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A Wish for More Dialogue with Non-Catholic Religions

By **Bridget Mulroy**



For the last four years I have become involved in my Catholic faith from a new and challenging aspect, the Society of Jesus. As an art therapy and theology major at Spring Hill College I have studied under several lay professors and Jesuit priests. Stepping into a classroom with these professors can be both an exciting and nerve-shaking challenge.

I have been challenged to work through the book knowledge presented to me in the classroom, and learn how to really absorb and apply the subjects to myself as a child of God. I have been challenged not only to grow in wisdom of the mind, but the wisdom of the heart. I have been challenged to take my area of study and use it to deepen my own spiritual journey. I have been challenged to accept myself in my entirety, strengths and weaknesses. I have been challenged by a Jesuit education to become aware of God in myself, in others, and in all things. I am becoming aware of what it means to be fully human and fully alive in Christ.

It begins in the classroom. My Jesuit experience as a theology major has been a crossover between both lay and clergy professors for a liberal arts education. At a Jesuit, liberal arts college I learn and explore core subjects, the arts, and the humanities, with my focus on theology. Through my range of study I am learning more about myself by further understanding what it means to be fully human in my own experi-

ence as well as others.

My theology courses have spread over an intertwined network of Catholic and religious topics from general studies of western religious heritage to specific persons, including Teilhard de Chardin. My learning has been enriched by Jesuit professors on very interesting topics. However while my focus was kept on courses on Catholicism, human sex and marriage, Dead Sea Scrolls, and Christianity, I would like to have had further explored topics outside of my personal faith.

After an introductory course on world religions, I would have loved follow-up courses on religions other than Catholicism, including Buddhism, Hinduism, or Islam. For example, my understanding of personal faith became more fully understood after taking a Judaism class taught by the local rabbi.

From learning the ins and outs of another religion I was able to grow in my own knowledge and understanding about Catholicism. Not only can this broader understanding of theology help personal faith, it also allows for a cross-cultural experience of interfaith dialogue. While so many barriers are built between people because of color, nationality, or social class, we as Catholics should be acting in a way that will tear down those barriers of religion. In my experience of a Jesuit education I have been awakened to these ideas of social justice, learning that it starts with a personal vocation

and moves into a social community aimed at the development of every person in respect and dignity.

At Spring Hill College, my Jesuit education did not stop in the classroom, but was supported by the faculty, staff, and student body, who created a community of education and living. My classroom experience leaves me with new ideas, and, more than anything, it leaves me with questions.

I am challenged with questions on current beliefs. I have found myself walking back to my dorm and arguing with myself about evolution and faith, morality, and just war. The biggest question that has continued to face me however, is how to live out my Jesuit education in the world around me. Not only do I have the opportunity to explore and question others and myself in a book, I am continuously practicing and learning in and through my experience. ■

Bridget Mulroy is a theology major at Spring Hill College.