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Theologians back Notre Dame honoring Obama

Jerry Filteau | May. 14, 2009 NCR Today

Calling President Obama "a Christian with a deep respect for the role of faith in public life," 20 leading U.S. Catholic theologians and scholars have sharply **criticized those who are attacking the University** [1] of Notre Dame for inviting Obama to deliver the university's commencement address May 17.

Most of those protesting Obama's appearance cite his support for legalized abortion as grounds for denying him a platform or honors at any Catholic university.

The scholars said Notre Dame "has a long tradition of honoring presidents from both political parties." They urged those who opposed Obama's appearance not "to disrupt these joyous proceedings or to divide the church for narrow political advantage."

"Catholic teaching warns about the threats to human dignity posed by abortion, the death penalty, torture, unjust military engagement and the nuclear arms race," the scholars wrote. "The honoring of George W. Bush and Ronald Reagan did not detract from Notre Dame's commitment to the fullness of the faith. These former leaders were received as sitting presidents who came to speak about great issues of our time. The same standard should apply for President Obama."

The statement was released May 14 by Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good. John Gehring, the alliance's senior writer, said it was the theologians and scholars who wrote the statement. He described the alliance's role as one of facilitating or coordinating their work.

The statement is slated to appear May 16 as a full-page ad in the South Bend (Ind.) Tribune.

Among signatories were church and civil law professor Nicholas Cafardi of Duquesne University, theologian Lisa Sowle Cahill of Boston College , constitutional law professor Douglas Kmiec of Pepperdine University , and Dayton University theologian Terrence W. Tilley, president of the Catholic Theological Society of America.

The **entire list** [1] follows the statement on the alliance Web site.

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Links:
[1] http://www.catholicsinalliance.org/node/20728