter." And the portions dealing with violence to women, constituting less than a third of the script, are far overshadowed by the much longer sections that celebrate illicit and perverse sex of all sorts in the most graphic terms.

We add three brief comments:

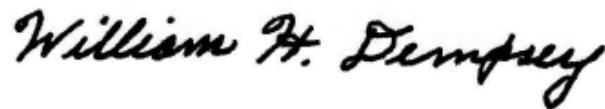
First, the play cannot be saved by a faculty member's pointing out that the sexual license it extols is obviously contrary to Church teaching. Who in the audience could possibly think otherwise? An analysis of a movie or play or novel in terms of Catholic theology serves an important purpose where the work portrays evil in the guise of good. Such a discussion would serve well, for example, in connection with the homosexual film festival, where it is not provided. Here the only purpose it can really serve is to secure a license for performance. Moreover, the complete inadequacy of the panel discussions the last time is telling. The praise the panelists heaped on the play -- one professor compared it to St. Augustine's *Confessions* -- simply made matters worse.

Second, while to mention the phrase "occasion of sin" might seem quaint to many, we think it not out of place at a Catholic university. Such collateral effects of a work should not alone be reason for barring it, of course; but neither should they be irrelevant. These monologues are so sexually charged that it is safe to say they would constitute an occasion of sin to some indeterminate number of performers and viewers. Indeed, the author herself testified in her introduction that she had had "thirty-two public orgasms a night" while performing it. In light of the libidinous character of the play, it is hard to understand the contention that it deters, rather than stimulates, aggressive sexual behavior.

Third, the decision by Notre Dame, and by you as President of the University, whether to host the Vagina Monologues cannot be dismissed as of no great importance on the ground that, however deplorable the play may be, once performed it is gone. Notre Dame is the leading Catholic university in the Western World, and The Vagina Monologues has become a leading symbol of the primacy of wanton sexual gratification of and by women. To give this work a place at the Notre Dame table is to signal to the public, and particularly to Catholics, an indifference to this sort of moral rot. To bar the door, on the other hand, is to give public witness to the teachings of the Church as well as to the principles of decency that ought to characterize a civilized society. Such a repudiation of what this play represents would fulfill in an important way Notre Dame's fundamental mission of playing a prophetic role in a culture saturated with moral indifference.

We appreciate the difficulty of your position. You have our prayers in all your work.

Sincerely yours,

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