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Letters to the Editors

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Letters to the Editor

Robert Bellah Replies to Kelly, Danforth, and Freie

I am honored that three professors have felt it worthwhile to comment on my article in the Spring 2004 issue of Conversations, “Education for Justice and the Common Good.” They deserve a brief response from me.

I very much like James Kelly’s point that we as professors remain students, often beginners as we tackle new problems and new fields. Letting students know that might help prepare them for the reality that they four undergraduate years are only the beginning of their education, which will go on the rest of their lives.

Since Kelly mentioned some events in my early life, I might just fill in a few points that could be relevant to the readers of Conversations. It was Paul Tillich’s The Courage to Be that convinced me in graduate school that I was still a Christian and not an atheist as I had imagined in my Marxist phase. But it took me a long time to realize that an individual Christian is a contradic- tion in terms and that I needed to become part of the Body of Christ. I ended up in the Episcopal Church, where I am active and, on occasion, preach. But especially since coming to Berkeley in 1967 I have been close to the Catholic community, and the Jesuits in particular.

From the beginning of my appointment at Berkeley I served as an adjunct professor at the Graduate Theological Union and developed a close working relation with several of the schools there, but particularly the Jesuit School. I directed John Coleman’s dissertation and long served as a close colleague of his before I retired and he went to Loyola Marymount, but John was only one of the many Jesuit teachers and students with whom I worked over the years. I did indeed come to learn a lot about Catholic “sub- stance” and Catholic social teachings in particular.

I am largely in sympathy with the comments of John Freie. I do believe there is a “hidden curricu- lum” from grade school through higher education that subtracts the ends of education of which I spoke. And I do believe that the university itself participates in the problems of the larger society. For example, increasing income polarization and exploitation of the most vulnerable workers occurs not only in the university but in the university. I have written about these issues elsewhere, par- ticularly in several articles published in Academe, the journal of the American Association of University Professors.

With the limited time that an academic lecture affords, I couldn’t deal with everything in the talk pub- lished in Conversations, but I can recommend to readers interested in the issues that Freie has raised a new book for which I have recently given a jacket comment that covers these issues in great and illuminat- ing detail: James Engell and Anthony D’Andrade, Saving Higher Education in the Age of Money, which the University of Virginia Press will bring out early in 2005.

I am happy that John Danford approved of most of my paper, but his objections to my concluding pages do require some answer. Again, my remarks on America in the world were very condensed in the piece published in Conversations so perhaps it is not surprising that Professor Danford misinterpreted some of them. For a fuller view the reader might consult such essays as mine as “Seventy-five Years,” South Atlantic Quarterly, Special Issue, Dissent from the Homeland: Essays after September 11, 102, 2, Spring 2003; pp. 255-265, and “The New American Empire,” Commonweal, 129, 18, October 25, 2002, pp. 12-14, among others.

I certainly do not believe that the American Empire began with the administration of George W. Bush. It goes back at least to Theodore Roosevelt and the Spanish-American War of 1898, and in some respects all the way back to the initial colonization of what was, after all, not an “empty continent.” But fervid claims for American global superiority have indeed reached a new pitch under George W. Bush.

When Professor Danford writes that “Neither President Bush nor his advisors have ever… claimed that the U.S. is all-powerful,” Professor Bellah’s fervid imaginings to the contrary notwithstanding,” he has apparently not read Bush’s National Security Strategy of the United States of September 2002. To that document Bush claims absolute military superiority over all other nations, none of which will be allowed to equal, much less surpass, us in military power. He also claims the right to strike any power at any time or any place that the United States deems necessary with or without the approval of any other power.

He further reiterates a pledge that he made at the “National Cathedral” days after 9/11, namely that the United States will “rid the world of evil.” While in the emo- tional days right after 9/11 such a breath-taking claim might be understandable, to repeat it in cold print in September of 2002 suggests a kind of political apocalypticism that ought to frighten anyone, certainly.
any Christian who would know that
redding the world of evil is not within
the power of any nation.

As to Professor Stanford's self-righteous picture of the decadence of contemporary Europe, I am afraid it really does indicate just the provincialism of which I warned. Western Europe does have many problems—there is no ideal society in the world that I know of—but in many ways its societies really are better than our own. The degree of income polarization, the percentage of the population in poverty, the lack of a national health care system are among the many indices that place the United States at the bottom of advanced industrial societies, just on issues central to Catholic social teachings. A nation that looks at the rest of the world with contempt and believes it already has all the answers is surely headed in the wrong direction, as the majority of Americans currently believe. As to collapse, indeed not yet, but overextension is pretty well admitted by everyone. I cannot imagine even President Bush repeating today the triumphalism of the National Security document of 2002.

I want to thank all the commentators for taking the time to respond to my article and to the editors of Conversations for giving me the opportunity to reply.

Robert M. Bellah
Fred Professor of Sociology and Comparative Studies
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Hollitz Answers His Critics

The responses to my "branding" essay reinforce any point. Fr. Nero identifies "marketing" and "branding." I differentiated them. Mr. Corzas suggests that "branding" is acceptable because it's commonplace or "vernacular," challenging my understanding of Aristotle and Cicero, not to mention Emily Post and Miss Manners. Deane Daley thinks "branding" is ok if it's not used to sell Jesuit schools, precisely what "branding" proponents claim as their intention. Julia McSherry, an Advancement officer, finds my reasoning disheartening. Me too. I expected better of Jesuit Advancement leadership. Dr. Buckholz brings to the debate an important new perspective concerning Ignatian praxis of serving souls. I would love to hear more; "soul" has too long been absent from our educational conversations.

Each of these writers offered a thoughtful response, distinguishing them from the "branding" proposal's authors. I recently joined a "branding" panel at the annual Jesuit Advancement officers' meetings. Just before the session the convenor, an author of the branding proposal, said that he would prohibit discussion except for questions which he screened in advance. Well, I thought, that's an interesting approach. Despite his objections, I asked participants three unapproved questions. First: Should our Catholic identity be "branded"? Second: what's the difference between a "Jesuit" and a "Catholic" brand? Third: "branding" guru Kevin Roberts defines "appeal to 'sensuality'" as a necessary feature of "branding." How will Advancement officers "appeal to 'sensuality'" on
our campuses! I received no answers (then or since), but the Advancement 'branding' consultant suggested that I am obnoxious because my own 'brand' was hanging right there on the wall in front of us. Two things hung on that wall, an Exot sign and a Crucifix. Hence a fourth question to Jesuit Advancement leadership: How dare you?

Enough. To the leadership of the Jesuit Advancement Association. Let's go public before our faculties. Address my questions for the record, perhaps in these pages. If I'm wrong, step out of the shadows and prove it. Until then, academics at Jesuit universities must demand accountability for what you're trying to do to our schools. To those faculties, a request: if you can get an honest answer from the Jesuit Advancement leadership, please let me know. You'll have done much better than I.

John Hollwitz
Academic Vice President
Fordham University

What free market?
To the Editor:

In his book review, “Economic Spirituality vs. Mindless Consumption,” Denis R. Jusz writes of those who “ought to be critical of the free market because of the massive poverty and suffering that accompanies it.” Evidently he is referring to today’s economies. But does he really think and wish to say we have today a truly free society and a purely free market economy?

The market in its purity consists of voluntary human action for all in production, exchange, and consumption. The U.S.A. has never been close to having such a free market — starting with slavery, the violation of the human and property rights of the Indians, and inequality for women. Today’s economies have massive interventions by government. Education is dominated by government, money is a government issue, and military spending exerts a major influence. There is heavy taxation and regulation of the nominally private sector. There are immense subsidies to agriculture and other industries.

All this skews prices and profits and creates economic distortions, poverty, and economic insecurity. We can get a glimpse of whether interventions or markets cause poverty by comparing the economic freedom of the countries of the world; the evidence is that greater economic freedom is correlated with greater wealth and less poverty. This evidence is consistent with economic theory, which tells us that taxes and restrictions that add to net costs create a deadweight loss to the economy, lowering wages.

Those who blame markets for poverty need to confront and rebut this theory and evidence. I commend the reviewer for an otherwise excellent review, and hope that perhaps some reflection will reveal that our society and economy have yet to achieve the level of true liberty that deserves the appellation “free market.”

Fred Foldvary
Economics Department
Santa Clara University

A Disappointing Tour
To the Editor:

The article, “Branding and Jesuit Higher Education” in the Spring, 2006 edition of Conversations magazine was personally intriguing on a number of levels. First, as a graduate of Marquette University (Class of ’85), I know first-hand the value of a Jesuit education. I completely agree with the author that this value is a well-kept secret, which, if properly articulated, could serve to pos-
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Students converse outside Scheuer Hall, Santa Clara University.

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