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Do your athletic shoes walk over the poor?

Patrick O'Neill | Dec. 2, 2008

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Following a presentation titled: Behind the Swoosh,? University of Scranton freshman Jonathan Danforth proudly showed off his altered pair of Nike athletic shoes to Jim Keady. Danforth had seen a video about sweatshops that Keady had produced, and he decided to carefully remove Nike?s?Swoosh? logo from his shoes as a protest.

?I recognized the injustices that were being done to the workers, and I didn?t want to represent something like that,? Danforth told *NCR*, ?and I just thought it would be the right thing to do.?

Keady, who 10 years ago was forced to resign from his job as a assistant men?s soccer coach at New York?s St.John?s University, approved of Danforth?s actions.

Keady delivered his lecture Saturday during a breakout session of the Ignatian Family Teach-In for Justice that is part of an annual protest weekend organized by SOA Watch, a group working to close the US Army?s Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (Formally the School of the Americas).

In 1998, Keady opposed St. John?s plans to cut a $3.5 million product endorsement deal with Nike.

?I said that as a Catholic in good conscience I could not, would not be a walking advertisement for Nike,?

Keady said. ?I challenged it because I was writing a research paper on Nike?s labor practices in light of Catholic social teaching, and if you want to find a company that violates everything that Catholic social teaching?s about, Nike?s the perfect case study.?

?When I said, ?I can?t do this, and the school shouldn't be doing this? they said, ?You wear Nike and drop this or get out.? So, in the spring of ?98 I became the first athlete or coach in the world to say no to one of these deals.?

Keady said most high-profile Catholic Universities wear Nike products. Notre Dame has contracts with Adidas and Champion, which are no better than Nike, he said.

?There could be a real statement made by these schools if they took this issue on in a way that wasn?t just constructive engagement, but was prophetic,? Keady said.

At St. John?s it?s Nike. At Notre Dame it?s Adidas, and whether it?s the Vincentians at St. John?s or it?s the Jesuits at Georgetown or it?s the Holy Cross fathers at Notre Dame, they put their stamp of approval on what these corporations are doing by sending their student athletes out onto national television every week, and you?ve got the Catholic school?s name and insignia right next to that corporate logo, and that?san explicit endorsement and it?s wrong.?

The two key issues of worker exploitation are a lack of living wage and workers are not permitted to

collectively bargain.

While the corporations may be following the letter of the law, Catholics must adhere to a higher law,Keady said.

?We have a much different standard,? Keady said. ?We are called by the justice of the Gospel and the specifics of Catholic social teaching to say, 'They need a living wage. You want to do business with us; you want to have your logo on our uniforms with our name and logo? These are the standards you have to uphold.'"

Keady, who has a master degree in theology from St. John?s, lost his graduate assistantship when he resigned his soccer position, but the theology department did offer him a partial scholarship to help him make up for his loss of revenue.

Following his lecture, Keady did sell several T-shirts that had the word ?Slavery? on the front with the letter ?V? in the form of Nike?s Swoosh logo.

Keady may always have Danforth as a believer. ?I will never buy any (Nike products) again,? Danforth said.

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