

**ND Response Rally
University of Notre Dame
May 17, 2009
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For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Every one who is of the truth hears my voice. (Jn 18:37b)

It is a great privilege and an honor to have been invited to participate in this awesome gathering, this faith-filled RESPONSE, this NOTRE DAME Rally for LIFE!!!

But today's gathering is no ordinary pro-life event, today we have gathered under the Golden Dome to say to the nation and to the world that in her heart and in her soul, the real Notre Dame, the true University of Our Lady, our LOVING MOTHER is totally committed to protecting the sanctity of human life.

How can we say this in light of certain pronounced appearances to the contrary? We can say it because from the moment the battle call was sounded, from the moment a fateful decision was made to do what no Catholic institution should ever do, from the moment the things of God were rendered unto Caesar, when the administration of this great university chose to dishonor law and to betray honor by bestowing an honorary degree of law on a man whose public policies support laws that are irrational, dishonorable, and unworthy of esteem; from that very moment the voices of the faithful of the University of Notre Dame began to cry out and that cry was heard. First and foremost by Almighty God, and it was also heard by the rest of us!

So I would like to say to all of you who have weathered this storm here on the campus of the University of Notre Dame that we are truly grateful for your courageous response and your witness for life!

You have been a source of strength and encouragement for alumni, for family and friends, for faithful Catholics and for pro-life people of every stripe across the United States. At times it may have seemed that you were alone—a small voice crying out in the wilderness—but nothing could be further from the truth.

Your voice has been heard loudly and clearly and we, your brothers and sisters, have responded in solidarity with you. We were with you when you first spoke out, we were with you on Palm Sunday when you gathered under the Dome in prayer, and we are with you today.

If indeed you are a minority on campus—and I know a little bit about being a minority on campus, it wasn't all that bad!—You are not a minority in the rest of this great nation of ours! Recent scientific polls (Rasmussen and Gallup) tell us that 60% of American Catholics are with you, 52% of all Americans are with

you, and even 51% of Americans identify themselves as being

PRO-LIFE! YOU ARE NOT ALONE!!!

Your witness has been conducted with dignity, with charity and with respect for all. Like all witnesses for truth, you have come under attack. You have been called names and your intentions have been impugned. Because of the historic dimensions of the election of the first African American president of the United States, and because you have rightly challenged the university's decision to honor him, you have even been called *racist*!

What shall I say...

Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for such did they treat the prophets before you!

The truth is that you are anything but racist!

Racist is Planned Parenthood's conscious targeting of African American and Latino communities for surgical and chemical extinction through abortion and contraception.

Racist is the fact that 37% of abortions in the United States are performed on African American women and their babies, who comprise 13% of the American population.

Racist is the genocidal magnitude of the 447,000 African American babies whose precious lives are destroyed each year before they ever get a chance to see the light of day.

Racist and sexist is the presumption that a poor, unwed mother, with the right kind of support and assistance, does not have the capacity to love her baby enough to allow him to live—with her, or with another loving family—despite the circumstances of his conception.

And herein lies the real tragedy of the administration's fundamentally flawed decision regarding the commencement invitation. For when given the opportunity to stand with and for the defenseless and unprotected by choosing an honoree who has dedicated him- or herself to the protection and defense of life, the administration has chosen to stand with and for presidential prestige and power which in its first 100 days was several times unleashed against the unborn!

At precisely the time when the collective voice of Notre Dame is needed on behalf of the unborn, the administration has chosen, like the priest and the levite in the parable of the Good Samaritan, to walk on the other side of the road!

Sadly this is not the first time an opportunity has been missed by Catholic leadership in the United States to stand for the oppressed and to speak truth to power. One hundred seventy years ago a Catholic Bishop, John England of Charleston, South Carolina set

out to explain to America that an Apostolic Letter of Pope Gregory XVI condemned the international slave trade and said nothing about American slavery.

Bishop England was not a bad man; he was not in favor of slavery, nor was he a racist. In fact, he exercised a cherished personal ministry to black Catholics in Charleston. He drew his arguments from scripture and from natural law, and he carefully parsed papal documents addressing slavery. But in the face of strong anti-Catholic sentiment and prejudice, he wanted to show his fellow ante-bellum southerners that Catholics could be just as American as everybody else, and that tolerance of their cherished institution, slavery, was not in any way opposed by the Catholic Church.

It was a lost opportunity for the Church in America to become a pioneer in the quest for racial equality, and many would later invoke his letters as expressions of a “Catholic” position on slavery. The slave was given the sacraments, but he continued to be denied his freedom.

Today the urgency is even greater. The victims created by President Obama's pro-abortion policies are not imprisoned or demeaned, detained or degraded, they are destroyed; they cannot even be baptized. They must be entrusted to the infinite mercy of Almighty God. And their mothers bear the hurt and pain of losing their children for the rest of their lives.

The bestowal of this honorary degree on an aggressively pro-abortion politician will undoubtedly cause many to regard defense of the unborn as negotiable and peripheral to Catholic participation in public life. They will point to the example set by Notre Dame today.

That is why we had to gather today at this time and in this place, to stand with and for these little ones, to stand with and for their mothers and fathers, to stand with and for every human being made

in the image and likeness of God whose rights are unrecognized and whose dignity is compromised.

It is not enough to merely “proclaim” that we are pro-life and to glibly “disclaim” any support or appearance of support for the anti-life policies of presidents and politicians. NO, we must stand for life here at Notre Dame and exercise the leadership that we often look for in others!

We must be the hands, eyes, ears, and feet of Jesus, embracing the pregnant mother and offering concrete help and hope for both her and her child.

We must continue to unmask the forces of deception that would have us believe that abortions are most effectively reduced by policies that make them more accessible and funded by US taxpayers.

We must organize to elect women and men of every race and creed who are committed to the constitutional protection of life from conception to natural death.

Why must we do this? Because it is a proven path to victory.

Abolitionists did it, Civil Rights Activists did it—and nobody ever dismisses them as single-issue voters! Pro-Lifers can do it too!!!

Be not dismayed! The great beauty of our faith is that we already know the end of the story—The Church Wins!!!

But there are times when it certainly looks like we are losing. We are definitely in one of those times! But I am reminded of a passage of scripture which is very dear to faithful Catholics:

Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Mt 16:19).

Not only does this passage illustrate the Petrine ministry of the Church and the great blessing which is the papacy and our current Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, it reminds us that Notre Dame is a small but significant part of the larger Church, the Universal Church, and thus she cannot legitimately function in a manner that is self-referential and aloof. She too is defined in relationship to the entire community of believers.

The passage also tells us something about our gathering today. You see, upon hearing these words we frequently conjure up the wrong image, that of the Church surrounded and protected by a strong and impregnable wall. But note, this passage refers not to the Church's gates, but to the gates of hell!!! It is not the Church that is hunkered down in defensive posture, afraid of the enemy at the gates, it is hell! The forces of darkness and the prince of this world will ultimately collapse, not the Church! The Church is leading the charge, raising the siege! The gates of hell shall not prevail because as we are told in the First Epistle of St. Peter,

...the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil (1 Pet 3:12).

Until that ultimate victory has been won, each generation is called to play its part, and that is why we are here today.

Throughout this controversy, many words have been spoken by the president of Notre Dame affirming the university's commitment to life. Our task is to make the university put its now oft-stated beliefs into practice. Faith without works is dead, words without actions are meaningless. If the administration is truly committed to life then it must show that commitment in concrete ways.

If a dialogue is actually taking place between the presidents of Notre Dame and the United States, between the university and the nation, then, for the university at least, that dialogue must be

shaped by truth and charity, and protecting the sanctity of all human life, as the Church understands life, must be its goal.

Ours must be the voice that continues to demand proof, evidence of this administration's commitment to building a Culture of Life first at Notre Dame and then in the larger sphere of her influence. This administration must be held accountable every day to the words that have been uttered repeatedly in defense/explanation/justification/rationalization of the decision which has brought us here today.

Actively building a Culture of Life at Notre Dame must become central to the university's mission and witness to the nation and to the world. Reparation must be done for the damage caused by this invitation—in the words of Bishop D'Arcy, "...to heal the terrible breach, which has taken place between Notre Dame and the

church.” Volunteers are needed! Those gathered here today are asked to accept this challenge.

It has been an honor and a joy for me to be with you today for this Notre Dame Response and Rally for Life! My prayer is that each of us will leave here renewed and refreshed, ready to return to battle, armed with the weapons of hope and love, to fight the good fight of faith. It will not be easy, but carrying the cross never is.

Let us pray every day that God the Father of Life, Jesus Life Incarnate, and the Holy Spirit, Lord and Giver of Life, will sanctify and prosper our work for life; and that Mary, Notre Dame, Our Mother, through her intercession, will make us faithful witnesses for life.

As we go forth to proclaim the Gospel of Life, let us go with the words of Jesus, “Be not afraid,” “In the world you shall have trouble, but take confidence, I have overcome the world!”