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Reverend Joseph J. Donovan, S. J. 1891-1977—In Memoriam

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*Reverend Charles S. Casassa, S.J.**

Father Joe Donovan and I first became acquainted in 1949 when I was installed as president of what was then known as Loyola University of Los Angeles. Father Donovan had already been Regent of Loyola University School of Law for many years. What may not be known to many people is the fact that he was also a member of the Board of Trustees of Loyola University, a position he continued to hold until lay persons were first added to the Board of Trustees in the late 1960's.

For reasons of convenience Father Donovan lived at Loyola High School while I was residing on the Westchester campus of Loyola University. As a result of these living arrangements we did not see each other on a daily basis, although we were in contact by telephone frequently. My reflections on Father Donovan have to be seen from that perspective. For a period of twenty-eight years we knew each other; for twenty of those years we had an official educational relationship, but I never knew him as intimately as did others who worked with him at the Law School or were his personal confidants.

For many of the twenty years that I served as president of Loyola University Father Donovan actually ran the Law School; in effect he was both regent and dean. That he ran a good law school does not need my testimony: there is the testimony of many law school graduates whom I have known, there is the evidence of the bar exam results, and from a fiscal standpoint there is the evidence of the annual audit to show that he provided sound fiscal management. That he could accomplish all these things in the terribly cramped quarters in which the Law School was housed before 1964 is further evidence of his abilities.

In making these remarks about Father Donovan, laudatory as they are and are meant to be, I have not really touched upon the one thing which impressed me most in my relationship with him. As his friends know, he was born in San Francisco some fifteen years before the great earthquake and fire. He attended school at St. Ignatius College, now the University of San Francisco. His association with his Jesuit teachers was a factor in his decision to cast his lot with the Jesuits and to enter the Society of Jesus in 1912 to begin his preparation for the priesthood. For more than fifty years he was a priest in the Society of Jesus.

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To him his priesthood was "the pearl of great price." I could cite the testimony of some of his fellow Jesuits to show that he treasured his priesthood more than any other gift God had given him. I can offer my own personal observance of this attitude in him. True, his mind and heart were wrapped up in the Law School, but this was because he saw his work at the Law School as a function of his life as a Jesuit priest.

In his last few years when his eyesight failed badly he made every effort to celebrate Mass daily with the help of one of his Jesuit confreres who would guide him through the liturgy. When he could no longer read the prayers he committed enough of them to memory to be able to celebrate the liturgy each day with the help of a colleague. He did not have to do this but he wanted very much to do it. If actions speak louder than words, his actions tell us unmistakably where his mind and heart were.

A few years ago there was a problem among some priests in the Roman Catholic Church about the role of the so-called hyphenated priest: the priest-scholar, the priest-educator, the priest-social worker, etc. For Father Donovan the problem was a pseudo-problem and he never bothered about it. He saw himself as a priest who was engaged in legal education: for him this was not a dual role; the liturgy and the law were for him simply two aspects of his one priesthood.

There was one duty which Father Donovan performed annually and performed it unbeknownst to most people. That duty was the writing of the citations for the honorary degrees granted at each year's Commencement Exercises. It was a duty he liked to fulfill and he did it exceptionally well. He wrote the citations with elegance and style unlike some others I have seen or heard which ranged from pedestrian to pedantic. Could he have written his own obituary, I am sure it would have been a literary gem sparkling with the style and the wit that were his.

Many men and women rightly praise Father Donovan for his outstanding contributions to the legal profession, particularly here in Southern California. I, too, echo their praise; I am conscious also of his contribution to Loyola University of Los Angeles through his achievements at Loyola School of Law. In all this I, as a Jesuit colleague, see another dimension: the dimension of Jesuit and priest. On greeting acquaintances Father had a habit of saying: "Nice to be seen by you." I would like to say of him: "Nice to have been known by you."