

The Church 1977



Fr. Andrew Greeley

A very clever and original new book, John Dominic Crossan's "Raid on the Articulate," raises some difficult questions, it seems to me, about Catholic universities.

Crossan uses the techniques of "structural analysis" to approach the Scripture from the point of view of literary criticism. He compares the work of the modern Argentinian writer, Jorge Luis Borges, with the parables of Jesus and concludes that they were both engaged in telling "comic" stories embodying a paradoxical view of reality. There is much to be learned from the book, though often its flippant cleverness gets in the way.

Crossan, for example, cuts the ground out from under his own method when he suggests that the "structures" of which he talks exist only in language and that what happens in the world beyond language is both unknowable and unspeakable (and thus ignores, incidentally, the critical insight of Bernard Lonergan that the human mind and human language are not distinct from "reality" but part of "reality" — maybe the most important philosophical insight for the twentieth century).

He also seems to be unaware that in the social sciences which produced structuralism as a method there is a good deal more skepticism about it than the

current enthusiasts in the scriptural field seem to realize. When the scriptural structuralists show some signs of having read and listened seriously to Clifford Geertz's devastating critique of Claude Levi Strauss, then I will take them seriously when they use a method borrowed from my own discipline.

But I am in sympathy with the use of structuralist analysis and with Crossan's emphasis on the "comic" in the parables of Jesus. He made an important contribution to my understanding of the message of Jesus.

My problem is rather with the theological "obiter dicta" that are strewn throughout his book. It is difficult to see that Crossan thinks that Jesus is anything more than the teller of paradoxical tales. It would appear that he does not accept, in any sense that might remotely be called traditional, the special presence of the divinity in Jesus, the resurrection, or human survival after death. Now that of course is his affair and, as one who knew him long ago, I will merely say that he danced to different pipers in the past and may well dance to yet other pipers in the future (some of which could easily be the original ones).

My problem has to do with the role of such an unbeliever on the faculty of a Catholic university (such as DePaul in Chicago, where Crossan teaches). The issue is not one of academic freedom. I am not suggesting that DePaul should get rid of Crossan or anything of that sort. But I am raising the question of whether DePaul might not be guilty of something like consumer fraud when it accepts more than \$2,000 a year from students (and their parents) on the pretext that it is a Catholic university when a person

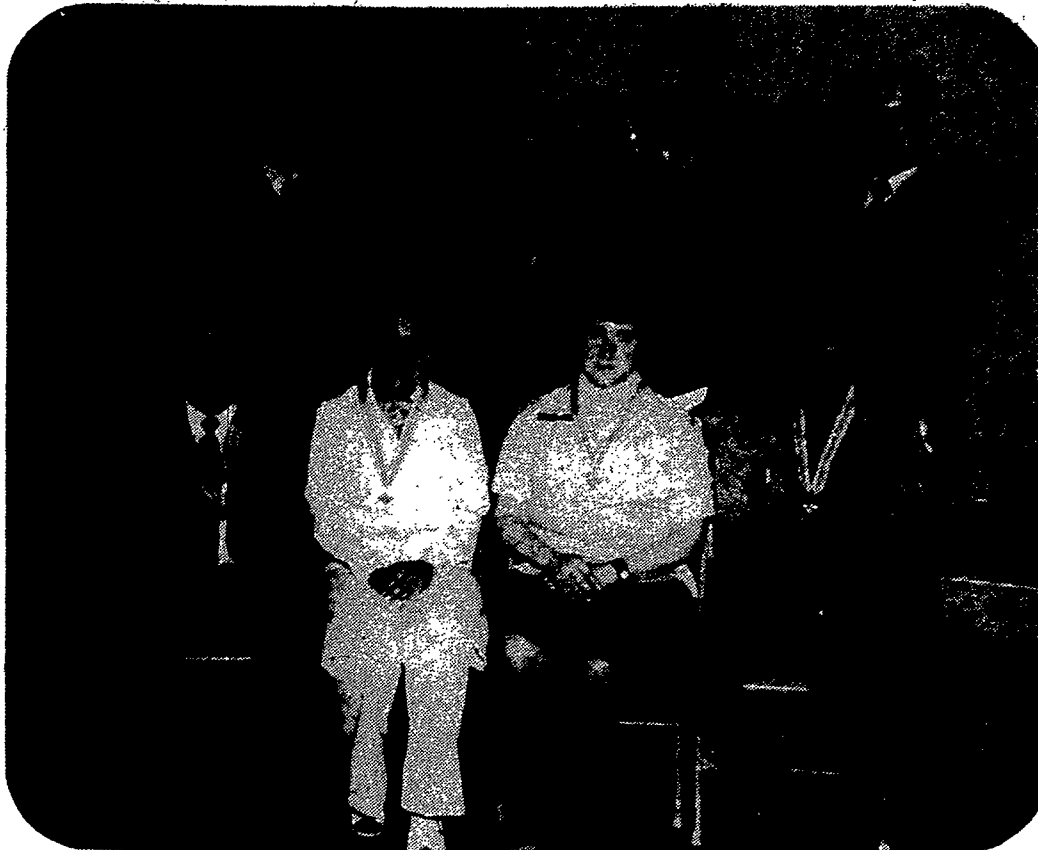
who rejects basic Catholic doctrines quite explicitly teaches freshmen religious courses.

Presumably, the ethnic families of Chicago are shelling out that kind of money because they think they are getting a "Catholic" education from DePaul. They may be getting well-taught courses from Professor Crossan (I doubt that he could be anything but interesting in class), but Catholic theology? Hardly.

My problem, it will be perceived, is less with Crossan than it is with DePaul. In graduate level seminars or even in courses for junior and senior religious studies majors, the ideas contained in "Raid on the Articulate" would surely be appropriate. But for 17-year-old freshmen? (Crossan makes clear that he does teach some of the material in the book to freshmen.)

The argument might be made that it is a mark of a broadminded and sophisticated Catholic university to have freshmen instructors who reject the basic premises of the Catholic tradition. Well, maybe. All I'm suggesting is that the administration of DePaul has an obligation to make that sophistication absolutely clear to those whose money it is taking. Let them tell the parents of freshmen from the Chicago ethnic communities that their children may well encounter a theology teacher who does not accept the divinity of Jesus, the resurrection, and the life after death. Then see if they will sacrifice \$2,000 for "Catholic" education.

If parents are still willing to pay for such a version of Catholic education, then that is their right. But if they are not told what they're getting, then I think their money is being taken under false pretenses.



Scouting Awards

The Diocesan Catholic Committee on Scouting awarded eight St. George Emblems and two Pelican Awards to individuals who have contributed significantly to scouting. The committee presented the awards at its 30th annual dinner at Guardian Angels Church on April 24. Pictured above are the winners from left, standing: Joseph E. Matarazzo, Jack Lisi, Father Edward Zandy, David Mulvey, Father Stephen Martin and Fred Farmer, seated: Allie P. Quatrano, Mrs. Barbara Mason, Mrs. Norita Darling and William Heffron.

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