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Letters to the Editors

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Letters to the Editor

To the Editor:

I must admit that I find myself in shock after reading Dominic Balestra's article in the Fall 2003 issue of *Conversations*. The article seems to equate "loyalty" with "mediocrity." The reasons for giving course reductions, sabbaticals, and other time-outs for excellent researchers used to be equated with promoting and encouraging excellence. Now faculty who are excellent and earn time to move their research into excellence are portrayed as acting against the mission. I think that St. Ignatius must be rolling over in his grave at this latest Jesuit trend! The *Exercises* do not promote generic mediocrity, but true excellence in the following of God's will and in using the fullness of one's talents in service to others. I say this as one who has made the *Exercises* twice with all of her heart and has had her life radically changed by them.

I sincerely hope that soon we can get rid of "loyalty" language and find the courage to embrace the language of excellence once again.

Sincerely,

Joan Mueller, OSF, Ph.D.
Theology
Creighton University

Balestra responds:

Sr. Mueller seemed to find my article to be a call for the elimination of any released time in support of faculty research, especially her own. Of course, the mundane provisions of research reductions and sabbaticals must be provided to faculty. It is not a question of either teaching or research, it is a question of both, but in a more complex landscape. As I said in the article, "it is not a question of citizenship in either one's university or one's profession or one's religion. Rather, it is a question of how to navigate the new terrain of multiple allegiances in exem-

plary ways." There is no formula for achieving this, but we recognize excellence in it when we see it practiced. In this regard, I referred to two exemplary colleagues, James Marsh and Merold Westphal. Professor Mueller could not know that each is outstanding in teaching and in service at Fordham. However, a brief search of their names in a university library or in Amazon would find the many books and articles written and scholarly honors earned. Indeed, far from "mediocre," these individuals exemplify how multiple loyalties equate with excellence as a magis, not of isolated roles, but in respect to the whole person, whether teacher, scholar or student.

Dominic J. Balestra
Fordham University

To the Editor:

I just read "What a Difference Fifty Years Make!" by Prof. Emeritus William Duffy, Jr., of Santa Clara University. I certainly share his concern over the health of "Catholicity" in Jesuit higher education and I will not quibble here with Prof. Duffy's presuppositions or methods. Let me just say that I think his reading of the situation at Santa Clara is a bit skewed. I would like to leave it at that, but on two related matters I must take issue and set the record straight.

First he claims that Provost Denise Carmody implies in her article "that Catholicity is clearly present, but it doesn't really belong." He then adds: "In her desire to be inclusive, she seems to be leading the University away from its Roman Catholic tradition." Nothing could be further from the truth. I was the founding director of the Catholic Studies program to which Prof. Duffy refers, and can easily report that no one in higher administration gave this program more support, from the very beginning, than did Prof. Carmody. That support continues. As chair of the

Religious Studies department, she worked hard to build up offerings in Catholic systematic theology. Her credentials as a committed Catholic academic are impeccable. The author of many books in Catholic theology, she, together with her late husband John, was winner of the John Courtney Murray Award from the Catholic Theological Society of America for accomplishment in Catholic theology. Her personal religious commitment to the endeavor of maintaining this university in its Catholic heritage is firm.

Second, Prof. Duffy refers to "the decline of Catholic identity at Boston College." Again, I am puzzled. Having spent a year at BC as a fellow of the Jesuit Institute, and having worked with several faculty there as a visiting professor at Weston Jesuit School of Theology in Cambridge, my impressions were just the opposite. In fact, I would recommend that other Jesuit universities take a look at BC to see how the Catholic heritage of a Jesuit university can be revitalized in many creative ways. Few places have struggled with Catholic identity more vigorously than has BC, and they deserve a lot of credit for their results. As is well known, BC has one of the leading departments of Catholic theology in North America, and it has become an exemplary leader in the revitalization of the Catholic Church in Boston.

Yes, things have changed, at Santa Clara, BC, and elsewhere, but that doesn't necessarily mean that "Catholic identity" has been under-appreciated or lost. In some respects, it may have been gained for the first time. But that's a story for another day.

Paul Crowley, SJ
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Santa Clara University

A CORRECTION

In the Fall 2003 issue, in William Duffy, Jr.'s "What a Difference Fifty Years Makes," the sentence on page 50, "Estimates of the fraction of the student body who identify themselves as Catholic are in a range of one-half to one-third" should read "two-thirds."