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Students Speak: The Integrated Catholic Gay Student

Zack Pesavento

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group who met with the Seminar's members at our January meeting.

As I graduate from Georgetown University this May, I see a campus community in a process of transformation. Following two widely-publicized anti-gay hate crimes and a powerful response from the student body last fall, President John DeGioia announced the creation of a full-time LGBTQ Resource Center to open this fall. Some have suggested that this center would require an institutional endorsement of positions that directly contradict Church teaching, which would leave the integrity of Georgetown's stated Catholic and Jesuit identity in jeopardy.

I certainly dealt with these same concerns in my personal experience of becoming an integrated gay Catholic. For many years, these two aspects of my identity developed in a fragmented way, separated by a seemingly insurmountable wall. I felt forced to choose sides on a daily basis, struggling as hard as I could to make sure that I kept hidden whichever "me" I was not to be in a given situation.

Like almost any Catholic, I might not agree with every word ever spoken in the Vatican. Nevertheless, I do appreciate that the Church embraces the notion that we are all stuck in the same, muddy mess of life. That's what I have always enjoyed about the Gospels; these stories emphasize the intrinsic dignity of the rejected members of society. Through them, we become friends with lepers, immigrants and sex workers. It makes sense to me that the Church's teachings are valuable for Catholics insofar as they are rooted in the tradition of these Gospels. In my view, the greatest commandment is the call to love God and one's neighbor, as we have already been loved. Christ tells us in Matthew's Gospel that "the whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments." This love is the most solid of all common ground in our faith tradition.

When any two people express a genuine love for each other, this gift cannot contradict any Church teaching that is

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consistent with Christ's only command. Likewise, Georgetown's decision to support any healthy relationship that is built upon the virtues of honesty and respect is fully consistent with its mission.

I encourage you to read the parable of the man born blind in the ninth chapter of John's Gospel. Christ contravened existing religious doctrine by opening the man's eyes on a Sabbath. The apparent outcast subverts his supposed "sin" of blindness by teaching the Pharisees a new lesson about seeing sin as exclusion and separation. Some say that we should judge the faithfulness of others on the basis of an outward conformity to a set of rules and codes. However, many people throughout history have pointed to a deeper understanding of faith – a journey (often, a struggle) to abide by an ineffable law of love that comes forth from within. To varying degrees, we are all blind men and we are all Pharisees.

For me, the road to cynicism is indeed wide and well-paved. But, I'm tired of being left with either that option or the self-hatred that tore me apart for so many years. This false choice has driven so many LGBTQ individuals out the door of our faith communities and into an unnecessary spiritual winter.

When a leading Catholic university like Georgetown openly recognizes the value of LGBTQ students, it sends a clear message to many that they do not need to fear one aspect of their identity in order to maintain the other. Our administration's support for the LGBTQ community is a natural expression of its ongoing mission to educate the whole person. Georgetown is simply experiencing a change of heart.

I do not believe that we are called to forge unity out of fundamental divisions. Rather, it is our task to reveal that which cannot be divided. Once we recognize that the walls between us – and within us – must have been constructed, it becomes much easier to see that we have been walking around on the same green earth this whole time. When we reject any form of hatred or discrimination, we are helping to clear the way for the "civilization of love" of which John Paul II often spoke. Although the terrain may change, we have always stood on common ground. ■

Zack Pesavento, a 2008 Georgetown graduate, is beginning a one-year media fellowship with the AFL-CIO.

