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A Basic Guide to Jesuit Identity

Thomas P. Rausch, S.J., and Others, *Educating for Faith and Justice*

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By James R. Kelly

At a recent faculty seminar on *The Marketplace of Ideas: Reform and Resistance in the American University*, the newly appointed dean of faculty suggested that we discuss Louis Menand’s four key questions in the context of Fordham’s history and mission. One faculty member, and by no means a Fordham newcomer, said she couldn’t, as she knew nothing of Fordham’s past and little of any singular mission. For the ever increasingly large number of Jesuit (the book’s primary references) and Catholic Colleges faculty — hired more for their promise of professional disciplinary success than for any inner attachment to a Catholic university intellectual identity — Thomas P. Rausch’s, S.J., *Educating for Faith and Justice: Catholic Higher Education Today* could serve nicely as a responsible and largely representative primer.

Nearly all the tradition’s key identity-mission documents are referenced, stretching from the *Ratio Studiorum* in the 17th century, through the critical mid-20th century, John Tracy Ellis’s *American Catholics and the Intellectual Life* and up to Benedict XVI’s 2008 Speech to Educators. In between 1600 and 2008 are John Paul II’s 1990 *Ex corde ecclesiae* and, particularly important to Jesuit education, Pedro Arrupe’s 1973 “Men For Others” and Peter-Hans Kolvenbach’s 2000 “The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice in American Higher Education.” While the book mostly notes rather than explicates the documents’ main contributions, those interested or curious about core mission and identity premises can find where to download them. For Rausch, the Jesuit Father Generals Arrupe and Kolvenbach addresses especially ground the ongoing evolution of Jesuit promoted notions of the *telos* of teaching and the academic appropriateness of conscience affecting research motivated by a faith that does justice. These documents enrich and complicate what we mean by good teaching, good learning, and good research.

Besides a concluding chapter focusing on what sociological studies tell us about the religious attachments of our students, Rausch contributes the first four chapters providing overviews, by no means uncritical, of the history of university based theology, in the West since 1250 and of Catholic Higher education in the United States; a history characterized by both material growth — currently about 235 — and a diminution of religious identity.
bestowing markers. For example, in 1900 lay faculty represented 10 percent of teachers (and virtually no administrators) but, by 1980, 90 percent. During the same period, philosophy class hours went from 25 to 6. Theology course hours are even less.

Rausch does not romanticize the more explicitly religious past, and includes the long list of Catholic theologians — Karl Rahner, Yves Congar, Henri de Lubac, Marie Dominique Chenu, Teilhard de Chardin, J.C. Murray, Charles Curran, Leonardo Boff, Gustav Gutierrez, Carmel McEnroy, Ivone Gebara, Tissa Balasuriya, Roger Haight, Jon Sobrino, Jacques Dupuis, Peter Phan — whose efforts to more fully engage the traditions of the past with their contemporary challenges led to their receiving Vatican sanctions.

The book’s core concern of educating for faith and justice is developed in Chapter 3. Rausch’s thesis — that Catholic academic institutions should steadily embody a Second Vatican Council (1962 - 5) perspective emphasizing the inner connection between faith and justice — can be succinctly captured through still another contemporary document cited several times in the book, Dean Brackley’s “Higher Standards.” Drawing from his experience since 1989, after the assassination of six Jesuits at the University of Central America in El Salvador, Brackley argues that for institutional integrity Catholic colleges and universities should abandon their “Harvard or Stanford” like measurement of academic excellence and adopt the following 7 criteria: 1. understand the real world; 2. focus on the big questions; 3. freedom from bias; 4. help students find their vocations; 5. maximize scholarship aid based on need; 6. truth in advertising — actually follow the mission statement; 7. speak to the wider world and contribute public outreach. Rausch provides the reader harboring suspicions of any return to a ’60s campus spirit and a curriculum that submerges objective scholarship in a sea of muddled apologetics with five cases studies of campus programs that explicitly aspire to integrate intellectual rigor, a justice dimension, and the formation of character.

Rausch does not romanticize the past.

The chapters include analyses of Catholic studies programs, community based learning, praxis-based education, and immersion trips. They are worth reading and reflecting on. I think most readers will find them fair minded and self-questioning, the very characteristics we might fear missing. Boston College’s Stephen J. Pope, for instance, considers the dangers of “spiritual tourism” as an outcome of cultural immersion experiences. Mark Ravizza S.J., of Santa Clara draws positive lessons from the inevitable sense of failure and inadequacy that both faculty and students feel after any serious cultural encounter in a different and poorer culture. Kristin Heyer, also of Santa Clara, zones in on the kinds of writing assignments that yield an articulate questioning by students of their cultural assumptions. I found most of pedagogical reflections in these case studies far from any catechetical or social justice fundamentalism.

So, Education for Faith and Justice is a fine primer to give faculty, especially faculty applicants. Still, some will legitimately question this choice. Rausch’s tone struck me as midway between the, in retrospect naive, reformist confidence of the 1967 Land O’ Lakes Statement and the muscular identity retrieval of, say, the Franciscan University of Steubenville. But perhaps a more telling question concerning this or any other chosen primer is, Who might have the task of giving it to a faculty applicant or inquirer? The vice president for academic affairs? The dean of faculty? The department chairperson? Alas, I think we already know — most likely, the head of campus ministry. The evidence so far would not lead a faculty discussion group at a representative Jesuit university to think their institutional experience would seriously challenge Menard’s analysis, which never even mentions the terms justice or faith and which, in the terms of his subtitle Reform and Resistance in the American University, finds almost all the data on the side of resistance.