Culture: A Measure of Where We Are, Have Been, and Are Going

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Rooted in Jesuit culture, our universities seek to understand and to incorporate these ideals into the diverse groups that make up the modern university. The author provides an overview of this issue's featured articles.

The culture of Jesuit institutions of higher learning is a key factor in the acculturation of students as they become cultured adults and understand and interact with the cultures in which they live. The multiple use of "culture" is meant to point out that we are confronted with several meanings of the word "culture." Each of the twenty-eight Jesuit institutions of higher education and the two theologates has much in common, but each is also reflective of its own set of customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits, to say nothing of the diverse interests and groups -- faculty, students, administrators, trustees, and staff -- that make a college or university. This essay will attempt to identify some highlights of the articles that follow, to raise some issues that need to be addressed, and to identify the shared attitudes, values, goals and practices that characterize Jesuit education. As a professor of business law at Le Moyne College, I will approach these questions simply as a person who has a deep regard for Jesuit education because of what I believe it has to offer our students and the culture in which we live.

This exercise will be organized around the typical Jesuit questions: where are we, where have we been, and where are we going. Father Robert Drinan, S.J. put a similar set of questions to our students last fall. He asked what have you done for Jesus, what are you doing for Jesus, and what are you going to do for Jesus. I mention this formulation of the questions because the students' and the faculty's reactions differed. I wondered how Father Drinan's questions would resonate with the students I had induced to come to the lecture by offering extra points. When the students turned in required essays to get the points, I and other faculty members were surprised to discover that many of our students were attracted by these questions. Their response suggests that students want more than the mere transmitting of knowledge and that they hope to find it in the culture of our institutions.

Where have we been?

This question asks about our roots. It points to those elements that are at the foundation of our schools and that we have in common. Jesuit education, (like Jesuits themselves) is rooted in the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola, particularly in the proposition that God can be found in all things, even, as I have both humorously and seriously proposed, in the Uniform Commercial Code. If God can be found in all things, teaching and scholarship are holy activities and must be done in an excellent way. Anything less fails to recognize the God in all things. Each person with whom we come in contact must be treated with care and concern because God can be found in them. Parents who know little else about our schools know that we strive to provide an excellent education, and generally it only takes one visit to campus to experience our care and concern.

Service as an aspect of Jesuit education comes from the part of the Exercises known as the contemplation to attain divine love. Although service activities are found at most universities, they have a particular underpinning in the Jesuit tradition. Once a person understands that he or she is loved unconditionally by God, the appropriate response is to love, to serve others -- usually expressed by the phrase that we are educating students to be men and women for others growing out of a faith that does justice. This

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aspect of Jesuit education may be less well known, but students are regularly reminded at least at the Mass of the Holy Spirit and at Baccalaureate that they should be men and women for others.

Another formulation of these ideals is found in the papal document, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*. When I read it, I am struck by its vision of a university. Before you dismiss the idea, let me quote a few passages. John Paul II notes that he himself "was deeply enriched by the beneficial experience of university life: the ardent search for truth and its unselfish transmission to youth and to all those learning to think rigorously, so as to act rightly and to serve humanity better."¹ The university "has always been recognized as an incomparable center of creativity and dissemination of knowledge for the good of humanity. By vocation [the university] is dedicated to research, to teaching and to the education of students who freely associate with their teachers in a common love of knowledge."² And a final quote:

"In the world today, characterized by such rapid developments in science and technology, the tasks of a Catholic university assume an ever greater importance and urgency. Scientific and technological discoveries create an enormous economic and industrial growth, but they also inescapably require the correspondingly necessary search for meaning in order to guarantee that the new discoveries be used for the authentic good of individuals and of human society as a whole. It is the responsibility of every university to search for such meaning, a Catholic university is called in a particular way to respond to this need: its Christian inspiration enables it to include the moral, spiritual and religious dimension in its research, and to evaluate the attainments of science and technology in the perspective of the totality of the human person."³

These passages describe the best of Jesuit education -- the striving for excellence in the search for truth in the service of humanity, faced with the challenges of an evolving society accomplished by educating and caring for students who associate with us because we share a common love of learning.

**Where We Are**

This issue of *Conversations* is devoted to an understanding of the second question: "where are we," what are the cultures that make up our institutions. At the heart of any educational institution, and most especially at Jesuit schools, are the students -- a constantly changing group. We need to understand who they are and the challenges they face in this new millenium. The first article, by Patrick Rombalski and Stephanie Quade, focuses on these students who arrive with their own culture. It often feels like we are faced with the task of Sisyphus. We begin again as each new group challenges us to incorporate them into the culture of our schools. New to college life, they usually are untainted by aspects of a prevailing culture that we would like to change. Each incoming group presents the possibility that change can occur. A simple example: Le Moyne freshmen do not remember that the college eating place -- no longer in existence -- was called the Den and refer to the new place as James Commons, much to the disgust of the seniors who mourn the Den's passing. In less than four years the "Den" will only be an alumni memory -- the place will "always" have been James Commons.

Before reading the next several paragraphs, or Rombalski's and Quade's article, take a few moments to consider how you would describe the students at your school? What words would you use? What culture do they bring with them? What challenges do they face as they try to be students in the twenty-first century?

As times change, cultures change, and the students of this new millennium are different than those who have gone before. Rombalski and Quade describe them as enthusiastic, energetic, and full of potential. They are ambitious, optimistic, and have strong self-images. Rombalski and Quade use four frames of reference -- ambition, anxiety, release and character -- to help us understand these students and the challenges they face in becoming educated adults who can contribute to the world. For example, multi-tasking is not just something that students do on their computers but is, instead, the way in which they live their lives, trying to balance the demands placed upon them. They are faced not only with the ordinary tasks of being a student -- papers, exams, class preparation -- but also the need to use the multiplicity of resources available to them. Added to these pressures are the demands of work, service, social life, and the desire for instant employment. It is incumbent upon us to respond to these stresses by recognizing them and caring for our students so that
they can develop into whole persons.

The challenge for us as educators is to harness and channel the energy and optimism of these students. Can we imagine that these new students could as it were "mentor up" and transform us as faculty and the upperclassmen with their enthusiasm for learning? On our part, we have to rise to the challenge posed by Father Peter-Hans Kolvenbach in his address at Santa Clara in October, 2000 and discussed by David Nantais, S.J. from the University of Detroit Mercy in the second article. We have to avoid the temptation to reduce Jesuit education to academic and technical excellence and take as our standard the fact that "[t]he real measure of our Jesuit universities lies in who our students become."4

Father Nantais explores the need for residence life to contribute to the development of our students by being mission-driven. Residence life is an essential partner in our common mission to form persons for others by paying attention to the ethical, spiritual, psychological, and leadership development of the student as part of our shared concern as Jesuit educators to develop the whole person. We have to work together to develop the Christian imagination that enables students to understand and build community that will empower them to enter more fully into the culture of others, to learn from and be of service to others. Father Nantais offers three suggestions from his residence hall experience: S.P.I.C.E.S -- RA programming focused on the spiritual, physical, intellectual, cultural, emotional, and social aspects of student life -- T.G.I. Thursdays, which offer students the opportunity to do theological reflection on their pop culture, and ideas that relate to the creation and development of a Peace and Justice Floor at the University of Detroit Mercy.

In "Service Changes Lives" Catherine Seymour and Patricia Vaccaro of Scranton University remind us that the early Jesuits chose education as one of the primary ways to be of service to people in need. "Service work allows students to explore their skills and limitations, to find what excites and energizes them, to put their faith into action, and to use their God-given talents to benefit others, discovering in the process who they are and who they want to become." It has become central to the notion of service that it is not enough to do service; service must be accompanied by reflection. John Breslin, S.J. of Le Moyne College talks about...
three Jesuit virtues: reflection, gratitude, and service. The three are circular and enrich each other. Students from Le Moyne who participate in alternative spring break type activities, such as building Habitat for Humanity houses or visiting Nazareth Farm in West Virginia, learn about these virtues not only from their activities but also from the people that they serve. A lunch augmented by potato chips, purchased with the meager assets of the woman whose home they are roofing, demonstrates to the students the virtue of gratitude out of what appeared to be simply service to another. Faculty members who accompany students in service activities can demonstrate the integration of learning and service.

In the fourth article Timothy Lannon, S.J. of Marquette University raises the question of what it means to be Jesuit and Catholic in the twenty-first century. While he does not answer that question, he does describe the essential role of a president in providing leadership on this issue. The article describes the attributes of three presidents who have been successful. He notes that Jesuit universities -- like secular universities -- are process driven, collegial and consultative in nature. Presidents must find a balance point and bring together disparate elements to make a whole. This article should remind us that the skills of an effective president -- being a politically and pragmatically astute coalition builder and a skillful bargainer -- are necessary for all groups who shape our culture and bring together disparate parts to make an organic whole. Good leadership on the part of presidents can model effective leadership for the rest of the university. Faculty governance officers, campus ministry, residential life, all need these attributes to help focus the community on key elements of Jesuit culture: cura personalis, seeing God (finding good in all), and a sense of service. This is not something that is done once and for all but, as Father Lannon notes, reflects Ignatius' brilliant insight that Jesuit education needs to be adaptable.

Father Lannon's article raises questions about the uses of presidential leadership. For example, among the challenges faced by our institutions is a growing sense of alienation. Is this a factor of university life in the new millenium which is distinct from the Jesuit culture, or is it a part of our culture? Jesuit faculty often experience the same kind of alienation and sense of powerlessness as do lay faculty. To what degree is that powerlessness caused by how we act or fail to act together? For example, on the question of recognition given to faculty service: is it rewarded or not rewarded because the administration has imposed norms on the faculty, or were these norms self-imposed? While it is true that the faculty must take steps to make changes in the norms, the presidents can encourage and help develop a sense of community in which these changes can be made. Issues must be addressed by dialogue among faculty, and with the administration. Because the best administrators described by Father Lannon have the power and the ability to be effective, when they choose not to use it for issues such as the recognition of service, the effect, albeit unintended, is to give the impression that they do not care and that the status quo of unrewarded service is just fine as it is.

If, indeed, cura personalis, faith that does justice, and service to others are part of our culture, it is important that all parts of the university act together (to be men and women for others) in order to reinforce those aspects of our culture as they apply not only to students but to all the groups. While in some ideal world people should do service without any need for reward, we live in a corporate culture in which behavior that is desirable and reflects the mission and ideals of an institution needs to be supported in order to become an ongoing part of that culture. It is not enough to say that these are the ideals; the ideals need to be celebrated to keep them strong.

"Collaboration or Commandment" by Sister Jo Ann Recker of Xavier University points to the necessity for that dialogue between faculty and administrators. This need grows not only out of the Jesuit characteristic of caring for students and caring for the welfare of one another as colleagues but also out of the Jesuits' own focus on the need for dialogue as a way of understanding and entering into the culture of others. Decree Four of the Jesuits' General Congregation Thirty-Four, "Our Mission and Culture" -- while basically addressing the need to dialogue with the many cultures of our world -- can be applied as well to the cultures that make up our institutions:

"The mission of the Society, in service to the Crucified and Risen Christ, is directed to the ways in which he makes his presence felt in the diversity of human cultural
experiences, in order that we may present the Gospel as Christ's explicitly liberating presence. Ours must be a dialogue, born of respect for people, especially the poor, in which we share their cultural and spiritual values and offer our own cultural and spiritual treasures, in order to build up a communion of peoples instructed by God's Word and enlivened by the Spirit as at Pentecost."  

As Sister Jo Ann notes, culture is defined in this decree as "the way in which a group of people live, think, feel, organize themselves, celebrate, and share life." Sister Jo Ann reminds us that true dialogue is based on respect shown by caring about the values, meaning, language, gestures, rituals, and world-view of the other culture. This is particularly true about the way in which different groups at Xavier experience their institution, especially women faculty.

Significant issues are raised about the value and respect paid to faculty input on the academic level. While most found Xavier "a good environment in which to teach and conduct research," there was "a strong desire for more genuine collaboration and consultation wherein faculty would be involved in meaningful decision-making processes." The concerns of the faculty for dialogue and meaningful input apply as well to the need for respectful dialogue among all our cultures -- student, faculty, staff, student life, and administrators.

The final article by Michael Webber, entitled "New World, New Realities: The Changing Role of Faculty Unions in a Jesuit University," describes the role of a faculty union at the University of San Francisco. The concerns raised, however, are germane to all faculties. Among other questions are those related to the tenuring or firing of faculty, the stratification created by market forces, the treatment of part-time faculty, the implications of the use of instructional technology, and the growth of administrative units. While the union at San Francisco has helped to facilitate dialogue on these issues, dialogue must continue and be part of all of our institutions regardless of the form of faculty governance.

Conclusion: Where Are We Going?

Many groups make up our institutions and contribute to the formation and reformation of our
culture. Two groups not otherwise discussed in this issue, that also share and contribute to the culture of our schools, are the staff and the trustees. The staff is on the front lines in conveying our culture. It is the secretary or telephone operator who often deals first with students, irate parents, or neighbors. Caring for the staff and providing them the same *cura personalis* that we claim as a hallmark of our education is essential in their acculturation, so that they can be role models of dealing with others. For example, security often has to deal with students in situations that are less than optimal. Nevertheless, security -- as part of the culture -- should be prepared to treat students in a respectful way. Simple gestures on behalf of staff, such as an extra hour added to lunch for a Staff Appreciation Day at Le Moyne College, help to demonstrate *cura personalis* by providing manicures, massages, and a nice lunch.

Trustees are an integral part of the mission of a university. Trustees, because of their obligation to preserve the institution, have a special duty to understand Jesuit education and the cultures of their particular schools and should make decisions in light of the mission of each institution. Through the use of their talents and wisdom, trustees can be examples of men and women striving for excellence in the service of others as they help to set policies for their college or university.

The third of our typical Jesuit questions, "where are we going," indicates that inherent in the exercise of looking at where we are and where we been is the notion that the journey is not over but is ongoing. The question always raises the idea that there are goals yet to be attained. The ideals of Jesuit education are inherent in the foundational culture of our schools and should be found within each of the cultures that make up our institutions. Jesuit schools in the United States vary in age and undergo cultural change in different ways and different times, but the goals remain the same: to educate men and women who will contribute to the society in which they live not only by the excellence of their learning but also by their fundamental care and concern for others. It is our task to ensure that these goals are interpreted anew not only for each generation, but indeed for each class of students who come seeking more than a mere college education.

ENDNOTES

3. *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, Paragraph 7
4. See Nantais article.
6. Ibid., n. 1.
7. See Recker article.