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These two Georgetown students were members of the student

On the Edge: Defending an Identity

By David Gregory



I doubtlessly owe everything I am to the Jesuits. Throughout my Jesuit high school and collegiate education, the Jesuits have set my heart on fire, truly revolutionizing the way in which I encounter Christ, whom and what I “fall in love” with, as Fr. Arrupe reflected so eloquently. My passion for and dedication to Jesuit education has me worried as Georgetown fast approaches a crucial decision: whether to maintain its powerfully rich Roman Catholic, Jesuit heritage, or to forsake its founding principles in favor of a secular route taken by many other schools. Please consider the numerous implications of the following events and trends carefully.

In 2007, Georgetown’s Law Center shockingly provided funding for a student internship at Planned Parenthood, the nation’s most prominent abortion provider. In the final lecture of Introductory Biology, I was stunned to hear my Georgetown-educated professor declare the human person to be nothing more than a purely material being, implicitly rejecting transcendent reality. While beliefs of non-Catholic employees must be respected, these individuals must likewise appreciate, as per Pope John Paul II’s apostolic letter *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, that Georgetown cannot

promulgate views that contradict the Roman Catholic Church. Georgetown must attract Catholic scholars who manifest love of the faith in their teaching and professional endeavors.

However, my main concern lies with the student body, which truly defines the university, as Georgetown has suffered a drastic decline in the Catholicity of its students. A few decades ago, over 350 students frequented weekly nocturnal adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, and now, no more than two dozen students attend this classic devotion. The Catholic Student Association and retreat program struggle for consistent activity, not due to lack of enthusiastic and talented leadership, but due to a largely apathetic student body. Only fifty-one percent of Georgetown undergraduates identify themselves as Roman Catholic, an ominously slim majority for one of the nation’s most prominent Jesuit schools.

Georgetown must always welcome non-Catholic students with open arms, and give them the resources and opportunities to follow their faiths seriously. Many Catholic students do not take personal spiritual development as seriously as do their non-Catholic peers. Undergraduate admissions should now, more than ever, in this age of wanton secularism and anti-religious hostility, actively seek to recruit Catholic students who want to engage and live their faith. Georgetown must proclaim proudly that it is a school in the Jesuit tradition, highlighting diversity while simultaneously remaining unflinching in upholding Roman Catholic teaching, unembarrassed and unafraid of any consequent criticism.

Last fall, a Jesuit commented to me that “Georgetown is out of the hands of the Jesuits.” While the Society surely maintains a presence on campus, it no longer exerts

its former influence on the university’s administration and scholarship. Many Hoyas intentionally graduate without ever encountering a Jesuit, without learning from these wonderful men who have given their lives to Christ and education, without allowing Jesuit education to transform their lives.

Thankfully, hope springs eternal, as Pope Benedict reiterates in his encyclical. Dr. John DeGioia, our first lay president, has been profoundly affected by his experience with the Spiritual Exercises. Georgetown students donate considerable time and energy to service, understanding that education is given so that we can effect change in the world, that we are not ultimately meant to live for ourselves. This year, three groups of students are traveling to El Salvador, Tanzania, and the Philippines as part of a “magis immersion” experience. There exists a sizable group of students dedicated to preserving the school’s Jesuit identity, through a number of activities such as sacramental devotions and the annual Jesuit Heritage Week. Most students simply neglect the plethora of opportunities Georgetown provides us with to deepen our relationships with God, and thus our relationships with one another and the world around us. Hoyas do not comprehend the vast importance of our origins.

Ex Corde Ecclesiae emphasizes that it is the “honor and responsibility of a Catholic University to consecrate itself without reserve to the cause of truth.” If Georgetown loses its Jesuit character, it loses its very self. If Georgetown fails to defend and advocate the cause of Truth, it fails its primary mission, to bring Christ to the world and the world to Christ. ■

David Gregory is a philosophy and theology major at Georgetown.