

# Holy Cross speech by church critic is canceled

By Patrick Healy

GLOBE STAFF

Women's studies professors at the College of the Holy Cross have canceled a speech by a prominent feminist critic of the Roman Catholic Church after the Worcester college's Jesuit president denounced her as "manipulative" and forbade the use of college funds for her \$500 speaking fee.

Frances Kissling, president of Catholics for a Free Choice, an abortion rights group that often challenges Vatican policy, had been invited to speak Nov. 7.

Kissling said she had planned to talk about "abuse of power in the church" and her recent meeting with the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, where she criticized the Vatican's response to the clergy sexual abuse scandal.



Frances Kissling had been invited to speak at Holy Cross on Nov. 7.

The college's president, the Rev. Michael C. McFarland, did not bar the lecture, but he sent a letter to women's studies professors assailing Kissling and saying they should have shown "better judgment" than to have invited her. Several professors said yesterday they feared that Holy Cross administrators and alumni would have retaliated against women's studies if the speech had gone ahead as planned.

"Feminists on Catholic campuses find this to be a difficult time," said Mary Hobgood, director of Holy Cross's women's studies program, who had scheduled the speech. "Many of us often do not feel secure on these campuses."

Many Catholic colleges, including

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Holy Cross, try to strike a balance between the principle of free speech and sensitivity to their Catholic mission. In some instances allowing controversial figures to speak, and in others hosting events that include a supporter and a critic of church positions. This year, for example, forums and classes at Catholic institutions such as Boston College and Regis College have cast spotlights on the clergy scandal.

The Kissling speech at Holy Cross, however, crossed a line for the college administration.

When Hobgood informed McFarland about the planned speech this month, McFarland replied in a letter that he found the invitation "extremely disappointing" because of what he called Kissling's record of "determined opposition to the Catholic Church and its leadership."

Kissling, a frequent commentator in the media, has denounced Pope John Paul II as "authoritarian" and referred to some US bishops as "bawed" and "bullies." She has questioned the Vatican's permanent observer status at the UN and its positions on a range of sexual and ethical issues.

McFarland said he supported free speech and "strong feminist

## Globe wins for work on abuse by clergy

ASSOCIATED PRESS

**BALTIMORE** — The Boston Globe yesterday won the Associated Press Managing Editors' Freedom of Information award for its exposure of the scope of the problem of abusive clergy within the Catholic Church.

The Globe's account began with an investigation into allegations of sexual abuse by a priest in the Boston Archdiocese and ballooned into a major national story.

The award was presented during the APME annual conference here.

Walter Robinson, editor of the Globe's Spotlight team, which has handled the coverage, told 300 newspaper editors and other journalists that as hard as it is to obtain certain records from government, it was

even more difficult to get information and records from the church.

Seven other newspapers were selected to receive APME FOI citations for their work in the area of access and public information. They are:

■ The Journal News, White Plains, N.Y., for various FOI probes, each of which resulted in the removal of high-ranking local officials.

■ The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, for "Dying in Darkness," an investigation into the care given by the state of Georgia to the mentally retarded living in group homes.

■ Wisconsin State Journal in Madison, for its exposure of illegal campaign activity within the Wisconsin Legislature.

■ The Orange County Regis-

ter, Santa Ana, Calif., for its investigation into the criminal backgrounds of day care center employees in California, and the state's refusal to make those records available to parents.

■ The York (Pa.) Dispatch-York Sunday News, for its investigations into the 1969 slaying of a woman during a civil rights riot, resulting in the indictment of the mayor on a charge of murder.

■ York (Pa.) Daily Record, for its investigations into the same case.

■ The Burlington (Vt.) Free Press, for its investigation into the issue of medical malpractice within the state.

The contest covered work published or pursued from July 1, 2001, to June 30.

was told about the president's objections, said she would not come under that condition.

"I'm a Catholic," Kissling said yesterday. "I'm tired of speaking off-campus and in Unitarian churches about issues that are important in my church."

McFarland said in a statement yesterday that he supported the right of campus groups to invite "almost any speaker, including Frances Kissling, but I could not defend the decision itself, which I think was a poor decision."

Some faculty members at Holy Cross said McFarland was strengthening the women's studies department to avoid a backlash.

"There is a small group of extraordinarily conservative Catholic alumni in the Worcester area that challenge anything and everything that is contemporary," said one women's studies professor, who spoke on condition of anonymity. "McFarland wouldn't want Holy Cross in the limelight over this speech."

Replied McFarland in his statement: "We have loyal, passionate and involved alumni. They criticize us over all kinds of issues. We have had speakers in the past that have enraged various segments of the alumni population, and I am sure we will continue to do so in the future."

Kissling, who says she has spoken in recent years at Catholic campuses such as Georgetown and Catholic universities, said she believed McFarland had "demonized" her unfairly.

"In an academic setting, I would have expected a more open approach — let's find out who this woman is," Kissling said.

But she also expressed disappointment with professors who did not challenge the administration and go forward with the speech. "This was a case of inexperience by the faculty," Kissling said. "We [feminists] don't fully understand the extent to which, even on campuses that seem to be liberal, there are unwritten messages from the administration."

Hobgood said that McFarland's letter stunned her. When about a dozen members of the women's studies faculty met to discuss it this week, most agreed it was "not the right time" to challenge the administration, Hobgood said.

She declined to explain the issues faced by feminist scholars at Holy Cross, but added, "I think the letter represented the difficulties that we face."

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positions" at Holy Cross, but said the women's studies faculty should have been more careful in its choice of speakers.

"Her criticism has been strident, personal, manipulative, and

unfair," McFarland wrote in the letter, a copy of which was provided to the Globe. "Her presence will be deeply offensive to many people here, including me, and will be an embarrassment to the

institution."

Hobgood, who is also an associate professor of religious studies, proposed moving the event off-campus. But Kissling, who had offered to speak for free after she