



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on April 30, 2012

Catholic Bishop Attacked for Comparing Obama to Hitler, Stalin

A Catholic bishop in Illinois has come under intense attack for his comparison of President Obama's healthcare policies with actions taken by Hitler in Germany. Bishop Daniel Jenky told attendees during a mass at St. Mary's Cathedral in Peoria April 14 that the Obama administration is modeling historically repressive regimes that "tried to force Christians to huddle and hide only within the confines of their churches."



The [Associated Press](#) quoted Bishop Jenky as saying that "Hitler and Stalin, at their better moments, would just barely tolerate some churches remaining open, but would not tolerate any competition with the state in education, social services and health care. In clear violation of our First Amendment rights, Barack Obama — with his radical, pro-abortion and extreme secularist agenda — now seems intent on following a similar path."

The comments sparked a firestorm of protest from liberal individuals and groups. Lonnie Nasatir of the Chicago branch of the Anti-Defamation League demanded that Jenky apologize, calling his remarks "outrageous, offensive and completely over the top." Nasatir insisted that the bishop's comments had trivialized the deaths of millions of Jews, adding that there were few if any historic parallels to "the religious intolerance and anti-Semitism fostered in society by Stalin, and especially Hitler."

The [Chicago Tribune](#) reported that the atheist group Americans United for Separation of Church and State had filed a complaint against Jenky with the IRS, in an attempt to wreak havoc with the diocese's tax-exempt status. According to the *Tribune*, the secular group's president, Barry Lynn, had accused the bishop of effectively urging Catholics to vote against Obama in the upcoming election, thereby violating federal law by inserting the church into a political campaign.

"In a letter to the IRS, Lynn wrote that Jenky violated the rules that prohibit issue advocacy and that he had called on Catholics to vote as a bloc at the polls," reported the *Tribune*. Wrote Lynn to the IRS: "To be sure, Jenky never utters the words 'Do not vote for Obama.' But the Internal Revenue Code makes it clear that statements need not be this explicit to run afoul of the law."

In response to Lynn's attack, Eric Rassbach of the [Becket Fund for Religious Liberty](#), a conservative Catholic legal advocacy group, came to Jenky's defense, saying that Lynn's charges are absurd. "Bishop Jenky isn't 'intervening' in a political campaign any more than Dad is when he talks politics over the dinner table," Rassbach told [CNSNews.com](#). "Bishop Jenky has an absolute right to teach and preach to his flock, as the Supreme Court recently affirmed unanimously in the *Hosanna-Tabor* case. The last thing we need with all the problems facing our country is have IRS bureaucrats vetting sermons for compliance with government mandates."

Meanwhile, 55 members of the faculty of the Catholic University of Notre Dame, where Jenky serves on the board of fellows, penned an open letter to the university's president, the Rev. John Jenkins, and university administrator Richard Notebaert, asking them to remove Jenky from his board positions. "We



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accept that Jenky's comments are protected by the First Amendment," the professors conceded, "but we find it profoundly offensive that a member of our beloved University's highest authority, the Board of Fellows, should compare the president's actions with those whose genocidal policies murdered tens of millions of people, including the specific targeting of Catholics, Jews and other minorities for their faith."

The professors asked the administrators to "issue a statement on behalf of the University that will definitively distance Notre Dame from Jenky's incendiary statement," and expressed their belief that "it would be in the best interest of Notre Dame if Jenky resigned from the University's Board of Fellows if he is unwilling to renounce loudly and publicly this destructive analogy."

Among those stepping up to defend the bishop were parishioners of Peoria's St. Mary's Cathedral, where he made the comments, as well as the city's Mayor, Jim Ardis. "There's nothing the bishop said that he intentionally meant to hurt folks in the Jewish community or any other community," Ardis, who is a practicing Catholic, told a local paper. "I absolutely agree with what he said. He was saying, 'As Catholics, we need leaders to represent our values.' As time goes on, we see more and more of the government getting into the churches."

As the criticism over Jenky's comments escalated, the Peoria Diocese attempted to do some damage control, with Chancellor Patricia Gibson saying in an April 19 statement that Bishop Jenky had merely "expressed concern that our country is starting down a dangerous path that we have seen before in history." She noted that the bishop had given "several examples of times in history in which religious groups were persecuted because of what they believed. We certainly have not reached the same level of persecution. However, history teaches us to be cautious once we start down the path of limiting religious liberty."

The [Catholic News Service](#) recalled that Bishop Jenky's homily "was addressed to more than 500 Catholic men who had marched through the city's downtown in a steady rain April 14 as part of the annual event 'A Call to Catholic Men of Faith.' Focusing mainly on the power of Jesus' resurrection to embolden today's believers as it had the early disciples, Bishop Jenky used the occasion to call Catholics to more strongly defend their faith as well as religious liberty."

The bishop told the assembled Catholic men: "As Christians, we must love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us, but as Christians we must also stand up for what we believe and always be ready to fight for the faith. The days in which we live now require heroic Catholicism, not casual Catholicism. We can no longer be Catholics by accident, but instead be Catholics by conviction."

The bishop warned that "this is not a war where any believing Catholic may remain neutral," adding, "No Catholic ministry ... can remain faithful to the lordship of the risen Christ and to his glorious Gospel of Life if they are forced to pay for abortions." He advised that every faithful Catholic "must vote, and must vote their Catholic consciences" in the upcoming elections.



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