

FAY VINCENT REFUSES SACRED HEART DEGREE
Resigns from the Board of Fairfield University
By Daniel B. England

Fay Vincent, 67, the former baseball commissioner, turned down an honorary Doctor of Letters degree from Sacred Heart University and resigned from the Board of Fairfield University, citing the Vatican's recent firing of Fr. Thomas Reese from the magazine *America*.

Speaking to the Minuteman from his Greenwich home, he said, "I've been a supporter of *America* for twenty five years. This thing really bothered me terribly. I have read the magazine carefully and it was always respectful to the Church. For me, not taking the degree was a matter of principle."

A crowd of about 6,000 including graduating seniors and their families were gathered in Campus Field at Sacred Heart last Sunday under threatening skies, when Thomas V. Forget, Vice President for Academic Affairs, made the surprise announcement. He said, "Earlier this week, Mr. Fay Vincent informed us that he regrets that he is unable to accept an honorary degree from Sacred Heart University at this time. He has taken this action, as well as resigning from the boards of several Catholic institutions, because of his deep concern over the Vatican's recent removal of Father Thomas Reese, from his position as editor of the Jesuit weekly magazine, *America*. Dr. Cernera met with Mr. Vincent and respects the decision he has made. Mr. Vincent admires the work and important mission of Sacred Heart University. He extends his best wishes to the graduates as they continue to make their contributions to the human family."

"I told Tony [Anthony J. Cernera, President of Sacred Heart] that I didn't want it to reflect badly on Sacred Heart but I had to do it as a matter of principle," Vincent said. "He said he understood." Three other honorary degrees were presented as planned to Geoffrey T. Boisi, Chairman of Roundtable Investment Partners and the commencement speaker; Sister Marie Julianne Farrington of the Sisters of St. Mary of Namur; and Farooq Kathwari, the Chairman and CEO of Ethan Allen.

When asked if the move against Reese was an ominous signal for the future of this papacy, he said, "I'm really worried that some Catholic organizations, especially universities, are at some risk. How can you call yourself a university without free debate?"

He emphasized that this was a personal decision not taken at the urging of anyone else. "I'm not trying to influence anyone," he said, "it's just something I had to do. I didn't feel comfortable with receiving the degree. I would have felt hypocritical." He said he has also resigned from Yale's Thomas More Center because of the Vatican action.

Fay Vincent served as the eighth commissioner of baseball after having served as deputy commissioner under A. Bartlett Giamatti the late 80s. He was previously the president and CEO of Columbia Pictures and vice-chairman of Coca Cola.