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Sr. Simone Campbell at the Democratic National Convention

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For those who have been following the Nuns on the Bus, there was little new in what Social Service Sr. Simone Campbell had to say in her speech at the Democratic National Convention on Wednesday. She spoke from the heart of Catholic social justice teaching as she emphasized the immoral cuts proposed in the budget put forth by Paul Ryan (and now Mitt Romney).

But I was struck by the enthusiastic and sustained applause from the audience. Yes, these are Democrats who loved her message; they want to defeat Romney and Ryan. But here was a religious woman -- a Catholic -- articulating a policy they could agree with.

As I looked out at the crowd, I wondered how many had been raised Catholic, how many were taught by nuns in grade or high school, and how many had left the Church since -- maybe in disgust. And I wondered what they thought now.

Perhaps for some of them -- and for some of the TV audience -- she represented a different kind of Catholic voice, a messenger for social justice, a woman (yes: a woman) who had taken Vatican II seriously all her life. Maybe they could relate.

I watched her speech with two neighbors, one an Episcopalian and one an agnostic. They thought she hit it out of the ballpark.

Move over, Cardinal Dolan: Have you met Simone?

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