



Letter to the Editor

CRUSADER 2/1/02

To the Editors:

Holy Cross is a unique school: it is the only Catholic, Jesuit college completely dedicated to providing a liberal arts education to undergraduates. But there are many exclusively undergraduate liberal arts colleges from which a student may choose, and some of them are ranked as the best colleges in the country. Why, then, should a student choose to attend Holy Cross, when he can just as easily attend schools "with a higher rank," such as Amherst, Williams, or Vassar? The principal difference between Holy Cross and other schools of this caliber is that Holy Cross is a Catholic college, by its own choice. Rather than watering down its Catholic identity to compete in these schools' playing field, Holy Cross should offer its Catholicism as the main reason why students of all faiths and backgrounds should choose to study here.

The distinguishing characteristic of a Catholic university is that it is a place where faith and reason are in constant dialogue with each other. At secular universities, reason reigns as the sole lord of the classroom, while the life of faith is confined strictly to the chapel. At Catholic schools, this dichotomy does not exist. Instead, faith and reason walk together in harmony, helping both students and teachers pursue the highest truths of human existence. Institutions such as Holy Cross provide a forum where the truths of the Gospel can be infused into the realm of reason for the mutual benefit of both. The Jesuit priest who celebrates Mass on Sunday, and then teaches Shakespeare on Monday, is just one example of how faith and reason live together daily in peace.

The Catholic Church teaches that Jesus Christ is "the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). For Holy Cross, this means two things. First, the

moral and theological teachings of the Church must not be absent from any classroom discussion, particularly those that concern the fundamental questions about the truth of the human experience. Second, in order to know these teachings of the Church, students must be instructed in the faith. Theology and catechesis, which allow for the scientific study of Revelation and instruction in the doctrines of the Church, should be part of every student's course of study, regardless of his faith background. This requires the College to reestablish an autonomous Theology Department, separate from the current Religious Studies Department. Religious studies is the external, objective study of religions, their practices and rituals. Theology, on the other hand, is an exploration of the truths of Scripture from the inside, allowing students to get to know God personally; theology is faith seeking understanding. Just as the College exposes students to disciplines such as philosophy and foreign languages through curriculum requirements, theology requirements will allow all students to know the one true God, and Jesus Christ, Whom God sent, in a way that they never knew before. Such a requirement is not the authoritarian imposition of an intolerant religion, but an exposure to the formidable intellectual tradition of the Catholic Church, a tradition that speaks as provocatively as any other system of thought to contemporary human experience.

The Church makes the boldest of proposals to the modern world by offering Jesus Christ as the fullness of truth and the means to salvation. This proposal is equally offered to all people, regardless of race, culture, or creed. Students of other faiths should be welcomed to partake in the discussion of the truths that the Church proposes, as their diverse viewpoints and backgrounds can only enhance the

pursuit of knowledge and truth taking place inside the classroom.

A return to a rigorous study of theology and instruction in the Catholic faith is not a return to antiquated pedagogical methods, nor is this type of study out of touch with the modern world. On the contrary, critical study and reflection upon the moral and theological teachings of the Catholic Church provide Holy Cross students with the intellectual and moral character formation that is the hallmark of Jesuit education. This study allows graduates to bring their faith into an open dialogue with the work place and the public sphere. The Holy Cross graduate should not relegate his faith to one hour on Sunday; rather his faith should transcend his very being, making his moral choices, career choices, and personal choices, ones that stem directly from a love of Jesus Christ and His Gospel message.

If Holy Cross wants to compete with the likes of Williams and Amherst, it must cease trying to become a "Catholic Amherst," and work more towards becoming a "Catholic Holy Cross." Establishing an autonomous Theology Department and adding theology courses to the requirements for graduation will not only help students fulfill the Jesuit ideal of "finding God in all things," but also will provide Holy Cross with a unique component that its secular counterparts cannot offer: a place where faith and reason exist as "two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth" (John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, 1). This is the proposal that Holy Cross can proudly make to the secular world and its institutions of higher learning, a proposal with which Amherst simply cannot compete.

Amanda McIntyre
Class of 2004

David Bonagura
Class of 2003