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The City as Classroom

JOSEPH A. O'HARE, S.J.



From the days when Socrates first questioned the conventional wisdom of Athens, there has always been a vital institutional tension between the city and the university, an interaction between polis and academia that is essential for the health of each. The city reminds the university that the pursuit of knowledge and truth cannot be merely a private pleasure. The university, on the other hand, guardian of the wisdom of the past and seeking the shape of tomorrow, can serve as both the critical conscience and the creative consciousness of the city.

But this historic link between the university and the city, understood in the broad sense of democratic society, is in need of serious attention, if one is to accept the findings of a Wingspread conference held in December 1998 that culminated in a report entitled, "Renewing the Civic Mission of the American Research University." Participants in the conference included representatives of the leading higher education associations in the United States as well as faculty members and administrators from several important research universities. Their report notes that many Americans "have withdrawn from participation in public affairs." The fact that a very high percentage of registered voters regularly choose not to vote in national and municipal elections is

only one sign of this alienation of the American people from the political process.

The Wingspread conference concluded that part of the explanation for this widespread political indifference could be traced to a change in the agenda of the nation's universities. At the start of the twentieth century, Charles Eliot, the President of Harvard, could claim that "most American institutions of higher education are filled with the democratic spirit. Teachers and students alike are profoundly moved by the desire to serve the democratic community." At the close of the century, the Wingspread conference concluded, that confidence in the democratic spirit of American universities needs to be recovered. The conference called on the university community—

Joseph A. O'Hare, S.J., has been President of Fordham University since 1984 and founding chairman of the New York City Campaign Finance Board since 1988. It was because of his real or perceived influence in the latter role that New York Post columnist Jack Newfield, in an admittedly idiosyncratic column in 1997, listed Father O'Hare as one of the fifty most powerful people in New York City, at number forty-four, two places behind rap impresario Sean Puffy Combs but two places ahead of a sports celebrity named George Steinbrenner.

faculty, students and administration—to become more fully engaged in meeting the challenges of American democratic society.

For Jesuit colleges and universities in the United States, this call for the renewal of the civic mission of higher education has a distinctive resonance. All of our Jesuit works, including our institutions of higher education, should be informed by a common mission to serve faith and promote justice. No Jesuit institution could retreat into academic isolation from its community and not compromise this distinctive mission. The interaction of school and community is important whether a Jesuit institution exists in a small college town or in one of the great metropolitan centers. According to the old Latin verse, however, while Benedict preferred the rural hills, Ignatius loved the great cities. An argument can be made, then, that the challenge posed by the modern urban university, in dealing with the passions and problems of the city, is a distinctively Ignatian challenge.

In any case, I have been asked to reflect on the relation between the Jesuit university and the city, and I will do so by drawing on what I know best, the mission of Fordham as the self-styled Jesuit university of New York City. I do so aware that similar experiences can be cited at other Jesuit urban universities and confident that these experiences will also find some resonance in our institutions that exist not in large metropolitan centers but in smaller urban communities.

The Ignatian predilection for cities found an echo in the words of the first Jesuit to work in New York, Father Anthony Kohlmann, who came in 1808 at the request of Archbishop Carroll to administer what was a new diocese until a bishop could be appointed. Father Kohlmann became the pastor of the city's first parish—St. Peter's in Barclay Street—and founded a small school, the New York Literary Institute. He had come from Georgetown College and was to return there, but while in New York City he did not hesitate to commit himself to a new enthusiasm and a new loyalty. Writing to a friend, he predicted "This city will always be the first city in America, on account of its advantageous situation for commerce."

Although the New York Literary Institute closed in 1815 and Father Kohlmann returned to Georgetown, his prediction that New York would become a center of commerce was surely vindicated. But its "advantageous situation" as a port city also meant that down through the decades New York would be the point of arrival for successive waves of immigrants who came to America in

search of a better life. When Archbishop John Hughes founded St. John's College in 1841, he sought to provide educational opportunity for the future priests of the Church in New York and the immigrant peoples they would serve. In a sense, St. John's College, which became Fordham University in 1907, was, in its own way, a port of entry to American life.

The "advantageous situation" of New York City has been responsible for the continuing coexistence of booming commercial prosperity and daunting social and moral challenges. The city has continued to renew itself, enriched by the contribution of its newest arrivals, but has also had to face the recurrent social challenges of poverty, unemployment and discrimination that have inevitably defined the conditions of life for each new group of immigrants, from the Irish and Italian immigrants in the early part of the nineteenth century to more recent arrivals at the end of the twentieth century from Latin America and Africa.

The city, then, represents a resource for the university community that takes conflicting forms: exciting career opportunities but also disturbing social pathologies. A rich cultural life crowded with theaters, art galleries, and libraries competes for attention with inescapable reminders of a widening gap between the rich and the poor. Stretch limousines seem all the more obscene when they pass by the homeless beggars on the sidewalks. These contrasting faces of the city appeal to both the classical Renaissance humanism of Jesuit education and what can be called the new Jesuit humanism that adds to the classical ideal an explicit emphasis on education for justice.

Fordham's interaction with New York City, a city remarkable for its diversity and sharp contrasts, takes many forms, and I will cite only a few of the ways in which the city poses both opportunities and challenges to our undergraduate students, our professional schools, and our institutional representatives.

For undergraduates an important part of the college experience involves the exploration of aspirations and the testing of talents. The largest major in any freshman class is "undecided." One of Fordham's most prominent alumni, Oscar award winning actor Denzel Washington, likes to recall the different stages of his own journey of self-discovery at Fordham, from aspiring basketball walk-on through an unhappy experiment in a pre-med program to thoughts of becoming a journalist, until the day he auditioned for Othello and a Fordham faculty member recognized what Denzel was meant to be. Many

undergraduates undergo a similar experience in self-discovery, even if the result is less celebrated than Denzel Washington's career.

Because of the special resources of the city, Fordham has been able to develop an extensive internship program that allows students to sample future careers while they are still undergraduates. Such internships are available in the financial services industry, the national broadcast networks, publishing houses and national newsmagazines. One enterprising film student at Fordham College at Lincoln Center talked himself into an internship as an assistant to Martin Scorsese this past semester.

Undergraduate students, however, can also see another side of New York City by participating in a wide range of community service projects: working at homeless shelters and soup kitchens, tutoring inner-city students in both public and parochial schools, helping to clean up local neighborhoods, and supervising children at a transitional residence for the homeless while their mothers look for employment. A number of faculty have included a community service component in their courses, and the question of whether some community service should be a requirement for graduation continues to be debated. For whatever it's worth, students most active in community service often argue against making such service a requirement because they believe that the voluntary character of their service is an essential ingredient of their experience.

At the award ceremony for those involved in community service at the end of the school year, students who have come from rather homogeneous suburban communities will inevitably testify to how much they have learned from the diversity of New York City in, for example, their work as tutors of neighborhood children. Is it too fanciful to suggest that the city presents different kinds of mentors for our undergraduates—the professional and corporate mentors they meet in their internships, and the very different but no less valuable mentoring they can receive in community service projects while working with the disadvantaged who seek their own dignity?

For two of the professional schools of the University, the Graduate School of Education and the Graduate School of Social Service, the city presents the possibility of a different kind of partnership that has allowed Fordham faculty and students to become engaged in the complex challenge of inner-city education. Collaboration on a project that joined social servic-

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es to educational programs for at-risk students some years ago led to the establishment of a National Center on School and Community that seeks to replicate the success of this collaboration in other urban centers where schools must provide a far broader set of services to students and their families than ever envisioned by conventional pedagogy.

In addition to this successful collaboration, the Graduate School of Education works closely with both parochial and public schools in the city, while the Graduate School of Social Service each year places a thousand students as interns in social welfare agencies throughout the city and in surrounding counties.

Fordham's School of Law can draw on an extensive network of alumni in the New York City legal community, not only in the leading law firms of the city but also in the courts and the city's system of justice. Under the leadership of John D. Feerick, who is completing his eighteenth year as dean, the school has gained a national reputation for public interest law and professional ethics. The School's Public Interest Resource Center, established in 1990, was the first of its kind in the nation. Graduates of the School's most recent class had contributed roughly 70,000 hours of pro bono service by the time of their graduation in May 1999, working in such projects as advocacy for battered women, death penalty defense, and housing and immigration advocacy. On the occasion of its ninetieth anniversary, the Law School community adopted as its motto, "In the Service of Others," a phrase its dean associates with the call of Don Pedro Arrupe, S.J., to be "men and women for others."

For the School of Law and the Graduate School of Business Administration, in particular, but for all of the schools of the University to some degree, Fordham's location in New York City also provides convenient access to the international community through the United Nations and the non-governmental institutions concerned with human rights clustered around that world body, as well as institutions involved in international trade and commerce. The Law School's location in Lincoln Center has facilitated its Program in International Human Rights, named after the late Joseph R. Crowley, a former faculty member and associate dean. The goal of the Crowley Program, which recently conducted a study mission to Turkey in collaboration with the New-York based Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, is to "provide every interested member of the Law School community an opportunity to become

engaged in human rights work and to stimulate them, through these positive experiences, to continue working in the field throughout their professional careers."

Similarly, its location at our Lincoln Center campus facilitated a recent conference sponsored by Fordham's Graduate School of Business on economic opportunities in China, which called attention to the newly established M.B.A. program in Beijing conducted by a consortium of Jesuit graduate schools of business in the United States.

Early in my presidency, an alumnus wrote to me objecting that my emphasis on Fordham's role in New York City was too narrow and parochial. Recognizing that one's viewpoint can become insular in even the most cosmopolitan setting, I would nonetheless contend that New York presents to even the mildly curious an astonishing mix of cultures and careers. If Pope John Paul II can call New York the "capital of the world," then the dangers of a narrow New York-centrism seem rather remote.

Over a decade ago, the report of the Commission on the Year 2000 called New York City a "world city" because of its dominant influence on international business and culture. But the Commission also described New York as a "city of neighborhoods" because of its mix of ethnic and racial communities. While Fordham's Lincoln Center campus, established in the mid-1960's, assures the university's presence at the city's cultural center, our original Rose Hill campus in the Bronx is very much part of one of those ethnic neighborhoods that the Commission hailed as distinctive of New York. The two campuses allow the university to interact with two very different faces of New York City, and each provides rich resources for learning as well as compelling invitations to service.

One of the most popular programs for undergraduates at Fordham College at Lincoln Center is a theater arts major, which counts among its faculty award-winning directors from the Broadway and off-Broadway theater community. A new Bachelor of Fine Arts program represents a collaboration between Fordham and the Alvin Ailey Dance Company. This year one of the forty Marshall Scholarships awarded to undergraduates in the United States was given to a student who entered Fordham College at Lincoln Center through the new Alvin Ailey collaboration. But while Fordham's Lincoln Center campus is part of an extraordinary complex in the heart of the city that includes the Metropolitan Opera, the New York State Theater, and Avery Fisher Hall, Fordham undergraduates need only to cross the

street to assist in an AIDS project and soup kitchen at St. Paul the Apostle Church or serve as mentors for students living in the nearby Amsterdam Houses.

Along with the opportunities and challenges that the city presents to its undergraduates and the professional schools of the university, there is another level of engagement for the university as an institutional public citizen. In Fordham's recent history, the most striking example of its response to this role dates back to the mid-1970's, when images of Fort Apache dominated the perception of the Bronx community surrounding Fordham's Rose Hill campus. Under the leadership of its president, the late Father James Finlay, S.J., the university established an office of Urban Affairs that worked with the Northwest Bronx Catholic Clergy Conference to develop a broader organization of community groups that became the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition. Twenty-five years later, the Coalition can look back on a series of impressive accomplishments, stopping the tide of abandonment and arson and then securing the funds needed to rehabilitate buildings and restore the communities of the Northwest Bronx.

While Fordham, like most private universities, did not have the resources to provide significant financial support to urban renewal initiatives, it could serve as a convenor of community groups, provide the support of research institutes, and lend legitimacy to the voices of community organizers seeking to call attention to the needs of the borough's neighborhoods and families. These efforts were institutionalized in the establishment of the Bronx Urban Resource Center, which provides relevant data to local community organizations, and the University Neighborhood Housing Program (UNHP), which sought public and private funding for the restoration and creation of housing for lower- and middle-class families in the borough. University representatives continue to serve as directors of UNHP, which announced on its fifteenth anniversary in 1998 an agreement with Fannie Mae, the nation's largest source of home mortgage funds, to provide a new twenty-five-million-dollar fund for loans to owners of multi-family buildings in the Bronx community, which will enable them to maintain and improve their properties.

Fordham's engagement with the life of New York City also takes the form of the individual service contributed by university representatives. Dean Feerick has served as President of the Association of the Bar of the City of New York, only the second law school dean in the history of the Association to be elected to that post

of leadership in the New York City legal community. Dean Feerick had previously served as chairman of the New York State Commission on Government Integrity, and has acted as mediator in several highly publicized conflicts in the city and the nation.

Among the issues identified by the Feerick Commission was the need for campaign finance reform. In 1988 I was asked by then-Mayor Ed Koch to become chairman of a five-person board that would administer a new Campaign Finance Program established by local law in the wake of the municipal scandals of 1986 and later confirmed by amendment to the City Charter in 1989. The program is necessarily voluntary, but candidates who agree to limits on contributions and expenditures, as well as the disclosure requirements of the Program, receive matching public funds to help finance their campaigns. The experience of four municipal campaigns over the past twelve years has been an opportunity to learn more about the political process in the city, including the realization that city politics is not a non-contact sport. At the same time, the success of the New York City campaign finance program, which has been hailed as a model by good government groups, editorialists, and advocates of campaign finance reform both in this country and abroad, is due, in part at least, to the non-partisan reputation the program has achieved. The program's association with the Jesuit University of New York City has surely given added credibility to this non-partisan reputation.

No individual in Fordham's history better embodied its aspirations to be the Jesuit University of New York City than the late Father Joseph P. Fitzpatrick, S.J., scholar-teacher at Fordham University and priest-activist in New York City for more than forty-six years. Joe Fitzpatrick's arrival at Fordham after completing his doctorate in sociology at Harvard in 1949 coincided with the first wave of Puerto Rican immigration to New York City and to the neighborhoods surrounding Fordham's Bronx campus. Aware of his roots and the experience of Irish immigrants in the mid-nineteenth century, Father Fitzpatrick recognized similar patterns in the challenges of assimilation that Puerto Ricans faced in the second half of the twentieth century.

Long before multiculturalism became a fashionable academic issue, Joe Fitzpatrick was reminding the American Catholic community that while the Church was one, the world was made up of many cultures. His commitment to the Gospel was uncompromising, but he recognized that the Gospel must be inculturated in dif-

ferent times and in different places, expressing the riches of distinctive cultures. As scholar-teacher, Joe Fitzpatrick influenced generations of students at Fordham and helped establish the original Hispanic Research Institute at Fordham. (The direct descendant of this institute is The Hispanic Mental Health Research Center, recently established by Fordham's Graduate School of Social Service and funded by a \$5.5 million grant from the National Institute of Mental Health.)

As priest-activist, Joe Fitzpatrick served on the boards of a number of Puerto Rican organizations. In 1978, he was the first, and still the only, Irishman to be honored as Puerto Rican Man of the Year. When Father Fitzpatrick retired from active teaching at Fordham in 1983, the University recognized his singular career with an honorary doctorate of laws. The citation noted that his books, articles, and addresses invariably reflected a common theme, "the ever-deepening responsibility of the urban university to offer its rich resources for the social healing of our constantly changing world—beginning with the world at its own doorstep."

Learning and teaching always constitute a mutual relationship. The best teachers always learn from their students; certainly Joe Fitzpatrick did. If the city provides a special kind of classroom for the urban university, it is because it constitutes a distinctive resource for both learning and teaching. The university can certainly serve the city, but not by presuming to instruct it in some Platonic ideal. Rather, the classroom of the city is constituted by the daily dialogue with the genius and passion at work in city life on many levels, from soaring artistic celebration to the search for human dignity for those left behind and left out of a rising tide of prosperity.

In 1972, a report of the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, entitled "The Campus and the City: Maximizing Assets and Reducing Liabilities," explored the ways in which urban colleges and universities could respond to what the President of the United States had a few years earlier called the "crisis of American cities." The Commission noted, with a tone of regret, that, while the university as an institution was born in great cities—

Salerno, Bologna, Paris—the American preference had been to establish campuses in more isolated areas. Against this background the Commission pointed out that "[o]nly Catholic colleges and universities have shown a clear inclination to choose city locations where the populations to which they most appealed have been located. As a consequence, they have had especially close ties to the cities."

Among these urban Catholic institutions, our Jesuit institutions in Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, Chicago, St. Louis, Milwaukee, Los Angeles and other metropolitan centers occupy a special place in the history of the American Catholic community. Generations of leaders in their communities have graduated from these institutions, and the network of Jesuit alumni in all of these cities constitute an important resource for both the city and the church. Over the last three decades, these institutions have responded to the call of the Carnegie Commission in 1972 that universities become more fully engaged in "the crisis of American cities."

While no Jesuit institution adopted the program of open admissions that the Carnegie report had suggested for inner city institutions, all of our Jesuit urban institutions have special programs for disadvantaged students. Our institutions have been involved in urban renewal programs in St. Louis and Milwaukee and have worked to improve the public school system in Boston and other cities. The examples

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I have cited from my own experience of Fordham University could be multiplied by the stories of other Jesuit colleges and universities that worked in partnership with their surrounding communities to respond to the challenge outlined in that 1972 Carnegie Commission report.

Each of our Jesuit institutions is defined in part by its particular local circumstances. All of these institutions, however, share a tradition informed by an Ignatian spirituality that seeks to find God in all things, which surely includes all the different faces that the contemporary American city presents. When corporate executives in New York City tell me that young Fordham graduates are more resourceful in dealing with the city than at least some graduates of Ivy League institutions, I would like to think that the secular mysticism of Ignatian spirituality has something to do with that attitude toward the city. Our graduates are typically neither naïve about the promises of the city nor indifferent to the needs of its people. In their own way, each according to his or her measure, their attitude toward the city resembles "the contemplative in action" that is the goal of the pedagogy of the Spiritual Exercises, or so, at least, I would like to think.

In the higher education community in the United States the best models for education in responsible citizenship remain a subject of lively debate. Our urban Jesuit institutions bring to this discussion a colorful history of civic engagement from coast to coast in the major metropolitan centers across the nation. Informing this history is a distinctive religious and educational tradition, one that respected diversity and multiculturalism for centuries, in places like China and Paraguay,

before these terms ever became politically correct in the United States at the end of the second millennium. This Jesuit tradition has always sought to create community within diversity and found in the multiplicity of cultures an enrichment of a common humanity. Similarly, this tradition has encouraged intellectual curiosity and the freedom such curiosity needs because of its confidence that in the end the truth is One. This tradition has found contemporary articulation in the call of the most recent General Congregation that Jesuits should be "men for and with others," and help the men and women in our universities to fashion lives that are "for and with others."

The contemporary Jesuit university finds in the classroom of its urban community both resources that feed the mind and stretch the imagination, and human needs that summon us to service. The roots of the relationship go back to Socrates, the gadfly of Athens, and Ignatius, who left the rural hills to Benedict and preferred the cities as a privileged arena for seeking the greater glory of God.

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