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Letter to the Editor

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Letter to the Editor

C. N. Sue Abromaitis

October 17, 2002

To the editor:

I have made an effort to parse the articles on Catholic identity in the most recent issue of *Conversations*. Most of them seem to suggest that Catholic in the context of Jesuit education has not much to do with creedal Catholicism. I deliberately use the words "seem to suggest" because so many of the authors employ a certain kind of Jesuit-speak that is vague, jargon-laden, and marked with assumptions that never have to be proved or, for that matter, clearly defined. The exception, of course, is Cardinal Dulles's demonstration of the relevance of Cardinal Newman to the question of *Ex Corde*.

Even the title "C/catholic" is indicative of the ambiguity about the faith in which too many who live off Mother Church specialize. This ambiguity was quite apparent in the peculiar disclaimer that preceded Cardinal Dulles's article: publishing it "does not in any way constitute an endorsement of the Cardinal Newman Society." That the members of the National Seminar on Jesuit Higher Education want to distance themselves from an organization of bright young men and women who do not hide their fidelity to Christ's Church is a cause for concern. If the editors' point is that there should be no confusion between source and approval of the source, why was there no disclaimer when one of the writers announced a way of life that is fundamentally at odds with Catholic morality?

Another instance of obfuscating Jesuit-speak is the distinction between "an elusive Jesuit substantive, a Jesuit quiddity," that, Father Paul

Crowley contends, so many pursue unaware that it is not necessary to the Jesuit project. Rather, he claims, "a spirituality, an approach to transcendence" is the mark of authentic Jesuit education. I have been a reader for decades and am relatively perceptive. But Father Crowley loses me with these phrases. If I read him correctly, he has an agenda that he chooses to present in terms that only the illuminati will get. For example, he refers to the "recent controversy at Georgetown University" about crucifixes without explaining why he cites this controversy. Later, he returns to the issue only to ask, "how do we move beyond the symbolic issue of crucifixes in the classroom?" That question is, to say the least, ironic. Crucifixes are, after all, symbols of the Incarnation. Yet Father Crowley dismisses the movement to have crucifixes just before recommending a "radical incarnationalist realism," a stance that ought to lead one to recognize the importance of symbols.

Equally evasive is Sr. Mary Theresa Moser's discussion of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*. How honest it would be, and how unlikely, if those in authority at schools that employ the Jesuit brand name even as they cringe at the notion of Roman Catholicism would just admit their aversion to the whole business of the Biblical mandate behind the Church. I am most unimpressed by her referring to St. Ignatius to justify double-speak about, and passive disobedience to, the authority of the Church. To suggest that it is acceptable and even noble to substitute our judgment for that of the Church in determining

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what Catholic means is clearly at odds with the Ignatian mandate, "*Sentire cum Ecclesia*." One can only imagine how that fiery founder would respond to such an application of his words.

Finally, I find the implicit denial of the real problems in Jesuit colleges to be at best disingenuous. When we talk about diversity of religion, we are not talking about a faculty filled with ardent and practicing non-Catholics or, for that matter, Catholics. Rather, secularism prevails. It is most obvious in the relatively rare examination of any integrated moral witness focused on life, love, and the family as taught by the Church. Moreover there is an obvious fear on the part of many administrators (whose name is legion) that to insist that chastity is a virtue whose violation entails injustice would be to put Jesuit schools at risk of mockery from the academic establishment. Without belaboring the subject, I would suggest that the sordid lives of too many faculty members and too many students are the result of a flight from an authentic incarnational view, one that rejects the Gnosticism of what passes for anthropology in too many Jesuit schools.

In these articles little if any attention is given to the significant counter-cultural possibility that Jesuit colleges could, as a matter of course, help students appropriate the intellectual framework that supports traditional Church teaching on faith and morals. Statements recognizing the value and calling for the protection of human life from conception to natural death are rarely uttered within any institutional framework. Equally rare in courses, college-sponsored speeches, and sermons is reference to marriage -- permanent, monogamous marriage between a man and a woman -- as the uniquely appropriate context for sexual activity, love, and openness to life.

How refreshing it would be to have an honest issue of *Conversations* in which, when the editor

sees fit to publish ambiguous or dissenting views, opposing views would be presented. Writers might be paired: those rejecting the role of the *magisterium* in an institution that uses Catholic / Jesuit as a brand name answering and being answered by those who acknowledge that role: no evasions, no jargon, no ambiguity. In this way we would take seriously a mandate that applies as much to academia as it does to business: truth in advertising.

Sincerely,
C. N. Sue Abromaitis
Professor of English

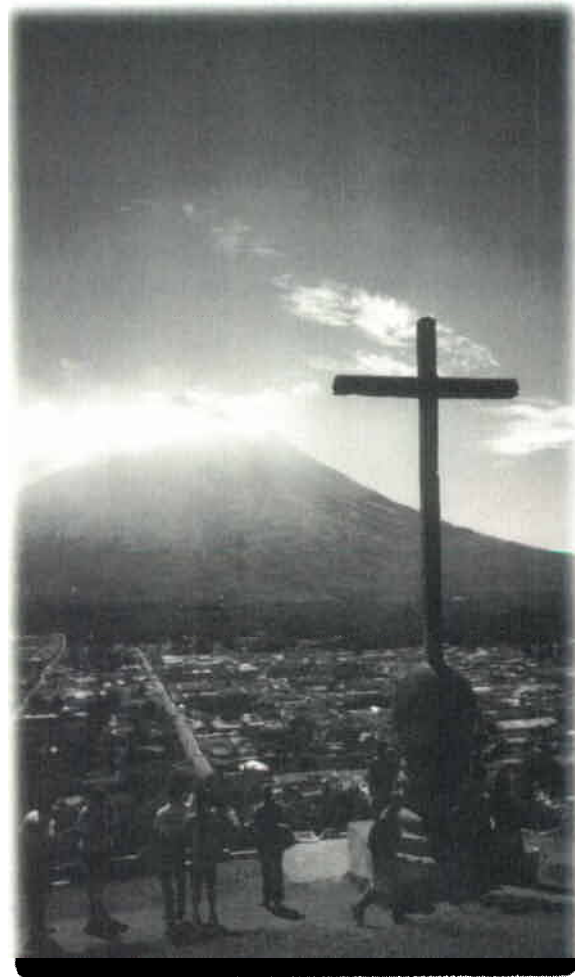


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