

Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education

Volume 40 *Re-creating Jesuit Higher Education: The General's Challenge*

Article 31

9-1-2011

Forum: Meet the Old Boss: Bringing Ignatius Back Into Jesuit Universities

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Recommended Citation

Metres, Philip (2011) "Forum: Meet the Old Boss: Bringing Ignatius Back Into Jesuit Universities," *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education*: Vol. 40, Article 31.

Available at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/conversations/vol40/iss1/31>

pastoral ministry, our faculties and staff can take greater deliberate steps to create tomorrow's wealth holders and great philanthropists who are in the forefront of changing the world.

We need curricula and formation programs on wealth itself and what it means for today's Christian. Courses that would expose students to the responsible

How to use wealth as good stewards

use of wealth from a Christian stewardship perspective. This includes especially an immersion into the rich tradition of Catholic social teaching and what it has to say about the responsible use of power and money.

All of our students should be familiar with the history of modern philanthropy, its weaknesses and strengths, and how Catholic social principles could deepen its motivations and effectiveness. Students also should be familiar with methods of proactive giving, the organizational structures for today's foundations, public policies that foster or inhibit generosity in society, giving trends and

use of wealth from a Christian stewardship perspective. This includes especially an immersion into the rich

volunteering. And more of our graduates should be prepared and encouraged to work within America's foundations and not-for-profit sector as a career choice.

The nation is undergoing a \$40 trillion wealth transfer between generations, yet, are any of our Jesuit institutions offering a major in philanthropy? If so, your profile is way too low.

Fr. Nicolás calls Jesuit institutions of higher learning to a depth of thought and imagination in the Ignatian tradition that involves a profound engagement with the real. Living in the wealthiest economy the world has ever known, we are challenged by the disquieting reality of massive global poverty and human need. Our Jesuit universities and colleges would do well to think more about our students as future wealth holders, with the capacity through their giving to shape, in the words of Fr. Nicolás, "the future for a humane, just, and sustainable globe." ■

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MEET THE OLD BOSS: BRINGING IGNATIUS BACK INTO JESUIT UNIVERSITIES

Philip Metres

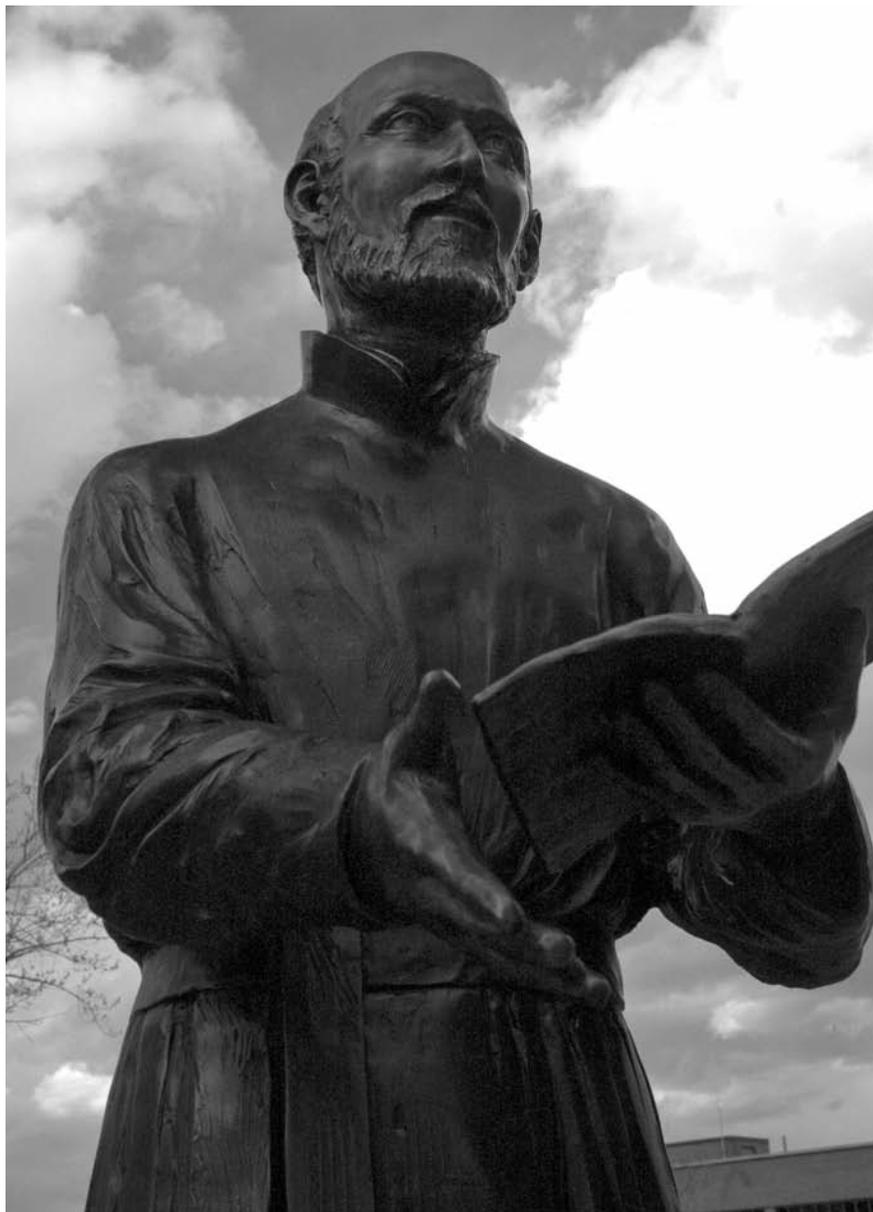
The Who's classic "Won't Get Fooled Again" dramatically renders its vision of failed revolutions in its (yowled) final lines: "Meet the new boss. Same as the old boss." In this modest proposal for Jesuit universities, my inquiries do not quite add up to revolution, lest we make new bosses. Rather, they are an invitation to rededicate ourselves to the original vision of Ignatius in light of the global realities we face together.

Father Adolfo Nicolás's address on the challenges to

Jesuit Higher Education Today (2010) begins with the need for imagination. The compression of space and time that is the essence of modern life stimulates our souls. New technologies of information and mobility suture us closer together, but in ways that are often virtual and voyeuristic. The cataclysms of our time—wars, revolutions, disasters, financial meltdowns—happen too quickly to digest fully. We hardly have time to know what to think or feel when "the story" has changed.

What to do, in light of the deluge? Perhaps we need to work our way to St. Ignatius' cave, outside Manresa. The Spiritual Exercises actively invite the imagination, to create, in Ignatius's words, "mental representation."

The contemporary challenge for imaginative artists, intellectuals, educators, the curators of the soul is not only to chronicle the present, but also to develop a creative and critical understanding of how we find ourselves at this time and place. And given that understanding, to ask Leo Tolstoy's question: "how, then, shall we live?" How can we live together, on this shrinking globe, with its finite resources? Critical thinking gets us only so far,



Statue of Saint Ignatius, Regis University.

and risks producing what Peter Sloterdijk calls “cynical reasoners.” How might we develop a pedagogy of the imagination, which would engage our creativity, empathy and love, alongside our pedagogy of critique?

Our marketing slogans trumpet our Jesuit universities as places that educate for social justice and serving others. Are we truly working to create a more just and peaceful world? Are we comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable, as Mother Jones once proposed? How can we better prepare students for lifelong vocations of social change, rather than for a year of noble service? And if we do, can we avoid activist burnout, anger, and self-righteousness by marrying our action to reflection, meditation, contemplation, and grateful wonder? As D.H. Lawrence once wrote, “One’s action ought to come out of an achieved stillness: not to be a mere rushing on.”

“The Wrath of Grapes”

Lastly, in our age, we have witnessed the transmogrification of our universities from communities to corporatized institutions. Without visionary leadership, the increasing emphasis on the bottom line and further stratification threaten one of the great values of Jesuit universities—a sense of beloved community, where each person is valued for his or her part in fulfilling the university mission; of fairness, where all workers earn a living wage; of love, which welcome and embrace difference, and also share our Ignatian values; of generosity, which find ways to fund first generation college students and the children of the poor, or will we be the playgrounds of the privileged; vital enough to leap the walls of the academy, creating partnerships with the broader communities, societies, and peoples that will challenge and transform the very idea of education?

Are our communities courageous enough to speak and act prophetically on behalf of the poor and oppressed, even when those words and deeds threaten the bottom line, the bishop, or the Board?

When I look back at my own Ignatian education, I trace my awakening from my first days at Loyola Academy where, in a religious studies class taught by the improbably-ancient Father Steenken, we watched “The Wrath of Grapes”—a documentary exposé on pesticide exposure to migrant workers—and the filmic adaptation of Ambrose Bierce’s “Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge.” That range of Ignatian spirituality—from timely social justice to existential exploration of a condemned man’s longing for freedom—fired my imagination and inflamed my empathy. In some sense, this range of the spirit infuses my writing, my teaching, my advising, my life. I fervently hope that our universities will continue to strike such sparks, to be places that awaken. ■

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