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Letters to the Editor

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Editor:

A “Yawning Chasm” and a Meltdown

Editor:

My thanks to David O'Brien for his reflections on the Jesuit and Catholic identity of our institutions [*Conversations*, No. 6, Fall 1994]. While he frames the question well, I fear he contributes to his own inability to come to a clear understanding. From my vantage point, he compounds the confusion in several ways.

First, he seems to want to merge theology and campus ministry into one. These two departments have related but distinct aims and functions. I leave it to the theologians to describe their own goals and to outline how they go about attaining them. The responsibility of campus ministry is to make visible the religious identity of the institution and to

nurture the faith life of the students, faculty, administrators and staff.

Second, he confuses the role of campus ministry with that of the parish. It is true that participation in campus ministry activities—like a parish—is a voluntary option. But, in Jesuit institutions, ministry activities are integral to the nature of the university as an educational institution. Campus ministry is not camped on the fringe of academe like the Newman center at a state institution. Rather, ministry is part of the university itself, mandated to contribute to the pursuit of the university's mission. This it does by providing pastoral care in the culture and context of higher education. In a Jesuit institution, campus ministry is a partner, from a religious vantage point, in the education of those it serves. It is only because of being incorporated into the mission and activities of the university that cam-

pus ministry is supported with personnel and an operating budget.

Third, he posits the assumption that ministry has only to do with private life and personal interests and nothing to do with the serious work of research and teaching. Ministry does indeed foster personal growth and religious development. But ministry is concerned as well with public life and social systems. Research into effectiveness and impact is expected of and integral to ministry. Learning is facilitated in many ways outside of the classroom. Ministry in Jesuit institutions contributes to teaching and to learning in concrete measurable ways, one example of which is the facilitation of reflection upon the experience of community service.

It would be helpful if O'Brien were to provide some examples of what he terms the

“yawning chasm between campus ministry and the research and teaching at the center of university life.” Efforts to integrate faith and daily life, values and career, are high priorities of campus ministry programs in most Jesuit colleges and universities. Providing firsthand experience of the problems of public life is frequently one of the endeavors of campus ministry. The realization that these public problems can only be resolved by well-grounded complex political actions is often the resulting insight for students involved. Motivated by this realization they then return to classroom and laboratory with renewed enthusiasm to put their learning at the service of the community.

Ministry contributes to the serious business of Jesuit education. Support for service learning encourages the intentional exercise of gospel values. Concrete opportunities for

putting one's faith into action complement intellectual wrestling with questions of values and ethics in the classroom. Supervised involvement in peer ministry prepares leaders for church and society. The careful and deliberate fostering of communities of meaning provides the context in which one can sustain the resolve to be a person for others.

O'Brien inaccurately conflates the role of theology and that of campus ministry. He mistakenly depicts the role of both as comparable to that of the local parish. He himself has internalized the dualism which relegates religion to the realm of private life and personal interests. He rules out *a priori* that campus ministry has anything to do with what is really significant, *i.e.*, "the serious work of researching and teaching." And then, having eliminated from consideration one of the distinguishing characteristics of Jesuit colleges and universities, he is concerned that he cannot come up with a clear answer to his question about identity. The Jesuit and Catholic identity question is indeed extremely complex. It is definitely the responsibility of the institution as a whole and cannot be relegated to any single department or program.

But to dismiss as ultimately irrelevant the role of campus ministry is to throw away a key piece of the puzzle.

Lucien Roy
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Editor:

David O'Brien's file on Catholic Jesuit education must be fit by now for a *magnum opus*. But . . . do ever closer readings of the same x-rays, and repetitions of the same old diagnosis improve the patient? Is "the Catholic problem is not so easily dealt with" an empowering mantra? In short, is "more talk is cure" the premise here? If so, you may just be driving the patient—and the whole hospital—bananas.

Isn't it about time to admit that throwing more words and money at this issue yields only diminishing returns? The more the goal obsesses you, the more elusive it becomes. Look at John Pfordresher's article [on Catholic Studies Programs]. As soon as he makes his good points, he weakens them by repeating after Hesburg that a Catholic university is "where the Church does its thinking." This when the problem is precisely the ambivalence in the term "the Church" in this context.

Here then is a suggestion that may flabbergast at first. Yet it merely makes obvious what is already visible in your articles: *Drop all minimalist demands for Catholicism*, whether explicit, implicit, proximate, or remote. Declare a moratorium. With the stress on excellence now in place, let's just get on with our projects . . .

For the rest, your Fall 1994 issue of *Conversations* already reflects G.M. Hopkins' "Pied Beauty." "Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)"—Give praise! So, let go of projects for formalizing a "critical mass" [of Catholics at Jesuit universities]. You may set off a meltdown.

Ben Llamzon
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Service Learning for Scientists?

Editor:

I have been following the discussion about service learning with considerable interest. The entire concept of service learning as outlined in Patrick Byrne's essay "Paradigms of Justice and Love" [*Conversations*, No. 7, Spring 1995] is quite noble. I see his reasoning for excluding the "pre-professional training focus" from his model; yet such an exclusivity seems to create problems and raises some questions.

The idea of service learning for academic credit in an off-campus environment appears to exclude students who are often defined as working students, commuter students, or non-traditional students. The student who must budget his or her time tightly will not have the luxury of being able to partake in a service-learning course or program. Does this not then create a course for the more privileged student—one, say, whose parents are able to afford full room and tuition costs? The student who has fewer time constraints, who falls into the traditional seventeen to twenty-two year-old category, who doesn't have to worry about a part-time (or full-time) job to pay the tuition, who doesn't have the concern of a spouse or children, seems to be inordinately favored in such a service-learning scenario. How can such programs be expanded to include the working, commuter, or non-traditional student, or are such courses and programs destined to be aimed at the wealthier, traditional student?

Also, is this way of teaching and learning one that must be confined exclusively to the humanities? Are students in the sciences and in engineering able to enter into a service-learning course only through philosophy or theology? One wonders if service learning can be expanded into traditional science or engineering disciplines. I agree with Dr. Byrne that our current system places a premium on what he calls "economic rewards." But can service-learning programs not be expanded to include projects that are rich in an engineering or scientific discipline?

It appears to me that service learning as Dr. Byrne defines it has significant room for expansion. I would welcome any comments on the matter.

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