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Revisiting the Promise and Foundations of a Jesuit Education

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Abstract

Offering a Jesuit education requires much from the faculty and staff at a Jesuit university. While there is wide agreement with Jesuit Superior General Peter-Hans Kolvenbach's observation that our particular education should be measured by who our students become, faculty and staff need a fundamental understanding of the roots and intentions of Jesuit education to truly begin to fulfill that promise of a Jesuit education.¹ This article shares the reflective practice of five colleagues working in different roles at a Jesuit university, seeking to better re-examine their understanding of the foundations of Jesuit education, including special attention to the history, contextual meaning, and analysis of the six Catholic, Jesuit values that we uphold at Regis University: contemplatives in action, finding God in all things, men and women for and with others, the *magis*, *cura personalis*, and unity of heart and mind.

Introduction

There are many pressures on modern day higher education in the United States. Professional organizations, accreditors, current students, potential students, alumni, parents, and even the often misinformed public serve as factors in the design and offerings of our educational institutions. Jesuit institutions are not immune to any of these pressures. However, Jesuit education also has its own context to be considered and explored or, for the authors and for many, re-explored. The over 450-year-old tradition (228

years in the U.S.) of Jesuit education cannot be revisited often enough if our institutions are to remain true to the vision of St. Ignatius Loyola. This work was conducted as the authors of "Are We Fulfilling the Promise of a Jesuit Education: A Group of Educators' Reflective Examen" were seeking to better develop their understandings of Jesuit education and its distinctions.² The authors' discussions led to rediscovering and reconnecting with the roots and the intentions of Jesuit education. The article includes a review of the history of Jesuit education and specifically, the six values of Jesuit education. Together with the

reflective practice article referenced above, the authors provide a guide for a type of practice examen that can be used by any faculty or staff member as a way to outline and revisit what Jesuit education promises a student enrolled in our institutions.

Jesuit Education and Intent

Formation was the goal of Ignatius and his colleagues from the very start. Formation was and is about developing a person's spiritual and intellectual character. Boston College's *Pocket Guide to Jesuit Education* provides a helpful introduction:

[T]he early companions of Ignatius were all graduates of the University of Paris — at the time, the best university in Europe — and they thought of themselves as specialists in “ministries of the word.” Gradually, they came to realize that there was one emerging activity that connected their intellectual training, their world-affirming spirituality, their pastoral experience, and their goal of helping souls: educating children and young people. When citizens of Messina asked Ignatius to open a school for their sons, he seems to have decided that schools could be a powerful means of forming the minds and hearts of those, who, because they would be important citizens in their communities, could influence many others. When the college in Messina proved a success, requests to open schools in other cities multiplied and soon education became the characteristic activity of Jesuits.³

For St. Ignatius, the connection between education and virtue — or, in the case of Jesuits, between education and effective ministry — was a given.⁴ Jesuits assumed, with the humanists, that education produced good citizens of high moral character and cultivated the capacity for sound judgment. They further believed that education could improve the social status of the underprivileged. From its early inception, a Jesuit education included training in religion and in spiritual practice. The goals of the early Jesuit schools in this regard were derived from the

personal experiences of St. Ignatius and those of the early Jesuits. Those schools consciously set forth to develop a specific set of qualities in their students:

- Self-knowledge and discipline
- Attentiveness to their own experience and to others'
- Trust in God's direction of their lives
- Respect for intellect and reason as tools for discovering truth
- Skill in discerning the right course of action
- A conviction that talents and knowledge were gifts to be used to help others
- Flexibility and pragmatism in problem solving,
- Large-hearted ambition
- A desire to find God working in all things⁵

Although the earliest Jesuit educational establishments were not schools of religion as such, it was expected that students — whether Catholic or Protestant — would attend to their spiritual lives.⁶ Unheard of at that time was the idea that a student might profess no religious affiliation at all.

By the time of St. Ignatius' passing in 1556, 34 Jesuit colleges were operating in Europe. The number of schools increased even more rapidly after that, growing to more than 800 around the world in the mid-1700's.⁷ As the growth in the number of Jesuit colleges continued, the Society of Jesus sought to revisit and reclaim its educational roots so that all of its schools operated from the same foundations. In 1832, the Society published the revised *Ratio Studiorum*.⁸ The *Ratio* addressed the changing conditions of intellectual life in the world and, while adding branches of study to the curricula of Jesuit schools, restated the essential and fundamental principles of Jesuit education (i.e., those listed above) and highlighted that those principles would ever be the foundation of Jesuit education. Until fairly recently, the *Ratio* was the guiding document for Jesuit schools all over the world, including Georgetown, the first Jesuit educational institution in the United States, founded in 1789.

Key Features of Jesuit Education: The Jesuit Values

What sets a Jesuit education apart from a secular education? What does it mean to be “Jesuit-educated?” Possible answers to this question abound, but perhaps the concept can be captured in the Jesuit values — again, prominently featured on the campuses of most Jesuit educational institutions: contemplatives in action; finding God in all things; women and men for and with others; the *magis*; *cura personalis*; and unity of minds and hearts. Of necessity, how — and whether — students come to understand the Jesuit values depends in large part upon how — and whether — their teachers and administrators understand them. History provides useful context for developing a deeper understanding of the Jesuit values. That history is rediscovered and presented in this section.

Contemplatives in Action

The term *contemplatives in action* dates back, at least, to the sixteenth century. It is rooted in the traditional distinction between the two principal forms of religious life in the Catholic church. There have been *contemplative* religious men and women for nearly as long as Christianity has existed.⁹ Traditionally, contemplative religious live apart from the world, in settings designed to support lives of single-hearted devotion to God, with an intensity of focus that is difficult to maintain amid the concerns of daily life.¹⁰ For much of Catholic Christian history, this has meant, in its purest form, canonical enclosure and vows of stability. The enclosed religious enters the abbey, convent, or monastery and, except in truly extraordinary circumstances, does not emerge from the premises. Although contemplative religious typically engage in some sort of collective enterprise to support their religious communities (making and selling fruitcake, for example, or binding books), it may fairly be said that the contemplative’s work is prayer.

Active religious live in community and profess the same evangelical vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience as their enclosed and contemplative counterparts, but are active in the world. Obviously, *active* is a term of art, used to describe religious who do not live in canonical enclosure

— the term is not meant to suggest that contemplative religious are sedentary or otherwise inactive. Jesuits are active religious, as are, for example, the several branches of the Sisters of St. Joseph, or the Sisters of Loretto. Their relationship with God is at the core of their identity and is fostered by prayer, but their work is, in traditional parlance, in the world.

As noted above, in the phrase *contemplative in action*, contemplative does not mean thoughtful, or reflective, or deliberative — although the term is frequently taken to mean precisely these things. Instead, contemplative refers directly to the spirit of single-hearted attentiveness to God that characterizes the contemplative religious. This spirit is what St. Ignatius wanted for his Jesuits. Jerome Nadal, one of the original companions of St. Ignatius, and the Jesuit delegated by St. Ignatius to explain and implement the founding documents of the Society across Europe, wrote,

[P]rayer ... should bring to fullness and direct and give spiritual relish to the activities we undertake extending its strength and power to them in the Lord; and the activities should bring prayer to its fullness and bestow on it both power and joy. In this way, joined like Martha and Mary and assisting one another, we do not embrace just one part ... of the Christian life; but setting aside the troublesome worries about things, Martha and Mary help one another and are united in the Lord.¹¹

In another work, Fr. Nadal refers more directly to the term we have come to know so well, in discussing the spiritual life of St. Ignatius Loyola:

Father Ignatius received this kind of [mystical, apophatic] prayer by reason of a great privilege and in a most extraordinary way; and this besides: so that in everything, in actions, and in conversations, he was wholly caught up in the presence of [God] and the love of all things spiritual: *contemplative also in the midst of action* (which he used to express in this way: [God] is to be found in everything).¹² [Emphasis added]

Finding God in All Things

God was the life project of Ignatius. Without overstatement or exaggeration, it may be said that Ignatius's every waking thought was either directly about God or about how to make God's dominion of love and justice a present reality.

Of particular note is the connection — an essential one — in the mind of St. Ignatius between the concepts *contemplative in action* and *finding God in all things*. As the Ignatian scholar Joseph Conwell, S.J. has put it,

[Ignatius] experienced the presence of God passionately, was absorbed in it, riveted by it, enraptured by it. Furthermore, he felt ... a surge of love for the whole spiritual realm and was bathed in it ... as well. He was caught up in the love of [God] and in the love of [God]'s creatures as well; and this was not just for a moment but in everything — in every action, in every conversation — seeing everything ... from the point of view of the Trinity, grasping the relationship of each creature to the three Divine Persons as their source and as the goal to which each returns.¹³

Put simply, St. Ignatius found God in prayer and in everything else.¹⁴ For anyone who desires to be true to the spirit of St. Ignatius, and for anyone who wishes to incorporate Ignatian spirituality into his or her life, God must be the starting place, the goal, and the reference point at every step along the way.

Men and Women for, and with, Others

This phrase comes to us not from St. Ignatius, but from Pedro Arrupe, S.J., the dynamic, prophetic, and saintly Superior General of the Society of Jesus in the 1970s. On St. Ignatius Day, 1973 (July 31, the day that St. Ignatius passed into eternity), Fr. Arrupe addressed a group of alumni in Valencia, Spain, speaking directly about Jesuit education:

Today our prime educational objective must be to form men[-and-women]-for-others; men [and women] who will live

not for themselves but for God and his Christ — for the God-man who lived and died for all the world; men [and women] who cannot even conceive of love of God which does not include love for the least of their neighbors; [men and women] completely convinced that love of God which does not issue in justice for others is a farce.¹⁵

Happily, Fr. Arrupe's words reveal both the meaning of the value and its underpinnings. Like Fr. Arrupe, St. Ignatius would not have imagined separating one's relationship with God from one's actions in the world, or acting in the world other than as an expression of faith in God.

The “with” was added later — as in men and women for, and *with*, others — to incorporate the idea of *solidarity*. We are in solidarity with someone when we stand with him or her, literally and figuratively. Justice and equity must be grounded in relationships of mutual respect, and must be built from within rather than imposed from outside. Those of us who are not materially poor are not somehow separate from the people we are “for.” We are not rescuers, saviors, or knights in shining armor. Rather, we are connected: certainly by our common origins in God, but as well by the web of causality that links poverty to injustice and inequity and to social and economic systems in which we all participate. Further, being *for* someone is not like being *for* the Broncos or the Chiefs. Rather, it suggests a much deeper connection, captured by the words a person might say to someone she cares deeply about: “I believe in you.”

Magis

St. Ignatius did not use the word *magis* in reference to Jesuit spirituality. Nonetheless, the concept was central to his spirituality and to his vision for the Society of Jesus.¹⁶ The term was not used in its more specific sense until the 1960s. The *magis* — adding a definite article helps clarify the concept — is about discernment. Although the Latin word *magis* means “more,” as a Jesuit value the *magis* does not call us — whatever our state in life — to do more, but rather to discern what would be better. As Fr. Bart Geger, S.J., explains in his essay “Myths, Misquotes and Misconceptions about St.

Ignatius Loyola,¹⁷ Ignatius did not suggest that we ask ourselves “what *more* can I do for Christ?” but rather (in the original Spanish) *lo que debo hacer por Cristo*. Correctly translated into English, this phrase means “what *can* I do for Christ?” In other words, the goal is to do what is better — in Jesuit parlance, the course of action (or thought) that will further a more universal good. More is not better. More is more. Better is better — the more universal good is better. Sometimes what will serve the more universal good is doing less, or even (Heaven forbid) doing nothing. Similarly, not every “noble or loving deed can properly be called the *magis*.”¹⁸ It is assumed that those who are seeking the *magis* are doing good things, and in fact Ignatian discernment never contemplates discerning good from evil, but rather choosing the best option from among a group of good options. Something can be good (in the sense of right) without serving the more universal good — and so would not be the *magis*. The *magis* presupposes a life of faith and a genuine desire to serve God. As such, choosing the *magis* is choosing between two or more goods.

Discernment does not stop there, however. The very idea of discernment suggests that there is something — for Ignatius, the more universal good — to discern. The Catholic tradition upholds the idea that moral norms have objective reality. They are things, in the same way that rocks and trees are things. In the language of philosophy, an “ought” can indeed be derived from an “is.” That moral norms should have to be discovered and interpreted does not change this.

For practicing Catholics and for the Jesuit, the more universal good is always thought of in reference to God. In the language of the Spiritual Exercises, when faced with a choice between two good things, a person should always choose the path that is more conducive to the end for which every one of us was created: the “praise, reverence, and service” of God.¹⁹ Properly understood, there is no secular version of the more universal good — rather, the universal good is related to, and an expression of, God’s will. In any given situation, God wills the more universal good.

As with the other values, the *magis* cannot be thought of without referring to God. Even the

universal good, though sometimes touted as a secular version of the *magis*, is not properly secular. “Universal good” refers to a standard, and in the Catholic, Jesuit world, the standard is the Gospel, which points directly to God. God, then, is the standard, and in the world of the Society of Jesus, it could not be otherwise.

Cura Personalis

The Latin term *cura personalis* means care for the person, but translating the words cannot begin to capture their meaning in the context of Jesuit spirituality. *Cura personalis* comes to us from the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, the goal of which is the interior freedom needed to allow someone to respond wholeheartedly to God.²⁰ Typically, the Exercises are given by a spiritual director or “companion,” to a “retreatant” or “exercitant.” Daily for the period of the retreat (which can last anywhere from an afternoon to over 30 days), the director presents the exercitant with passages from scripture and suggestions for the day’s prayer. When they next meet, the exercitant shares her feelings and experiences with the director, and the process is repeated. Care for the person is a necessary component of effective spiritual direction. The competent director works to create a dynamic with the exercitant that may be described as a confidential relationship of respectful familiarity. For her part, the exercitant must trust the director enough to reveal her interior state. The overarching goal is to empower the exercitant to respond to God’s call in the particularities of his or her time, place, and person.

Ideally, an educator’s approach to a particular pupil would be similar to the approach of the competent spiritual director, and would as well be grounded in a relationship of respectful familiarity. Comparably with spiritual direction, the ideal educational experience would be tailored to the student’s personality, goals, and learning style, all with the object of empowering the student to take charge of his or her education. The more the educator knows about the student, the more likely this empowerment is to happen. Again, however, in a Jesuit context, none of this can be thought of without reference to God. On many Jesuit campuses, *cura personalis* has come to mean something less than either of the above models: namely, attentiveness to the student as a whole

person with a unique history and unique desires and aspirations. This approach is clearly better than ignoring the student's history and aspirations, but does set aside the spiritual elements that so define *cura personalis* in its original meaning.


Unity of Mind and Heart

Of all the values, *unity of mind and heart* has perhaps drifted the furthest from its origins. It is now taken to mean (a meaning displayed on Regis University's own website) that we are to be integrated, in the modern psychological understanding of integration. Ideally, the desires of a person's heart (presumably, for the *magis*) find expression in thought and action. No part of life is isolated from the whole. Integrity is a noble aspiration, certainly, but it has little to do with this value, properly understood. The original phrase is not *unity of mind and heart* but rather *union of minds and hearts*. It comes to us not from Ignatius, but from the Jesuit Fathers of General Congregation 32 in 1974.²¹ The idea behind the phrase, though, comes directly from St. Ignatius, who wanted his Jesuits to be united in bonds of fraternal love and shared vision — in addition to a general uniformity of dress, deportment, and liturgical practice.²²

Finishing Thoughts

The roots of Jesuit education are deep and storied. Those roots and stories were born into a particular time and context. This is especially true of the Jesuit values that adorn and direct the work of Jesuit institutions and are inscribed on our buildings and walkways. We wanted to understand the original intent of these values and to work towards applying them to our own experiences in an authentic way. The content in this article came from the reflective examen process of colleagues in professional health care education at one Jesuit university. We genuinely want Jesuit education to be a distinct model of personal education and transformation.

Our key conclusion is that in present day, when the external pressures are both many and heavy in higher education, it is important to recall the roots from which our institutions have sprung and examine them given our current contexts and understandings. It is not enough to learn these

values once at orientation; they should be examined and revisited in various contexts and situations. We were surprised to find that the current understanding of the values, in some cases, has moved significantly from the original intent. Through this work of rediscovering and examination, we, as faculty and staff at Jesuit institutions, will be better able to adapt and improve our work in order to meet the intentions of Jesuit education and better fulfill the promise of a Jesuit education. 

Notes

¹ Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., “The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice in American Jesuit Higher Education,” October 6, 2000 lecture at Santa Clara University, The Santa Clara Lectures 7, no. 1 (2000), accessed May 30, 2017, <https://www.scu.edu/media/ignatian-center/santa-clara-lecture/Peter-Hans-Kolvenbach,-S.J.--%C3%A2%C2%80%C2%9CThe-Service-of-Faith-and-the-Promotion-of-Justice-in-American-Jesuit-Higher-Education%C3%A2%C2%80%C2%9D.pdf>.

² Kenneth S. Sagendorf, Susan A. Scherer, James D. Nash, Dirk J. Dunfee, S.J., and Cheryl Schwartz, “Are We Fulfilling the Promise of a Jesuit Education? A Group of Educators’ Reflective Examen,” *Jesuit Higher Education: A Journal* 5, no. 2 (2016): 62-75, accessed May 30, 2017, <http://epublications.regis.edu/jhe/vol5/iss2/9>.

³ Boston College Division of University Mission and Ministry, “A Pocket Guide to Jesuit Education,” accessed August 22, 2016, <http://www.bc.edu/offices/mission/publications/guide.html>

⁴ John W. O’Malley, *The First Jesuits* (London: Harvard University Press, 1993), 208.

⁵ Boston College, “A Pocket Guide to Jesuit Education.”

⁶ O’Malley, 206.

⁷ Boston College, “A Pocket Guide to Jesuit Education.”

⁸ *The Ratio Studiorum: The Official Plan for Jesuit Education*, trans. Claude Pavor, S.J. (Boston: Institute for Advance Jesuit Studies, Boston College, 2005).

⁹ Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1994), New ed., 612.

¹⁰ *Religious* is the individual and collective noun, and the adjective, that is used when referring to men or women in Catholic religious life, as in “St. Thérèse of Lisieux was a *religious*.”

¹¹ Joseph F. Conwell, S.J., *Walking in the Spirit: A Reflection on Jeronimo Nadal’s Phrase “Contemplative Likewise in Action”* (St Louis, MO: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2003), 208-209.

¹² *Ibid.*, 227.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 228.

¹⁵ Pedro Arrupe, S.J., “Men for Others: Education for Social Justice and Social Action Today,” address at the Tenth International Congress of Jesuit Alumni of Europe, Valencia, Spain, July 31, 1973 (Washington, D.C.: Jesuit Secondary Education Association, 1974), accessed August 22, 2016, <http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/men-for-others.html>.

¹⁶ Barton T. Geger, S.J., “What *Magis* Really Means and Why It Matters,” *Jesuit Higher Education: A Journal* 1, no. 2 (2012): 16-31, accessed May 8, 2017, <http://epublications.regis.edu/jhe/vol1/iss2/16>.

¹⁷ Barton T. Geger, S.J., “Myths, Misquotes and Misconceptions about St. Ignatius Loyola,” *Jesuit Higher Education: A Journal* 5, no. 1 (2016): 7-20, accessed May 8, 2017, <http://epublications.regis.edu/jhe/vol5/iss1/4>.

¹⁸ Geger, “What *Magis* Really Means,” 26.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 28.

²⁰ Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., “*Cura Personalis*,” *Review of Ignatian Spirituality* 114 (2007): 9-17.

²¹ “General Congregation” is the name for the regular meetings in Rome of Jesuit delegates from every part of the world, usually for the purpose of electing a Superior General.

²² Barton T. Geger, “*Cura Personalis*: Some Ignatian Inspirations,” *Jesuit Higher Education: A Journal* 3, no. 2 (2014): 6-20, accessed May 8, 2017, <http://epublications.regis.edu/jhe/vol3/iss2/2>.