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# The culture wars come to Notre Dame

*The controversy over Obama's commencement address has given his critics and abortion foes the chance to take on the popular president over a divisive issue.*

May 14, 2009 | Robin Abcarian

When University of Notre Dame valedictorian E. Brennan Bollman learned she'd be sharing a stage at Sunday's commencement with President Obama, she was elated.

"I am a strong supporter of President Obama because I think he lives the values of justice and working toward peace," the 22-year-old senior said Tuesday. "President Obama takes a lot of pro-life positions. I don't think that he is strongly pro-abortion."

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But others vehemently disagree, and Obama's visit to Notre Dame has set off a fierce debate among Roman Catholics about whether it is appropriate for one of the nation's premier Catholic institutions to host a proponent of legalized abortion and embryonic stem cell research, both of which are contrary to church teachings.

Ten priests, all Notre Dame alumni, wrote an open letter warning that the university had put its "true soul" at risk by welcoming the president.

The controversy has also given Obama's conservative opponents the chance to hammer the popular president on a divisive issue they think he has tried -- successfully so far -- to minimize.

Obama, who will give the commencement address and accept an honorary law doctorate, is a supporter of abortion rights, though he has spoken of the need to reduce unwanted pregnancies. Polls show that a slight but steady majority of Americans thinks abortion should remain legal.

As of Wednesday, 71 Catholic bishops -- including two cardinals -- had denounced the invitation, as have more than 350,000 Catholics who signed an online petition asking Notre Dame to withdraw it. Dueling websites and Facebook groups have sprung up, including one, Notre Dame Response, that urges graduating students to boycott the ceremony.

Harvard law professor Mary Ann Glendon, a former U.S. ambassador to the Vatican who is opposed to abortion, turned down Notre Dame's most prestigious award, the Laetare Medal, when she learned the university tried to

Notre Dame's Obama flap  
April 1, 2009

placate critics by reminding them that she was included in the commencement program too.

Familiar names from culture wars past rushed to South Bend, Ind.: Antiabortion stalwart Randall Terry, a newly converted Catholic, temporarily moved his family of six from Washington, D.C., in April and vowed to "make this a political mud pit for Obama." An antiabortion group called the Center for Bio-Ethical Reform hired planes to fly over Notre Dame with banners carrying photos of aborted fetuses.

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