



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on May 11, 2009

Protesting Obama's Notre Dame Invitation

"The phones are ringing off the hook from people who want to come here to be arrested this Friday," said a woman who answered the phone at the [StopObamaNotreDame.com](#) headquarters in South Bend. The effort, which includes a website and an online petition urging the university to withdraw the invitation to Obama, is the work of the Society for Truth and Justice, an organization led by Operation Rescue founder Randall Terry, who has been arrested numerous times over the years for criminal trespass and sued over his efforts to block access to abortion clinics. Terry was arrested on the Notre Dame campus on May 1, but was not arrested last Friday.



The woman, who would identify herself only as Sandy "Veritas," said the group would continue to hold vigils outside the campus every day this week and planned to trespass again, with a nonviolent demonstration on campus this Friday. While the protestors will picket and pass out leaflets in front of the campus again on Sunday, she said the group would likely not try to enter the grounds on the day of the commencement, when security is expected to be extremely tight. "I don't believe so. At this point, no," she said.

Keyes, a representative to the United Nations in the Reagan administration and a candidate for President in 1996, 2000 and 2008, led 25 people onto the campus, despite warnings from the university that they would be arrested for trespass if they entered. Keyes and others in the group pushed baby strollers holding dolls covered with red to indicate the bloody violence of abortion. The political activist/talk-show host and 21 others were arrested by university police when they refused to leave and were confined at Saint Joseph County jail on misdemeanor criminal trespass charges in lieu of a \$250 bond for each. An anonymous donor put up the bail for Keyes, who was released Friday evening, "Veritas" said. The others made bail and were released at various points over the weekend. All were given court dates at the end of May.

"Veritas" said the group has been too busy "strategizing" and carrying on protests "on the ground" to count or even estimate the number of names on its petition in cyberspace. But ever since the invitation was announced in March, countless individuals and numerous organizations have registered their opposition — via phone calls, letters, e-mails, and petitions — to inviting Obama give the commencement address and receive an honorary degree from the prestigious Catholic university. At end of April, the Cardinal Newman Society, an organization dedicated to strengthening the "Catholic identity" of the nation's 224 Catholic colleges and universities, announced it was sending a petition with 300,000 names on it to the university opposing the invitation. The petition took up 64,000 pages, which were bound in notebooks and sent via courier to Father John Jenkins, the president of Notre Dame.



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More than 70 Catholic bishops from around the country have issued statements critical of Notre Dame's decision. The Most Rev. John M. D'Arcy, bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend, announced he will not attend commencement because of Obama's presence.

"Even as I continue to ponder in prayer these events, which many have found shocking, so must Notre Dame," D'Arcy said in a written statement a few days after the announcement of the president's visit. "Indeed, as a Catholic University, Notre Dame must ask itself, if by this decision it has chosen prestige over truth."

Many Catholic and other pro-lifers have called this president the nation's most extreme pro-abortion chief executive ever. They cite his executive order, among the first in the new administration, repealing the "Mexico City" policy, which denied U.S. funds to agencies abroad that provide abortions. Obama has also lifted a ban on federal funding of stem-cell research on human embryos and declared his support for the Freedom of Choice Act, now before Congress, which would nullify all state and local regulations pertaining to abortion and eliminate the "conscience" exemption that allows individuals or hospitals to refuse to perform abortions.

Notre Dame officials had hoped that some of the pro-life backlash would be deflected by the fact that they had already chosen Harvard Law Professor Mary Ann Glendon to be the recipient of this year's Laetare Medal, the university's highest honor. Glendon, the ambassador to the Vatican from 2007 until early this year, was to receive the award for her service to the pro-life cause and deliver a speech as part of the commencement ceremonies. But in an April 27 letter to Father Jenkins, she informed the university president that she would forego the honor.

Glendon noted in her letter that the honor to be bestowed on Obama runs counter to the request made by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in 2004 that Catholic institutions "should not honor those who act in defiance of our fundamental moral principles" and that such persons "should not be given awards, honors or platforms which would suggest support for their actions." That request, wrote Glendon, a longtime consultant to the Conference, "seems to me so reasonable that I am at a loss to understand why a Catholic university should disrespect it."

The Superior General of the Congregation of the Holy Cross, the order that founded Notre Dame in 1844, noted in a March 22 letter he sent to Obama from Rome that he had been "deluged with angry e-mails regarding Notre Dame's decision to invite you to the campus for the honors you are to receive." But Rev. Hugh W. Cleary, CSC, declared himself personally delighted with the decision.

"President Obama, the University of Notre Dame is honored to have you, as President of the United States of America, deliver the commencement address to the graduating class of 2009," Cleary wrote. "Personally, in so many ways, I admire you as a great American, a person endowed with extraordinarily well developed intellectual gifts and, in my opinion, a man whose enormous compassion characterizes the goodness of his heart."

Before he was done praising Obama, Rev. Cleary did invite the president to "rethink, through prayerful wrestling with your own conscience, your stated positions on the vital 'life issues' of our day, particularly in regard to abortion, embryonic forms of stem cell research and your position on the Freedom of Choice Act before Congress." Many Catholics, both lay and religious, are not eagerly awaiting the outcome of such a wrestling match between Obama and his conscience. In an interview with the National Catholic Register, Archbishop Raymond Burke, Prefect of the Vatican's highest court, the Apostolic Signatura, was asked what the Catholic Church should do about the situation at Notre



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Dame.

“What it should do is have Notre Dame come clean,” he said. “Is it Catholic or isn’t it? A Catholic institution, a Catholic university, cannot give honors to someone who is a promoter of things that are opposed to the most fundamental beliefs of Catholics, and so that’s what needs to happen.” Asked how the Church can do that, the Archbishop replied: “There’s an apostolic constitution, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, which sets forth the requirements for a university to have the name Catholic. I think that Notre Dame has to either follow those norms or say ‘We’re not a Catholic university anymore.’”

Back in the United States, Catholic pundits, as well as clerics, have weighed in on the controversy. Pat Buchanan typically pulled no punches in a column entitled, “Is Notre Dame Still Catholic?” “By inviting Barack Obama to deliver the commencement address and receive an honorary degree at Notre Dame,” Buchanan wrote, “the Rev. John Jenkins has polarized the Catholic community nationwide — and raised a question. What does it mean to be a Catholic university in post-Christian America?”

Keyes last Friday confronted a university official at the entrance to the campus in an exchange that was videotaped and posted on YouTube. Keyes, who ran unsuccessfully against Obama in the 2004 U.S. Senate election in Illinois, expressed his dismay that Notre Dame would choose to confer an honorary degree on Obama, whom he called the world’s most prominent and determined promoter of abortion.

“He is the epitome and the focus of that evil now,” Keyes said. “And this man,” he said, his voice rising as he pointed to Randall Terry standing nearby, “this man who has laid his life on the line for the faith, who has gone to jail, who has lost his home, who has been inflicted — this man stands alone, to be treated like a criminal? Well, no, I’ll stand with him if that’s going to be the case. I’ll stand with him until hell freezes over!”

Keyes, who was still clutching his rosary when his hands were cuffed behind him by campus police, said and he the other demonstrators were there to follow the example of Saint Paul to “pray and speak the truth.” He acknowledged that the university had a legal right to bar him and others from the grounds of the privately held institution. “But you know, there’s man’s law and then there’s the law of God,” he said.

“I have been a Catholic all my life,” Keyes said. “I have gone through the battles, I have fought for the causes, I understand that sometimes we stand alone. But why on earth should it be at a Catholic university?”

The fiery orator claimed that the ultimate choice in the battle over abortion is not that of the “pro-choice” politicians. “One of two things will ultimately come out of this,” he said. “Either Notre Dame will return to respect of God’s will, or I think Catholics the world over will demand that the name of the Mother of God will be removed from this university.”



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