

what would be either physical or psychological explanations for certain phenomena," Cardinal Di Nardo told the Associated Press (Nov. 12). "We may have forgotten that there is a spiritual dimension to people."

Spiritual warfare is real, and as the eminent Fr. John Hardon, S.J., once said, "Whether we like it or not, whether people even believe it or not, we are all conscripted. And,

we better know the enemy." Knowledge of the Enemy — nay, mere belief in the reality of the Enemy — is something the Church has let slip through her fingers in recent decades. Could the Conference on the Liturgical and Pastoral Practice of Exorcism signal a renewed recognition of our role and responsibilities as the Church Militant? Let's pray that this is the case. n

IS AUTHENTIC DIALOGUE POSSIBLE ?

Randall B. Smith

Call the Police, It's an Academic Lecture!

I had just parked my car and was walking toward the lecture hall when I heard the siren, a short blast from a Notre Dame campus-security vehicle moving traffic out of his way. At first I thought he was merely pulling over a speeder on a nearby road, but then I saw him pull into the driveway in front of the lecture hall toward which I was walking. Parking right behind another security vehicle already on the scene, the officer hustled out of his car and into the building. "Oh, *of course*," I suddenly realized. "Someone's talking about the Catholic Church's teaching on homosexuality." And that usually means a public demonstration and attempts to disrupt the lecture. Sure enough, fifteen demonstrators had gathered inside the lecture hall, right outside the doors of the auditorium, to read "queer poetry" in protest of a lecture by a young woman named Melinda Selmys. Selmys, as it turns out, had self-identified as a lesbian for many years, but later converted to Catholicism — a conversion that at first

caused her to resolve that she must forever live a life of celibacy. But some years later, she met and fell in love with a man, married, and now has five children. You can see the problem. Selmys's *experience* has become a threat to other people's *identity*.

By the time I had gotten inside the auditorium, the protest had disbanded. Selmys's husband and some of the conference organizers had invited the protesters inside to hear the lecture. The situation inside the auditorium remained tense, however, and Selmys was visibly nervous. So much so, in fact, that she largely set aside her prepared comments in order to address the concerns of the protesters, saying that she was not there to demonize anyone. She seemed anxious both to hold fast to the teachings of the Catholic Church and not alienate members of the "gay and lesbian community." She mentioned several times that her comments were drawn largely from her own experiences and that her experiences would not necessarily be the same as anyone else's.

When the time for questions came, however, the room was still identifiably tense. In spite of repeated appeals that questions be kept short so that a maximum number of people would be allowed to participate, the first questioner spent nearly five minutes lecturing Selmys on how she was "demeaning" those with a gay identity by "privileging" her Catholic identity. After hearing Selmys's response, the questioner immediately launched into a long

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follow-up question, and then another, and another, and another, basically dominating the first fifteen minutes of the scheduled twenty-five-minute discussion period. She would not voluntarily relinquish the floor until general crowd disapproval and an intervention from the chair forced her to do so. The lecture hall was now even tenser than before.

The second question was fortunately brief and to the point, but it too came from one of the protestors: "Aren't you asking me to give up my gay identity in order to embrace my Catholic identity? Why should I have to choose between the two?" After a brief reply, the third and final question came from another of the protestors: "Should homosexuality be added to this university's non-discrimination clause, and if not, why not?" This was another blessedly brief question, but as Selmys pointed out, she wasn't a representative of the university and thus knew nothing about its internal political debates.

In a letter to the editor of *The Observer*, Notre Dame's student newspaper, the following Monday, one of the protestors in the audience criticized the conference, of which Selmys's lecture was a part, saying:

If the conference desires to reflect upon homosexuality and Catholicism, planners may want to consider allowing someone to speak who actually identifies as homosexual, which they failed to do. . . . In privileging Selmys' voice, a subtle message was sent that homosexual identity is illegitimate and anti-Catholic. For those struggling to integrate body and soul (a theme of the conference), that message can actually do more violence than any ill-conceived cartoon ever could. . . .

I hope that Conference organizers in the future. . . give space to listen to the voices of LGBTQ [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender/Transsexual, and "Questioning"] Catholics. Such dialogue could form a complimentary [*sic*] relationship that would give everyone deeper insight into the incredible beauty of humanity created in the image of God, and the boundless love we receive from such a Creator. . . . While such dialogue takes courage on both parts, there is nothing to fear because as Catholics we know the outcome, which is the truth of Love.

The "ill-conceived cartoon" of which the writer speaks was a disgusting comic that appeared in *The Observer* several weeks prior with the caption: "How do you turn a fruit into a vegetable?: A baseball bat." After the cartoon appeared, the university administration intervened

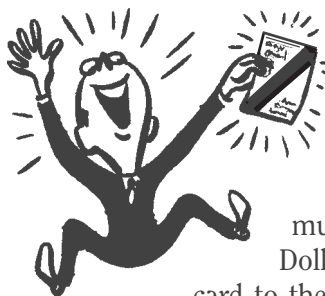
instantly at what is described as the campus' "independent student newspaper" and demanded the resignations not only of all the five students involved with the comic strip, but also of the associate editor who was on duty the night the paper went to press, even though she claimed not to have seen the offensive comic. The administration also demanded, and received, from the students and the editor, public statements of apology, which appeared in the paper within two days.

One theme that appeared repeatedly during the conference and in the subsequent letters to the student newspaper was that we "need more dialogue." But it is somewhat disorienting to hear repeated demands for "dialogue" from the same people who demonstrated *against* a speaker and who passed out leaflets decrying her being allowed to speak. *Dia-logue* by definition involves at least *two* voices or positions.

Perhaps that is what our young letter-writer was asking for two voices — one for and one against. I'm not sure, though. This isn't a demand we place on *most* speakers who come to campus. We don't insist that there be a pro-Israeli speaker every time we have a pro-Palestinian speaker. Nor do we insist on a pro-capitalist speaker every time we have a Marxist, or an Aristotelian speaker every time we have a fan of Plato. We usually assume people understand that this is *one voice*, one

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perspective, among many possible.

Problems arise, however, when speakers on Side A are demanded to balance those on Side B, but never vice versa — when, for example, pro-Palestinian speakers are demanded any time a pro-Israeli speaker is invited, but never the reverse. I'm not exactly sure that our young letter-writer *really* intends to say that every time a pro-gay speaker is invited to campus, a person upholding the Catholic teaching on sexuality should be invited as well, so that those who "privilege" their "Catholic identity" will not feel "demeaned" by those who privilege their "gay identity," or that campus officials should ensure there is a speaker to defend chastity along with each spring's ritual reading of *The Vagina Monologues*. Be that as it may, it hasn't happened, even though there have been nearly a dozen pro-gay speakers on campus since Selmys's visit.

Instead, we lost an opportunity to hear Selmys's insights into what would have been an interesting and important topic — namely, how *do* we create an environment that is welcoming to the LGBTQ community while still being honest about what we as Catholics hold regarding sexual relationships? Not producing comic strips with vile, unfunny jokes is one obvious answer. "No physical violence" is certainly a *sine qua non*, but just as certainly not the last word.

Our question has to be: How can we engage in this essential discussion in such a way that we invite people into an environment free of fear and retribution? Universities are supposed to be such places, but we all know they're not. Both the students who protested Selmys's lecture, as well as the other audience members who were forced to walk through a gauntlet of obscenities outside the lecture hall and then sit wondering what sort of outbreaks might erupt inside, were inhabiting an environment of fear. Is it possible to have a lecture on the Catholic teaching on homosexuality on a college campus and *not* have it generate fear on *both* sides of the cultural divide? We didn't get to that discussion, however, because certain people were more interested in partisan sexual politics than in dialogue.

Those of us who *are* interested in engaging in the dialogue are going to need a lot more *fortitude* than many of the well-intentioned platitudes about "dialogue" imply we should require, and especially large amounts of fortitude's auxiliary virtue, *patience*. We're going to have to be ready to hear things that make us uncomfortable, and we're going to have to "take offense" a lot less often — "taking offense" being the usual response *du jour* for

nearly everything that challenges one's current views. So, for example, unless the person speaking is *actually advocating violence*, we can't simply equate speaking with violence. That is to say, speech doesn't become violence simply because I disagree with the speaker. All sides are going to have to have the courage and patience to hear things they might not want to hear — and that includes Catholics — especially if those things challenge those hallowed assumptions and presuppositions that make up one's identity, whether that identity is Catholic, gay, pro-Palestinian, or pro-Israeli, etc.

We need to acquire fortitude and patience, yes, but let's not forget *charity*. These two former virtues are *expressions* of charity. Charity without these virtues is empty. So, for example, consider the following statement from our young letter-writer: "While such dialogue takes courage on both parts, there is nothing to fear because as Catholics we know the outcome, which is the truth of Love." If, however, there is "nothing to fear," then there is no need for courage. So too, if there is "nothing to fear," why the outrage at the presence of the speaker? Clearly she thought there was *something* to fear.

There is also, however, in the letter-writer's statement, this interesting locution: "we know the outcome, which is the truth of Love." I *think* I know what she has in mind, but then again, I'm not so sure. Talking about "the truth of Love" is not exactly the same thing as talking about "the love of Truth." Granted, for Catholics, the two are ultimately supposed to be one. Problems arise, however, when we aggressively assert the truth without love, but equally so when we try to affirm love without truth.

In his encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* ("Love in the Truth") Pope Benedict addresses this paradox:

Truth needs to be sought, found and expressed within the "economy" of charity, but charity in its turn needs to be understood, confirmed and practiced in the light of truth. . . . This is a matter of no small account today, in a social and cultural context which relativizes truth, often paying little heed to it and showing increasing reluctance to acknowledge its existence. Without truth, charity degenerates into sentimentality. Love becomes an empty shell, to be filled in an arbitrary way. In a culture without truth, this is the fatal risk facing love. It falls prey to contingent subjective emotions and opinions, the word "love" is abused and distorted, to the point where it comes to mean the oppo-

site. . . . A Christianity of charity without truth would be more or less interchangeable with a pool of good sentiments, helpful for social cohesion, but of little relevance.

This is why, as Benedict makes clear, those who share a faith in the truth of Love will always be animated by a love of the Truth. And only when there is a *shared* love of the Truth can there be a true "dialogue." If our charity is to be more than a mere "pool of good sentiments, helpful. . . but of little relevance," it will need to be given free access to the light of Truth, but also planted deep within the soil of virtues such as patience, respect, and a refusal to demonize one's opponents.

As opposed to some of the more naïve enlightenment thinkers, our Founding Fathers understood the importance of developing such virtues. They understood that things like "democracy" and "dialogue" require vast amounts of *patience*— the kind of patience most of us in the contemporary world are not accustomed to giving. We like our Diet Coke *now*, we like our information *now*. We don't want Diet Pepsi when we asked for Diet Coke, and we don't want CNN when we are looking for Fox News. Most of us, as much as we *say* we like to see things in "shades of gray rather than in black and white," actually *insist* on things being black and white. Brevity and clarity are considered the greatest virtues in the age of the sound bite. Let's get right to it: "Are you *for* it, or are you *against* it?" "Do you *love* poor people, or are you going to vote against health care?" "Are you *for* cutting taxes, or are you against the middle class?" That is the stuff of sound bites and bumper stickers, not discussion and dialogue. What takes place in the media is not dialogue; it only masquerades as dialogue because it involves *talking*. But not all talking is dialogue any more than all use of baseball bats is baseball.

A society based on individual self-assertion will end up turning what should be a sport, which is played by rules, into just another lawless struggle for domination.

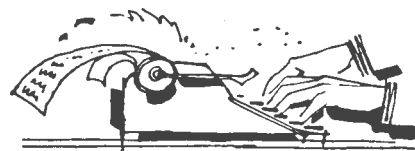
In such a culture of lawless domination, there can be no real dialogue. There can only be, as Nietzsche thought, the assertion of *will to power*. All "dialogue," in this view, is nothing more than a mask for individual will to power. But let's understand that there's no way we can have real dialogue in the academy — or anywhere else, for that matter — as long as Nietzsche's rules continue to be the rules of the game, which is increasingly the case on college campuses today. We'll either be united in a shared love of and patient search for the

truth, or words like "dialogue" and "love" will become meaningless verbiage. And when will to power becomes the order of the day, then the "lie" of dialogue may very quickly degrade into the "reality" of fear, confrontation, and even violence. When we deny our opponents a forum within which to speak, we haven't defeated their arguments or changed their hearts and minds, we've merely forced their views underground. And there they will seethe, frustrated and angry.

The enlightenment university fails because it treats human beings as rational agents without will or appetite in a disinterested pursuit of truth. The post-modern university fails because it treats human beings as animals with nothing to pursue but the satisfaction of their will and appetites. Catholic universities that love the Truth and value their Catholic identity must find ways of doing better. They should begin by treating humans as beings of both intellect and appetite, fallen and in need of redemption, capable of great understanding, but only if their natures are carefully guided in the disciplines necessary to virtue and truth. n

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