Response: Mission Through the Years

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MISSION THROUGH THE YEARS

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Over the years Conversations has contained articles of moment written, for the most part, engagingly. Of most interest to me have been those concerned with mission, whether considered theoretically (e.g., Prof. Westphal and Frs. Appleyard and Gray) or practically (e.g., Fr. Murphy and Prof. Ziegler). They have caused me to reflect on my experience of Jesuit education as one who has taught more years than any other woman in a Jesuit college or university in this country (I started as an adjunct teacher at Loyola in February, 1962).

Despite an innate cynicism about mantras, I have, nonetheless, tried to respond affirmatively to the oft-cited and variously (often ideologically) defined slogan, "the faith that does justice." Unfortunately, I have observed that the more people talk of values and virtues, the more likely they are to be illusory. In more than twenty-five years of meetings--inter-institutional, provincial, and even one national--I have heard that collaboration (shades of Casablanca), then cooperation, and now partnership are the means for faculty, staff, and administration at Jesuit colleges and universities to continue the tradition of Jesuit education, whatever that means. And, of course, "whatever that means" is the neuralgic point.

A typical response to "whatever that means" is first to invoke the mantra "the faith that does justice"; then to point to student volunteerism and participation in service learning; and finally to demonstrate that movers and shakers in Jesuit institutions espouse views compatible with those of The Nation and The New York Times. Thus we have such scandalous phenomena as Jesuit presidents honoring political and cultural figures who are advocates for the culture of death, Jesuits attacking John Paul II in their own publications as well as in the national media, Jesuits who hide behind the skirt of academic freedom as they speak against the magisterium, and even Jesuits who attack and/or support fellow-Jesuits who do not follow the zeitgeist. As an aside, over thirty years ago I witnessed first hand the dismissive cruelty practiced by younger Jesuits toward old Jesuits; in recent years I have witnessed this same group, now old, practice this same cruelty to the younger men.

However, the difficulty of defining Jesuit education is not really a logical problem. Nor can this difficulty be attributed to our living in a multi-cultural world replete with various modes of communication. Nor is a clear definition precluded by institutional emphasis on professionalism in hiring administrators, or by the careerist model in recruiting faculty members, or even by the decline in the numbers of Jesuits. On the contrary, I suggest that this inability is the result of an age-old moral problem: the thirst for power that expresses itself in the desire to consort with and enjoy the respect of the powerful. This desire leads its

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votaries to adopt the secular notion that education is a means of mere empowerment and to reject Ex Corde Ecclesiae's vision of education as an enterprise that liberates men and women made in the image and likeness of God, a vision that underlies the Ignatian emphasis on doing all for the greater glory of God.

Indeed, one might say that clearly defining Jesuit

This essay is a response to Conversations #18, Living the Mission. The seminar encourages readers to submit letters or articles that "join the conversation" on the magazine's various themes. [Ed.]

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education would be a cause of embarrassment. Lest that assertion seem far-fetched, one need only consider the various well-publicized, negative reactions to *Ex Corde* by prominent and powerful Jesuits, men who have no problem with the binding judgments of accrediting agencies. At the national meeting in Philadelphia in the summer of 1999 I heard an oft-cited Jesuit object to *Ex Corde* on the grounds that Jesuit universities and colleges would lose their newly achieved respectability with those in prestigious universities.

I believe that the following practices will clarify the mission of Jesuit education, enable us to reclaim it, and leave no room for one to add, "whatever that means." First, there must be a continuing study of the application of Ignatian principles to the modern world. Whatever its shortcomings, the self-scrutiny of the past three-plus decades has led to several important and authentic advances: the sharing of the Exercises, retreat and other programs founded and continued because of Jesuits committed to Christ and His people, frequent and prayerful liturgies, even the extension of hospitality by Jesuit communities.

Second, there must be an admission that a cold stove gives off no heat. To imagine that a faculty, an administration, a staff, or a board of trustees who are secularists can carry out the work of Ignatius is a delusion. Until everyone in Jesuit higher education is motivated by a real desire to connect Jesuit with Catholic, a connection that strikes me as self-evident, we will continue to have opportunism rather than integrity and tepidity rather than apostolic effectiveness. Just as being a cultural Catholic is not enough, neither is it enough to be a cultural Jesuit or Jesuit institution.

Third, Jesuit higher education must be countercultural if it is to define itself truthfully. We who serve in these institutions are there to serve students so that they may experience what J. R. R. Tolkien calls, "Recovery...regaining of a clear view...seeing things as we are (or were) meant to see them - as things apart from ourselves" (*Tree and Leaf*, 57). In a world of philosophical solipsism and theological solemnis, such a mission can only be achieved by people who care about the truth as the end of education. Clearly, in a post-modern world in which the denial of objective truth is a given, such a stance is not comfortable. It hardly needs saying that the culture of higher education in the United States is unfriendly to those who posit objective truth and, thus, believe that good and evil are real and not dependent on the *consensus gentium*.

When I consider the events that have transpired at Loyola during the thirty-nine years since I was hired to teach American literature, I have a great sense of having been blessed. This sense owes little to the many and largely efficacious changes in the life of Loyola: once a male commuter college of around 800 students, Loyola is now a predominantly residential and coeducational college of around 3200 students. Rather, the blessedness is the gift of the Jesuits and laymen who have been my colleagues through these years. Images of the past -- Father Beatty watering trees on his last night as President, Father Scanlon teaching marriage preparation courses, Father Wise speaking about curriculum, Ed Kaltenbach speaking about anything, Father Sellinger bidding *avem atque vale* to the graduates, Father Davish presiding over the library and proudly surveying the campus in his golf cart -- mix with images of the present: Jesuits young and old, lay colleagues male and female, praying, working, thinking, advising, planning, conversing. And those images remind me that ultimately the reality of a Jesuit education is dependent on the people who are entrusted with the institutions. Where our hearts are, so also is our treasure. May our hearts be set on Jesuit education as Ignatius envisioned it to be--dedicated to the greater glory of God.
Paraphrasing Ignacio Ellacuria, it is the nature of every University to be a social force, and it is the calling of a Jesuit university to take conscious responsibility for being such a force for faith and justice. Every Jesuit academy of higher learning is called to live in a social reality... and to live for that social reality, to shed university intelligence upon it and to use university influence to transform it. Thus Jesuit universities have stronger and different reasons, than many other academic and research institutions, for addressing the actual world as it unjustly exists and for helping to reshape it in the light of the Gospel.

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