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A NEW TURNING POINT

By Michael J. Garanzini, S.J.

Since Fr. Adolfo Nicolás's address in Mexico City in April 2010, there are four "trends" in Jesuit higher education that mark a turning point in Jesuit institutional development worldwide. Together they amount to a unique and potentially important moment in the history of Jesuit contributions to the world of education, especially higher education. If nourished and developed, Jesuit higher education could once again make a significant contribution to higher learning and to the Church, especially to its evangelization goals. These realities might be described as: an increasing awareness of the relevance of Jesuit education, a greater alignment with the Society's social justice mission, a renewed focus on the Catholic identity of the schools, and a desire to leverage the network.

1. Growing demand. There is a persistent demand for Jesuit schools, especially colleges and universities. In Africa, Asia, and throughout most regions there is a desire for new Jesuit programs that will address the need for better-educated workforces and professional classes. No fewer than four African provinces are actively planning on opening a Jesuit university. The success of Jesuit high schools in Africa and Asia has

led to the desire for colleges and universities just as they did in places like North and South America a century ago. And, while the Society is not yet allowed to formally open schools in countries like China and Vietnam, American Jesuit institutions are beginning to operate programs in such places. In some countries, like Indonesia, our higher education presence is expanding into new fields, often with the help of other established Jesuit universities.

The biggest threat to this expansion and to the maintenance of our more established colleges and universities is keeping our schools affordable. With the exception of certain states and some developing nations, most governments are pulling back on their financial support of higher educations. In Europe and the U.S., our Jesuit schools increasingly compete for students who bring with them a diminishing amount of state support.

2. Renewed commitment to the poor. This pressure for expansion, in nearly all regions of the world, and the pressure on governments to diminish

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funding has come at a time when our institutions have renewed their commitment to educating the poor. The last three Superiors General of the Society have each stressed that our schools produce citizens bent on service, a commitment to justice, to inclusivity and depth as the special hallmark of Jesuit universities. Many Jesuit institutions have turned to specific programs for admitting talented men and women who were traditionally locked out of this opportunity. This has led to greater inclusion of and even a preference for those traditionally excluded from higher education. Worldwide, our institutions are thus more multicultural in their student body, more diverse socioeconomically, and more committed to finding financial resources to include poorer students. In India and elsewhere, some higher education works have been started specifically to educate the marginalized and poorer classes.

3. More intentionally Catholic. With the diminishing numbers of Jesuits, especially in leadership positions, and the growing secularization of higher education in general, one would have predicted a lessening of institutional commitment to the Catholic and Jesuit identity. Yet, in nearly every region, there is a concern to pass on the Jesuit and Catholic mission of the institution to academic leaders who embrace that commitment. Our institutions are more comfortable highlighting this dimension of their heritage. One sees this explicit commitment to service, especially service of the Church and those in need, and the commitment to justice in the way our schools make this an explicit part of their recruitment and development of faculty and administrators. It is also visible in their interest in best practices in orientation of faculty and staff for mission, programs for service learning, renewal of the core curriculum, and direct support in training personnel for Church-sponsored programs.

4. Increasing number of network collaborations. Another very positive sign is the increasing number of projects which are in fact collaboration between and across Jesuit universities and other apostolates. Such examples include an on-line environmental science textbook that incorporates Jesuit values and collaboration in bringing higher education into refugee camps. This e-text is the result of

40 university scholars and dozens of Jesuit high school science teachers.

The Jesuit Commons: Higher Education at the Margins, with JRS, has been operating for more than five years to deliver higher education classes and certificate and degree programs for refugees in camps and now to other marginalized places around the globe. It involves dozens of faculty at many Jesuit institutions who deliver their on-line courses to hundreds of adult students. Roughly eight Jesuit business schools from five continents are working together to share best practices in social entrepreneurship training. Dozens more are contributing to a business case studies series which is being housed at Deusto in Spain and Le Moyne in the U.S. And, besides these multi-institutional collaborations there are an increasing number of bilateral collaborative projects, too many to mention. New and growing collaborations include such areas as training in Ignatian Spirituality, research on migration and human trafficking, nursing education and research, and inter-religious programming and research.

Why is this a potentially unique and important moment? The Society has the largest and the most culturally, economically, and intellectually diverse system of higher education in the world. Its 175 institutions are unparalleled in terms of scope and importance within their given locale. They share a commitment to social justice, a desire to include the marginalized, an embrace of service and the capacity for leveraging assistance for new projects and programs. This network can be a model of international collaboration for the betterment of all peoples. These Jesuit universities can serve the Church by harnessing their formidable intellectual resources for sharp and clear analysis of unjust systems and practices. Their faculty and students can address a host of issues that cut across national and regional boundaries, from migration and human trafficking to environmental degradation. They have the power to model the proper use and renewal of natural resources. They can be communities of interreligious dialogue and cooperation. In short, they have within them, as a network, the capacity to offer a significant contribution to the global challenges we experience today and to renew the Church's age-old desire and to contribute to the betterment of all humankind, which is its evangelization mission. ■