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THE FATAL BLOW

The Case of the Stinking Corpse

By Martin X. Moleski, S.J.

The fatal blow against Jesuit Catholic education was struck forty years ago when the decision was made to give our colleges and universities away to secular boards. There is still a lot of life left in the corpse and with some careful embalming we may be able to maintain the outward appearances of Catholic identity for some time yet. The Russians have preserved Lenin's body for nearly a century; if they can do it, so can we!

The great crisis for administrators watching over the carcass of Catholic universities is this: if they give too much attention to the relationship between their institutions and the Church, they may actually be sued for discriminating between Catholics and non-Catholics in their hiring practices. They have to stay constantly on guard against any spark of life that might accidentally revive the deceased. If there is sufficient evidence of a living, meaningful link to the Catholic Church—evidence that could stand up in court—the schools will lose access to federal funding. Every step must therefore be taken, with proper documentation, so that the charge of being a Catholic institution could never be proven against them. We only want the corpse to look as if it is still alive. Heaven forbid that it be resuscitated! The consequences for the bottom line are unthinkable.

"No, your Honor. We have no real connection to the life of the Church. We are willing to swear on a stack of Bibles to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Our corporation is as secular as any other university in America. There isn't a dime's worth of difference between what they do and what we do, so please do not cut off the flow of money to us and to our students. We have made our choice. Money talks; faith walks. The life of our institution is what counts. We'll do anything to survive. Your will be done in us as it is at Harvard."

Although the evidence has been carefully collected for four decades to prove that the institutions formerly

known as Catholic universities are, in fact, completely and utterly detached from the Catholic Church, the outward appearances of Catholicism have been maintained as a marketing and fundraising device. The thought of telling the public that our schools are demonstrably no longer Catholic is as terrifying to the administrators as being charged in court with having a real link to the life of the Church. Honesty is definitely not the best policy when competing for customers and benefactors.

Fortunately, the Jesuit tradition supplies many resources for dealing with this crisis. We are notorious for our casuistry and famous for teaching people how to say one thing but mean another under oath. Language and culture change over time. Evolution of meaning is a law of life. Words are arbitrary associations of sound and sense. All we need to do is keep the old words in our literature and give them new and improved meanings. It has happened before, so there's no harm in us causing it to happen again. "Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam" translates nicely into "Excellence." There is no need to mention "God" in our translation, of course, because everyone knows that "God" means "most excellent." Striving for excellence is practically the same thing as worshiping the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The Spiritual Exercises are great for giving the illusion of a Catholic culture as well, after they've been properly filtered to remove those sixteenth-century allusions to sin, suffering, redemption by God-made-man, and the rules for thinking with the Church.

When we're all done re-reading the Exercises, it turns out that they're all about feelings, and feelings do sell well in modern culture. "Pray about it. Recognize the fearful risks you are taking. Then do what you think is right. God (if there is a God) loves you unconditionally, so it doesn't matter what you choose. If you feel that it

"If you feel that it is right, it is right."

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We are fortunate indeed to have found a way to distance ourselves from the institutional Church while still keeping the word 'Catholic' in our advertising.

is right, it is right. Whatever you will is what God wills through you, with you, and in you." Changing with the times is the Ignatian way. We must adapt to new circumstances never foreseen by the founders of our universities. If we do not adapt, we will die, and we all know that God could never ask such a sacrifice from us.

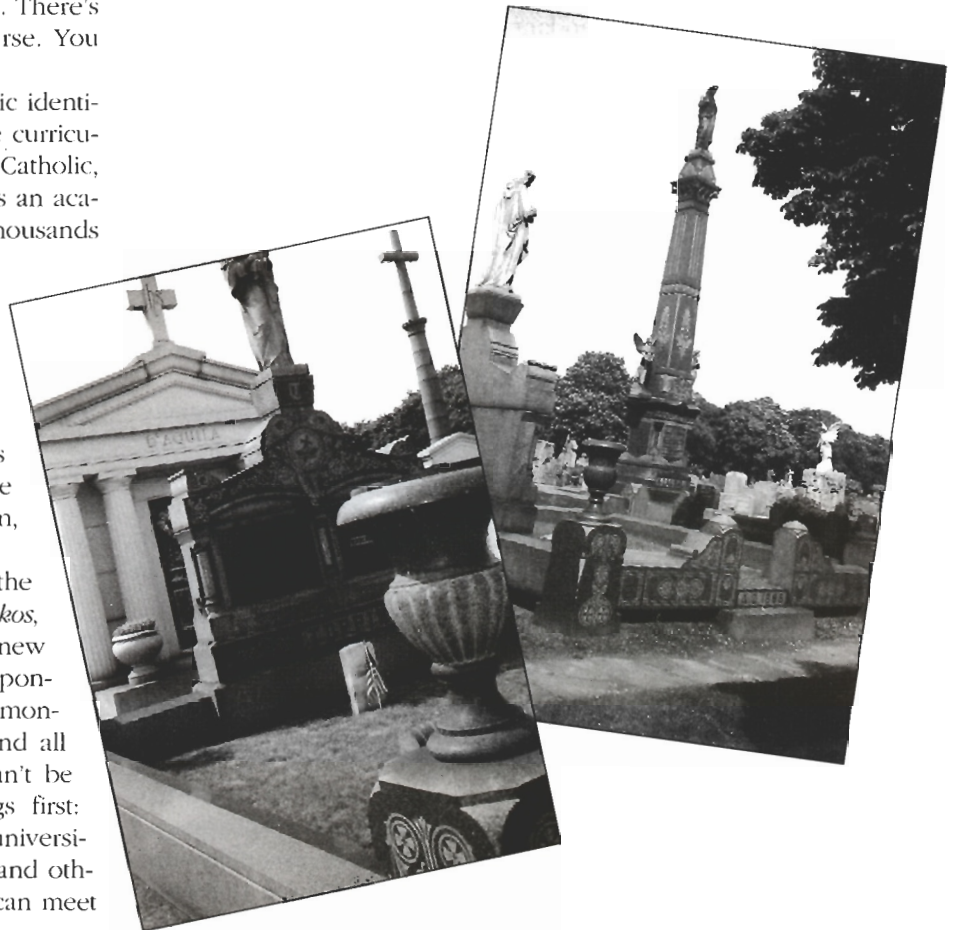
Then there's "cura personalis"—care for the person. This is a stunning slogan for the modern world. "We care for you as a person. We don't care about your eternal salvation, of course, because taking any real steps in that direction might cut us off from federal and state funding, but we want you to be just like everyone else in the world. Our Healthy Sex Committee meets regularly to help make sure that the incidences of pregnancy and other sexually transmitted diseases are kept within the national norms. We wouldn't want you to think that we have any opinion about the proper use of human sexuality. That would be medieval, and we all know that being medieval is bad, that the present is new and improved, and that the future is going to be better than ever. We are people-oriented people. We put personal concerns above everything else. We want you to know that we care for you just the way you are. There's no need to repent, unless you want to, of course. You do what you think is best."

In order to maintain the illusion of a Catholic identity, the study of religion must remain part of the curriculum. But, lest we be convicted of actually being Catholic, we must make sure that the Church is treated as an academic specimen no different from any of the thousands of other oddities collected from cultures around the world and from the pages of history. "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. The truth is that people disagree about what truth is. If there were one true Church, everyone would accept it; the fact that people disagree about the truth of Catholicism proves that it is not the true Church; therefore, you are free to believe anything you wish about God, sin, salvation, and sex. Have a nice day!"

This redefinition of truth is supported by the original meaning of the Greek adjective, *katholikos*, which meant "general, universal." In the brave new world order, in which each person takes full responsibility for what he or she believes, we will demonstrate our true Catholicism by endorsing any and all opinions about divinity and humanity. "You can't be narrow-minded about these things. First things first: funding is fundamental! We are a truly Catholic university because we do not call some opinions false and others true. It is all the same to us, as long as we can meet

our payroll. Let ten thousand visions blossom! The more opinions we embrace, the more universal we are, and the more we can please our customers, about whom we care more than we can say. Keep the customer satisfied!"

The redefinition of "Catholicism" as "universalist" is consistent with the trend within Catholicism for Catholics to sift the teachings of the Church through the sieve of their own personal conscience. The vast majority of Catholics now know that conscience is supreme; that conscience is a matter of personal choice; and that no one else can judge their conscientious decision-making because Jesus said, "Judge not, lest ye be judged." Therefore the behavior of Catholics in the sexual arena has become indistinguishable from that of the general population—the same rate of pre- and extra-marital sex, abortions, and divorce. This means that the American Catholic population wants Catholic universities that applaud and affirm dissent from the Church's dead, white, male, chauvinist, uptight, moralizing, European, colonial Puritanism. Since the sins of priests against chastity prove that the Church is hypocritical in its teaching on heterosexual marriage as the norm by which sexual behavior is to





be evaluated, we are fortunate indeed to have found a way to distance ourselves from the institutional Church while still keeping the word “Catholic” in our advertising.

It may well be that we won’t have to keep the corpse from stinking much longer. An American schism may yet take place; if it does, our universities will be perfectly positioned to serve those who have broken with Rome and have crafted a truly modern form of Catholicism. We will be able to show how we led the way to freedom by detaching our corporations from the dead hand of authority and allowing them to nurse with delight at the abundant breasts of the federal and state governments. Since Catholicism can be studied notionally, just like any other mythology, and since anyone can do religious studies regardless of his own religious convictions, we really won’t need any Catholics at the university in order to have a Catholic university. Anybody can collect the propositions of Catholicism and show the logical relationships between them. Religion is nothing but a set of words, and anybody can investigate the meaning of words as well as anybody else. You don’t need to be converted to see what Catholicism is all about. All you need is a good dictionary.

Nor will we need Jesuits to have a Jesuit university. It is easy to teach people to pay attention to what they like and dislike and to follow their bliss, which is all that Ignatius meant in talking about “consolation” and “desolation,” so the laity can continue the process of continual reformation and adaptation that the Jesuits set in motion after Vatican II.

We will have the best of both worlds: full funding from the government and the full support of those who agree that there is no once-for-all-time meaning to words like “Jesuit” or “Catholic.” The idea of what a Catholic university is has to change because the idea of what it means to be Catholic has changed. And the world will be a better place when the jesuitical universalist gospel is grasped. The old concept of truth was essentially totalitarian. The idea that people could tell the difference

between true and false, good and evil, or Heaven and Hell was essentially fascist.

We now know that the old way of looking at things killed thought because it was univocal, closed, dogmatic, exclusive, and oppressive. This is the kind of religion that produced crusaders, witch burners, and terrorists. It made people feel guilty about doing what they felt like doing, and we now know that feeling guilty is ridiculous. People need and want to be affirmed in the choices that they are making, not told that there are objective standards of right and wrong that can be derived from right reasoning about nature and from right reason-

ing about revelation. The majority of Catholics don’t believe in Catholicism, and we definitely want to be where the majority of our market is. The shepherd must stay with the flock, so where the flock goes, the shepherd must follow.

With our new and improved theology derived from polling the faithful in matters of faith, we may fearlessly encourage our faculty and students to “find God in all things.” God is in the world, not outside of it. God is engaged in human activity, not divorced from it. God is everything and everywhere. He is the wind beneath our wings. Everyone in the university is striving for excellence and everything they study is divine, so the whole world is sacred and all of our work is sanctified. Those who have eyes to see will perceive the supernatural existential, the horizon of grace that is open to the whole of humanity. There is no need to argue this doctrine against that doctrine nor to compare one system with another. All is one! The people who worry about the death of Catholic universities are operating on a lower plane—mere religionism. If they would just raise their eyes to the heights, they would see that everything that rises must converge, that the mountain of God may be ascended from east or west or north or south, that all apparent opposites are really two sides of the same coin, and that you cannot have life without death, good without evil, truth without falsehood, or universities without state funding.

This spiritual vision is what our consumers are hungry for. They do not want authority, dogma, ritual, sacraments, or institutional ties to the Roman Catholic Church. They want to know the glorious freedom of the children of God to think what they want to think, to believe what they want to believe, and to do what they want to do—when, as, and with whom they want to do it. Let the faculty and staff say, “Amen!” Let the administrators and fundraisers say “Amen!” Let our customers and benefactors say, “Amen!” Come, great future, come! ■