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Teaching *Magis* at College: Meaning, Mission, and Moral Responsibility

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Abstract

This essay aims to rescue *magis* from banal jargon like striving for “excellence” or “generosity.” While some might have a vague sense of what *magis* means, this charism of Jesuit education is better understood as a horizon of meaning that orients our work as partners in mission for inclusive and integral human flourishing *For the Greater Glory of God* (A.M.D.G.). After describing how *magis* provides the *raison d’être* of Jesuit education, this essay addresses several challenges that result from current perceptions of higher education as well as the socio-cultural context that shapes emerging adults today. Insofar as widespread moral relativism blunts the call to action implied by *magis*, this essay proposes five key virtues (love, mercy, justice, solidarity, and hope) to amplify how *magis* can inspire in us a commitment to pursue “the good life” as part of our work in Jesuit education. Finally, this essay pivots to the praxis of teaching by highlighting three tools (contemplation, imagination, and vocation discernment) for education as formation for *magis*.

Introduction

Magis is crucial for the religious and moral formation of the individuals who constitute Jesuit institutions of higher education. To explore the obstacles and opportunities for embracing *magis*, this essay moves forward in four steps. First, it explores the meaning of *magis* as traced through the Jesuit documentary heritage and as currently understood by Jesuit leaders like Pope Francis and Rev. Gregory Boyle, S.J. By considering *magis* in terms of “the greater good” as well as devotion to what God desires, *magis* is linked to the promotion of justice as articulated by Rev. Ignacio Ellacuría, S.J. (the president of the Jesuit university in San Salvador, murdered in November 1989) and Rev. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J. (the former Superior General of the Society of Jesus). Second, this essay explores some of the chief challenges to *magis* in higher education today, ranging from views of college as a commodity to the stress and anxiety that overwhelm today’s students. Above all, the prominence of tolerance and non-judgmentalism foster moral relativism, which undermines the shared agreement and accountability necessary for a commitment to the common good in the pursuit of justice. In light of the lack of moral formation in today’s emerging adults (as examined in the work of sociologist Christian Smith), this essay moves to a third step: to propose five key virtues that can provide the basis for moral norms in aspiring for integral flourishing and justice. These

five virtues—love, mercy, justice, solidarity, and hope—are drawn from Scripture and tradition to comprise a framework for the “good life,” where individuals and communities flourish. The fourth and final step explores how contemplation, imagination, and vocation discernment provide three ways to approach the praxis of teaching for *magis* in the college classroom. These practices help students recognize the good in and around them, expand their sense of what is possible as a personal and communal endeavor, and discover how to integrate what brings them joy, what they love learning about, and what problem they can solve into the meaning and purpose of their lives. Taken together, this essay provides a template for engaging Jesuit college students in education as formation for living *magis*.

Why *Magis*?

As fewer Jesuits teach in Jesuit institutions of higher education, core Jesuit values—like *magis*—need to be translated from their context in Ignatian spirituality for faculty, staff, and students who do not always share the same theological framework. Without a clear grasp of the meaning of these terms, there is a risk of domesticating Jesuit values into bourgeois jargon. Timothy Hanchin attests:

The catechetical task of communicating the memory of St. Ignatius to students is

a dangerous one. It is dangerous because the marketability and accessibility of Ignatian-speak makes it vulnerable to an uncritical appropriation that baptizes the privileges of an American middle-class lifestyle. Yet the catechetical task is dangerous in a positive way as well. When the language communicates the Jesuit identity of the school through the narrative of St. Ignatius, it teaches students to see the world in a radically new way. In this way Jesuit education fulfills its fundamental mission of teaching students to discern by seeing with new eyes.¹

How do we help students to “see with new eyes”? In part by interrupting the common assumption that views a college education like a personal investment for self-improvement. This narrative often reserves college for the economically privileged or treats it like a commodity such that students see themselves as customers while faculty and staff are rendered service-providers. Neither should Jesuit education be reduced to preparation for a profession, since our task is to form and integrate whole persons, not simply to impart knowledge for expertise in a particular occupation. Additionally, Jesuit education must resist the cultural value placed on achievement wherein busyness becomes a badge of honor and *magis* is coopted to motivate productivity or used as a point of comparison between individuals. Hanchin observes:

Jesuit education must vigilantly guard against the misuse of its language. For example, *magis* is rightly understood as the fruit of a discernment of spirits in search of that which more brings about union with God. Instead it often becomes, at best, an unreflective motivation affirming that the more school activities I am involved in, the more I am of value to it. At worst it means the busier I am the more I find value in myself ... In this case, *magis* becomes a principle of bourgeois religion as it dangerously stamps an Ignatian seal of approval on a culture that equates constant busyness,

mass productivity and maximum efficiency with worth.²

Magis is less a matter of accomplishment than becoming; it invites us to answer questions like: Is God the center of my life? What kind of person am I growing into? What kind of community are we building? As Rev. Gregory Boyle, S.J. suggests, *magis* “refers to an affection for God,” a “devotion” that takes the shape of a “pervasive familiarity and union with God, a desire to want what God wants.”³ When the state of higher education places a premium on measuring outcomes or making data-driven decisions to maximize efficiency or generate revenue, this Ignatian inheritance interrupts the need to prove our value. Instead, *magis* reminds us to bask in our inestimable value as loved sinners who—in gratitude and generosity—are called to repair a world broken by despair, division, and injustice. Pope Francis describes *magis* as “the fire, the fervor of action, that rouses us from slumber.” It is what drives us “to leave an imprint or mark in history, especially in the lives of the smallest.”⁴ *Magis* prevents us from becoming complacent with an unjust status quo by reminding us that we love, serve, and honor God in meeting the needs of our neighbors. Insofar as God is the Creator of everything that exists, the God of Life and Love, then *magis* is realized when we commit ourselves to the promotion of life and love. The heart of Jesuit education is to take up this work, aspiring for inclusive and integral flourishing.

In his thorough exegesis of the word as it appears in the history of the Jesuit documentary heritage, Rev. Barton Geger S.J. suggests the best translation of *magis* is “the more universal good.”⁵ This definition can be traced all the way back to Ignatius of Loyola, who advised the early members of the Society of Jesus to discern how their choices could be guided toward what is most conducive to the “greater service of God and the universal good.”⁶ In this way, *magis* is inseparable from the unofficial motto of the Jesuits, *Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam* (often abbreviated as A.M.D.G.), which means “For the Greater Glory of God.”⁷ Geger explains that the “glory of God” refers to “God’s truth, beauty, wisdom, and power becoming evident to human beings.”⁸ Truth, beauty, and wisdom not only bring us closer to God; they also make us more fully human. For

this reason, it might also help to recall Saint Irenaeus of Lyons claim that the “glory of God is the human person fully alive.”⁹ In this way, A.M.D.G. or *magis* implies a call to work for the fullness of life for all, the conditions that allow individuals and communities to flourish. *Magis* is a duty to defend human dignity, deliver on human rights and responsibilities, and dedicate ourselves to the common good of all.

When *magis* is misunderstood as a synonym for “excellence” or “generosity” or perhaps conflated with the “best, most, and greatest,” then it becomes self-serving. In fact, *magis* is incongruent with egoism or the ethics of self-interest. If one pursues only what is beneficial for him or her, then there is never a reason to be responsible or make sacrifices for another person. Not only would living by egoism make for a terrible friend, partner, or parent, but it fails to honor the gospel command to love God *and* neighbor (Luke 10:25-28, Matthew 25:31-46). In a cultural context that privileges self-interest and achievement, *magis* orients us to the common good (or “the greater good”) in a way that is “powerfully counter-cultural” because it also inspires a cultural critique that denounces whatever dehumanizes or disempowers.¹⁰

One of the reasons why *magis* seems so vague is because it is unclear what is implied by “the more universal good,” or “that which makes the widest impact.”¹¹ *Magis* involves discerning the *greater* good in order to choose the greater of at least two goods. The hardest decisions in life are not between a good option and a bad option, but when we are forced to choose between two (or more) good opportunities. In this regard, Ignatius encourages us to choose what will produce the *greater* good between the available options. *Magis* means pursuing what will promote greater dignity, freedom, and responsibility for ourselves and others (or, what will alleviate the suffering of others). Decisions oriented by *magis* must be informed by careful reflection and discernment, an intentional process that is both personal and communal. *Magis* aims to balance the inherent dignity of the human person with the common good of all. Because human beings are inherently social, the good of the person is inescapably linked to relationships and communities marked by justice. As Geger concludes, “Jesuit dedication to

social justice is a clear manifestation of the *magis* in action,” which means that *magis* makes all of us who are partners in Jesuit education sharers in “the potential to transform [one’s] whole society.”¹² Our task is to identify, analyze, and apply the beliefs and values, practices and relationships, systems and structures that ensure everyone has adequate access to the rights and duties necessary for the fullness of life.¹³

With this understanding of *magis* in place, we can better recognize how and why *magis* provides the *raison d’être* for Jesuit higher education, and also serves as the foundation for what it means to belong and contribute to such a community. Rev. Ignacio Ellacuría S.J. insisted that the university must foster knowledge as well as “transform and enlighten the society in which it lives.” This means that the university must engage its historical reality in the struggle for justice:

In a world where injustice reigns, a university that fights for justice must necessarily be persecuted . . . What does a university do, immersed in this reality? Transform it? Yes. Do everything possible so that liberty is victorious over oppression, justice over injustice, love over hate? Yes. Without this overall commitment we would not be a university, and even less so would we be a Catholic university.¹⁴

According to Ellacuría, the Jesuit university exists to help make students become more aware of reality so that they take responsibility for transforming it. Each and every student should see their education as an opportunity to learn more about how justice is central to their education and personal development. Jesuit colleges and universities—like all institutions of higher education—reflect the diversity of civil society and test possibilities for building a shared commitment to the common good through inquiry, dialogue, and collaboration. This shifts the focus of higher education away from self-interest or success toward personal and collective flourishing marked by interdependence and collaboration.

This fits well with the address to students by Rev. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach S.J., who described his vision of student formation in this way:

You are called by the Society of Jesus to be men and women who reflect upon the reality of this world around you with all its ambiguities, opportunities, and challenges, to discern what is really happening in your life and in the lives of others, to find God there and to discover where God is calling you, to employ criteria for significant choices that reflect godly values rather than narrow, exclusive self-interest, to make decisions in the light of what is truly for the greater glory of God and the service of those in need, and then to act accordingly.¹⁵

Without using the word *magis*, Kolvenbach presents Jesuit education as orbiting around *magis* by learning how to “make decisions in the light of what is truly for the greater glory of God and the service of those in need, and then to act accordingly.” This view of Jesuit education provides a fundamental horizon of meaning (to be in relationship with God), calls all to be partners in mission (for human flourishing in justice), and empowers all to think, speak, and act with moral responsibility *For the Greater Glory of God*.

Ellacuría and Kolvenbach remind us of the core objectives of Jesuit education today. Although Jesuits have been educating since 1548, this tradition remains a dynamic process that adapts to the state of the world and the needs of its people. We are all invited to join a process of reflection and discernment to gain a sense of how our life can contribute to the *more* universal good. This requires magnanimity or “greatness of spirit,” that readies us to “think big” and tackle sizable problems, address and resolve conflict, and embrace our responsibilities to the “common good.”¹⁶ While *magis* affirms personal freedom, it does so through the logic of interdependence that reminds us that the good of each person is inherently linked to the good of the entire community.¹⁷ This includes human as well as nonhuman creatures; Pope Francis states in his 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si'* that the earth, its inhabitants, and the environment are all part of a “common good, belonging to all and meant for

all.” Francis encourages us to see the common good as “the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment.” Since the earth and its ecosystem represent our only home on which we all rely, then protecting nonhuman creation is inextricably linked to our duties to our human brothers and sisters just as much as God, the Creator of all that exists. If we render earth uninhabitable, we will destroy life for every member of creation. Pope Francis continues:

Underlying the principle of the common good is respect for the human person as such, endowed with basic and inalienable rights ordered to his or her integral development ... the common good calls for social peace, the stability and security provided by a certain order which cannot be achieved without particular concern for distributive justice; whenever this is violated, violence always ensues. Society as a whole, and the state in particular, are obliged to defend and promote the common good. In the present condition of global society, where injustices abound and growing numbers of people are deprived of basic human rights and considered expendable, the principle of the common good immediately becomes, logically and inevitably, a summons to solidarity and a preferential option for the poorest of our brothers and sisters. This option entails recognizing the implications of the universal destination of the world's goods ... it demands before all else an appreciation of the immense dignity of the poor in the light of our deepest convictions as believers. We need only look around us to see that, today, this option is in fact an ethical imperative essential for effectively attaining the common good. The notion of the common good also extends to future generations. The global economic crises have made painfully obvious the detrimental effects of disregarding our common destiny, which cannot exclude those who come after us. We can no longer speak of sustainable development apart from intergenerational solidarity.

Once we start to think about the kind of world we are leaving to future generations, we look at things differently; we realize that the world is a gift which we have freely received and must share with others. Since the world has been given to us, we can no longer view reality in a purely utilitarian way, in which efficiency and productivity are entirely geared to our individual benefit. Intergenerational solidarity is not optional, but rather a basic question of justice, since the world we have received also belongs to those who will follow us.¹⁸

Pope Francis helps us to recognize the interdependence between human dignity, rights, and responsibilities to the human family (present and future) plus nonhuman creatures and the environment. *Magis* reflects Mother Teresa's insight: "If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other."¹⁹ *Magis* requires fostering inclusive belonging since the "more universal good" is impossible if the good of certain individuals—no matter how lowly in status or limited in number—is sacrificed to the good of the whole. *Magis* is incompatible with a utilitarian philosophy of "the greatest good for the greatest number" or a cost-benefit-analysis that boosts profits for some at the expense of others; these ideologies justify the sacrifice or exclusion of a few for the sake of the many, violating innate human dignity and our shared interdependence in the common good. When one suffers, all suffer. *Magis* points beyond the narrow vision of self-interest or the confines of any campus community; it inspires us to join together as partners committed to the common good of all creation.

Challenges for Teaching *Magis* at College Today

Those of us who teach in college classrooms know that this emphasis on the common good is not the default setting of our students. On the contrary, students arrive in the classroom already shaped by the "culture wars" of identity politics and polarization, simplistic categories and labels (e.g., "liberal" or "conservative"), and the radical tolerance and non-judgmentalism that camouflage moral relativism (propped up by the mantra

popular among students, "I do me and you do you"). When faculty, staff, and students adopt the lens of culture wars, we are divided into categories of "us" vs. "them." In a cultural context that privileges tolerance and non-judgmentalism, every person gets to decide their own values, including their own definition or application of *magis*. While tolerance is an essential ingredient for a vibrant and inclusive society, it is also woefully insufficient for the demands of justice. Merely tolerating the existence of others does nothing to take responsibility for those who suffer from injustice. "Live and let live" just as easily becomes "live and let die" (or at least, "live and let suffer"). If we are unable to communicate our core values and discuss the moral norms that generate agreement and accountability, we approach what philosopher John Dewey describes as the "eclipse of the public."²⁰ What makes education so valuable, as Dewey sees it, is that it fosters personal freedom for intellectual and moral growth to become "power to share effectively in social life."²¹ In Jesuit colleges and universities, our task is to educate students who become people dedicated to building a society that affirms human dignity and rights, which include both freedoms and responsibilities. This is the path to the common good.

Jesuit education today must confront the challenges posed by the commodification of higher education, the prevalence of self-interest, and the tyranny of tolerance. When a college education is reduced to a commodity, it is viewed more as a possession than a process. Students are tempted to take the path of least resistance toward their ultimate goal: a diploma they can brandish as they compete with others in an endless race of prestige envy. In this view of education, their value is tied to grades and résumé-builders, not intellectual curiosity, academic discipline, or horizon-broadening experiences and relationships. It breeds more than endless competition, but also insurmountable insecurity. College students report unprecedented levels of anxiety and feeling overwhelmed.²² Many experience heightened pressure in the face of a number of lofty expectations operating in concert: academic success, financial risk to pay for tuition and housing, manage debt, and secure employment after graduation. Every student has to navigate new freedom at college, but a rising number

encounter additional challenges like experiences of racial bias, gender-based discrimination, bullying and hazing, intimate partner violence or sexual assault, as well as food insecurity and hunger.

Adding to these concerns is another worrisome trend: untreated mental health issues and a surge in suicide, which is now the second leading cause of death among school aged youth.²³ If students are living in such a fragile state, how can we ask them to dedicate themselves as “women and men for and with others”?

What is more, the widespread emphasis on self-interest needs to be addressed at institutions of Jesuit higher education. Not only does self-interest run counter to gospel values, but it undermines our ability to build community. When students internalize the notion that ambition or achievement is the greatest good, their identity and self-worth get measured by this standard. In this framework, gratitude and generosity get pushed to the back burner in order to get ahead. Leisure and play seem superfluous; curiosity is too time consuming and can lead to making mistakes. Instead of learning from mistakes, students might believe missteps are unacceptable signs of weakness pushing them farther from their goal to succeed. Shortcomings get internalized, which leads to questioning one’s value. Feeling down on themselves, they find it harder to be vulnerable and make authentic connections with others. For these reasons, it is disappointing but unsurprising to learn that psychologists have detected among college students a diminished ability to connect with their peers. Reports of a rise in narcissism and a drastic decline in empathy—down 40% according to a University of Michigan study²⁴—may be the result of training young people to think more of themselves and their feats than about others. Although smartphones and social media mean that our students are more connected than ever before, they report rising rates of feeling insecure, isolated, and lonely.²⁵ Some research indicates an inverse relationship between happiness and the amount of time spent with a screen (phone, tablet, computer, or television).²⁶ If these issues go unaddressed, students will fail to recognize the communal dimensions of *magis*.

A loss of community seems like a surprising concern given the state of constant connectivity students enjoy thanks to their phones, tablets,

computers, and social media. However, self-interest risks becoming self-obsession in a digital landscape where people can spend countless hours carefully curating their digital profiles in an unending task of “impression management.”²⁷ In this cultural context, there is never enough time to perfect one’s image or brand, and it subjects young people to steady surveillance from others, setting them up to feel like they can never measure up to the meticulously polished highlight reels that flood their social media newsfeed. Social media intensify the age-old “compare and despair” dynamic, exposing today’s students to a steady dose of feeling unworthy and fearful of being authentic.

Nonstop surveillance—which comes from always being connected and ready to share—would put anyone on edge; for emerging adults, this exacerbates a stage of development already marked by uncertainty and vulnerability. Social media foments insecurity because “anything they say or do can easily be taken out of context” by “audiences [that] are invisible” to a particular person.²⁸ Users can easily feel exposed, unsafe, and craving social conditions that foster a sense of security. Tolerance and non-judgmentalism are adopted to mitigate social risks like ambiguity and awkwardness. Students contort to social scripts and distort who they are, edit what they believe and value, and even go back to filter out any undesirable digital content.²⁹ All of these habits are adopted in order to avoid conflict, but this desire to conform to social norms actually undermines the moral norms necessary for fostering the common good.

Tolerance seems like an acceptable moral norm, but it is not robust enough to generate responsibility to deliver justice or resist injustice. Moreover, when pushed to the extreme, tolerance means that we have to make room for all ideas, and in some viewpoints, treat them as equally valid. While moral relativism sounds attractive because it gives individuals the freedom to identify their own values, it also makes morality a free-for-all. That means there would be no way to agree whether it’s morally acceptable to lie, cheat, steal, or kill. Moral norms—shared standards of the good—are necessary to foster agreement and accountability. Using extreme examples (like rape or genocide) might make it easier to identify moral

norms (e.g., free consent, do no harm, etc.), but daily life is usually less clear-cut and thus requires careful ethical analysis in order to discern what will best promote human flourishing so that it is always both personal and communal.

Unfortunately, our students have not been equipped and empowered to make these complex judgments. Sociologist Christian Smith has been studying emerging adults for years through the National Study of Youth and Religion. In light of the data collected since 2001, Smith and his colleagues describe youth culture as awash in “moral therapeutic deism,” an individualistic and morally relativistic ethos that prizes personal subjectivity, feeling, and self-fulfillment at the expense of shared moral norms and obligations.³⁰ At first blush, this view seems harmless: American Christian youth say they believe “God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other,” and that “the central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about one’s self.”³¹ However, “moral therapeutic deism” defies any normative understanding of good or evil, which is necessary for establishing common agreement and accountability. In “moral therapeutic deism,” a person can be self-indulgent without any thought of social or ecological responsibility. Community is an add-on and often an encumbrance.³² According to Smith’s findings, emerging adults show little interest in civic or political engagement: 69% said they were not at all political, compared to 4% who considered themselves to be actively political.³³ Many survey respondents admitted feeling apathetic, uninformed, distrustful, and disempowered in the political sphere. Though emerging adults affirm the value of volunteering and charitable giving and aspire to incorporate these habits into their later adulthood, many say they do not have the time or resources to be involved in such efforts at the present time. This is problematic for at least two reasons: first, emerging adults fail to recognize that present priorities and practices become habits that build future character; second, too many emerging adults do not believe they can make a difference in the world. In fact, according to Smith, less than five percent of emerging adults are confident they can make a difference.³⁴ If all God wants is for me to be happy, then I can be content to focus on my own comfort, status, and achievement. There is little room—or need—for social concern or moral

outrage in such a worldview. This socio-cultural context shows how much work is necessary in order to accomplish the vision of Jesuit education for justice, as articulated by Ellacuría and Kolvenbach.

If young people cannot identify a moral norm, how are they supposed to understand the demands of “the greater good”? Smith and his colleagues find that today’s young people are deeply confused and disorientated when it comes to morality. Moral duties are viewed as inessential to character formation or spiritual maturity; they are considered to be “largely avoidable displeasures to be escaped in order to realize a pleasurable life of happiness and positive self-esteem.”³⁵ Six in ten respondents stated that morality is a matter of personal choice or opinion while one in three indicated they did not know what makes anything morally right or wrong.³⁶ The NSYR data show that two-thirds of emerging adults were unable to consistently and coherently respond to questions about moral dilemmas in their lives. Instead, they made sporadic appeals to generic platitudes like “do no harm,” the Golden Rule, or Karma, without being able to describe how these relate to religious and ethical systems. As many as 60% of emerging adults say their morality is situational, with roughly half explaining that they determine what is moral based on whether it might hurt someone.³⁷ Smith and his colleagues contend that emerging adults demonstrate very little concern for religious obligation or love for God; rather, their moral motivation is social order, efficiency, and prosperity under the safeguard of tolerance. Smith and his colleagues conclude that parents and educators have done an “awful job when it comes to moral education and formation.”³⁸

Jesuit education faces these and other challenges in teaching college students today. *Magis* is essential because it provides a horizon of meaning, a mission-driven purpose, and a foundation on which to build moral agreement and accountability. *Magis* is rooted in “interior freedom” that authorizes each individual—in the sanctity of one’s own conscience³⁹—to reflect and discern what the “more universal good” uniquely means and requires. However, insofar as it is ordered *For the Greater Glory of God* as a shared aspiration of the Society of Jesus, *magis* necessarily

involves communal reflection, discernment, discussion, and cooperation. If we are to embrace its meaning and our call to be partners in mission, then we have to work together to identify, analyze, and apply how *magis* inspires a new commitment to moral responsibility. To live into this vision, we have to come to a shared understanding of what makes personal and communal human flourishing possible.

A Vision of the Good Life

The Christian tradition, which builds from the Jewish law and prophets and also shares much in common with the teachings of Islam, offers a compelling vision of the good life, advancing the flourishing of all creation. In philosophy and theology, the road to flourishing is marked by specific virtues, or attitudes and habits of moral excellence that form character and community to promote personal and collective flourishing.⁴⁰ Insofar as *magis* is understood as a vague sense of “the greater good,” then it can take on a more concrete meaning through specific dispositions and actions. Five key virtues—**love, mercy, justice, solidarity, and hope**—provide the foundation for moral agreement and accountability. These virtues defy the insipid claims of tolerance. They also add more theological substance to *magis* than words like “excellence” or “generosity” typically offer. While love, mercy, justice, solidarity, and hope carry secular significance, all three Abrahamic religions highlight these five virtues as defining characteristics of fidelity to God. If *magis* is to be understood as devotion to God or desiring what God desires, then these five virtues offer an essential starting point. By highlighting these five virtues, I hope faculty and students will discover points of entry into *magis* across all disciplines. Of course, the ultimate goal is not just to learn about these virtues, but to explore possibilities to practice and integrate them into one’s life.

Love: In English, the word “love” is like the kitchen junk drawer: it’s a catchall to express a variety of preferences and desires. It’s hard to know what we mean by the word “love” when we use it to talk about food or clothing, music or movies, places or people. Do you love your friends and family the same way you love an inanimate object? The Jewish understanding of

love is rooted in a sense of loyalty (to God, others, and oneself). In Christian Scripture, the author of the First Letter of John states clearly that God is *agape*, which conveys “self-giving love” (1 John 4:8). Although God is beyond our total comprehension (or else God would not be God), the least wrong way to talk about the mystery we call “God” is self-giving love. It is actually better to think of God as being than *a* being, or not as “love” but as “*loving*.” Calling to mind the Trinity, we might think of God as the love that is shared between persons. In this way, the Trinity is not two men and a bird which represent God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, but a co-equal communion where love is offered, received, and returned. This is a far cry from what most people envision when they read or hear the word God (typically, an old white man with a long beard—something like Zeus, Santa Claus, or Dumbledore).

More to the point, the Christian tradition asserts that piety and fidelity are measured less by what we believe than by how well we love (cf. Luke 10:25-37, Matthew 25:31-46). The greatest commandment is to “love your neighbor as yourself,” placing the stress on loving the other person, and even more, inviting you to imagine the other person as related to yourself in kinship.⁴¹ Importantly, the Christian tradition holds that no person—not even an enemy—is exempt from our obligation to love. Saint John of the Cross summarizes this clearly: “[L]ove is the measure by which we shall be judged.” But what is love? Thomas Aquinas defines the virtue of love (in Latin, *caritas*, which is where we get the English word “charity”) as willing the good of another person.⁴² This means that love is not just a feeling, but a choice and action. Even more, love entails an investment of the self, a commitment to act to ensure the good of the other person. It is worth repeating that love is owed to each and to all. In fact, Dorothy Day once claimed, “I really only love God as much as I love the person I love the least.”⁴³ This is a sobering test of how well we love one another, which, as the Gospel of John attests, is how we love and honor God (John 13:34).

Mercy: Mercy is another tricky word in English. It usually conveys a sense of loving-kindness. But this falls well short of the rich and diverse meaning of the word as it appears in Scripture.

The words for mercy in the Bible—*hesed* in Hebrew and *eleos* in Greek—appear nearly 300 times to express who God is and what God wants. *Hesed* is the first word used to describe God in the Hebrew Scriptures (Exodus 34:6-7). It refers to God's unconditional and unlimited love that is always faithful and never fails, a love marked by tenderness and overabundance (Joshua 2:12; 1 Samuel 20:14-17; Isaiah 54:8-10). *Hesed* reflects God's goodness that endures for a "thousand generations" (Exodus 20:6) and unlimited forgiveness of sin (Numbers 14:18-19; Micah 7:19) within a web of relationships as part of God's covenant with God's people (Leviticus 19:2, 18-18; Deuteronomy 15:4, 7; Psalm 13:6). *Hesed* highlights the gratuitous love of God that embraces and saves all creation, including nonhuman creatures (Psalm 25:6, 33:5, 111:4, 136:1, 145:9). *Hesed* defines faithfulness (Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:8) and characterizes those who love God (Ruth 1:8, 2:20, 3:10). The Hebrew Scriptures make clear that *hesed* is inseparable from justice, judgment, piety, compassion, and salvation (Psalm 72:1-4, 82:3, 140:13).

Eleos appears in the Christian Scriptures dozens of times to fortify the witness of the Hebrew Scriptures that mercy describes God's own being (Luke 6:36; 2 Corinthians 1:3; Ephesians 2:4) and how God treats God's people (Luke 1:58; 1 Peter 2:10). Jesus' teaching and healing ministry is framed in terms of mercy: it is what he teaches (Matthew 5:7) and practices (Mark 5:19). It is the way to love one's neighbor and inherit eternal life (Luke 10:25-42), the standard for unlimited forgiveness (Matthew 18:21-35), and what makes faithfulness possible (Romans 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 4:1). It is the core of God's desire for God's people (Matthew 9:13, 12:7, 23:23). Even when the word isn't used, it is evident that mercy is the fulcrum of several key gospel stories, whether the father's forgiveness of his prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32), Jesus' forgiveness of the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11), or what separates the sheep from the goats in the Last Judgment (Matthew 25:31-46). Mercy is an expression of wisdom (James 3:17) and the reason for hope (1 Peter 1:3). In the end, mercy triumphs over judgment (James 2:13) and is the expression of God's justice (Psalm 51:11-16; Matthew 9:13).

In his book *The Name of God Is Mercy*, Pope Francis writes:

the centrality of mercy, which for me is Jesus' most important message, has slowly evolved over the years in my work as a priest [and] as a consequence of my experience as a confessor ... [mercy] means opening one's heart to wretchedness ... mercy is the divine attitude which embraces, it is God's giving himself to us, accepting us, and bowing to forgive ... we can say that mercy is God's identity card.⁴⁴

Pope Francis explains that he understands God's character and purpose through the lens of the gerund "mercifying:" *doing* mercy.⁴⁵ God is known through mercifying and God expects mercifying from God's people for all creation. Perhaps the best word to express the meaning of mercy is tenderness. Pope Francis has called on people all over the world to join a "revolution of tenderness" to combat ignorance, indifference, and inaction.⁴⁶ In his 2017 *TED Talk*, Pope Francis insists that tenderness is not weakness but fortitude.⁴⁷ Tenderness creates the conditions for us to recognize that we are loved, lovable, and capable of loving others since we belong to each other. Rev. Greg Boyle, S.J. drives home this point:

We are at our healthiest when we are most situated in awe, and at our least healthy when we engage in judgment. Judgment creates the distance that moves us away from each other. Judgment keeps us in the competitive game and is always self-aggrandizing. Standing at the margins with the broken reminds us not of our own superiority but of our own brokenness. Awe is the great leveler. The embrace of our own suffering helps us to land on a spiritual intimacy with ourselves and others. For if we don't welcome our wounds, we will be tempted to despise the wounded.⁴⁸

Boyle later adds, "only the soul that ventilates the world with tenderness has any chance of changing the world."⁴⁹ If our lives radiate tenderness, we will be in the world who God is.⁵⁰

Justice: In common parlance, the word “justice” usually conjures images of a courtroom or “law and order.” But Scripture understands justice as “fidelity to the demands of a relationship.”⁵¹ Jesus is the visible manifestation of God’s justice, which he demonstrates throughout his teaching and healing ministry. Jesus draws near and touches the unclean (considered unworthy or even cursed by God in Jesus’ day), he heals those labeled as sinners (the social outcasts), and he breaks bread—an intimate action that violated the purity code of contemporary society—with people of other religions as well as his fiercest critics (like the Pharisees, who test and try to trap him) and even agents of the oppressive Roman Empire (like tax collectors). Jesus’ teaching and healing ministry aimed to restore dignity and foster a more inclusive and egalitarian community, providing the standard for social justice for Christian individuals and groups today.

Justice is what we owe God and one another; it is the precondition for full and free relationships, personal and communal flourishing. Typically, justice can be understood in a variety of lenses: contributive (what individuals owe society or the common good), distributive (the fair allocation of goods and services to avoid unjust inequalities between persons and groups), commutative (right-relationships between persons and the proper exchange of goods/service), retributive (penalty for an offense, either as punishment or as a deterrent), and restorative (compensation to victims, healing wounds, and working to restore the offender to right-relationship in the community).⁵²

For those who call themselves Christian, justice is not an optional add-on to one’s moral responsibility. In 1971, a worldwide gathering of bishops declared that “[a]ction on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the gospel, or, in other words, of the church’s mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation.”⁵³ Echoing this document, Rev. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J. identified the goal of Jesuit education as oriented to “bring about the kinds of structural and attitudinal changes that are needed to uproot

those sinful oppressive injustices that are a scandal against humanity and God.”⁵⁴ But years later, many Christians narrow their focus to personal piety or acts of optional service, instead of the systemic change required by the demands of justice. Kindness is always a welcome gesture, but feeding hungry people does nothing to solve their inability to consistently secure nutrition, just as offering a warm blanket to someone experiencing homelessness falls quite short of providing affordable housing. If we take seriously that God desires life in abundance for every member of creation, then we have to tackle what triggers injustice and overcome any force that limits dignity, agency, and right-relationships.

The work of justice means addressing these root causes, as this parable illustrates: one day, a woman was walking in the woods when she heard someone crying out for help. She rushed through the trees to find a man drowning in a river, and pulled him out. The next day, she was near the same forest and heard another person shouting for help. When the woman reached the river, she saved another person who was drowning. The same thing happened the next day—and so on. Service is saving the people who are drowning; justice is going upstream to find out why people are falling into the river in the first place and then fixing that problem. As Cornel West puts it, “justice is what love looks like in public.”⁵⁵ Justice compels us to take responsibility for making our social, economic, and political spheres marked by greater equity and harmony.

Justice embraces the integrating work of advancing the dignity and rights of the human person on the individual, social, and institutional levels. It considers the systems and structures that give some people more benefits or advantages than others, and then tries to make up for unjust inequalities. In the Christian tradition, justice means taking the side of the poor, the vulnerable, and the marginalized. These are people who have been rendered socially insignificant, economically deprived, and political nonpersons. This is what Catholic social teaching means in calling for the “preferential option for the poor,” a term coined by Rev. Pedro Arrupe, S.J. in a letter to his Jesuit brothers in May 1968.⁵⁶ It claims that justice is measured by the welfare of the neediest members of society; to deliver justice is to prioritize the

needs of these most vulnerable. Archbishop Desmond Tutu adds that justice prohibits neutrality, for “if you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor.”⁵⁷ He explains, if an elephant is stepping on the tail of a mouse, your neutrality does nothing to help the mouse. Both Arrupe and Tutu highlight God’s preference for the lowly and lost starting with the Hebrew slaves in Egypt (Exodus 22:20-26) and continuing through the Last Judgment scene in Matthew’s gospel (Matthew 25:31-46). Rabbi Jonathan Sacks observes that in the Hebrew Scriptures, the command to “love your neighbor” is repeated twice whereas the command to love the stranger, the widow, and the orphan (those without any status or protection) is repeated at least thirty-six times.⁵⁸ Justice requires more than a special concern for those without the same security and stability many enjoy; it means drawing near those who are marginalized and vulnerable. If we do not know people who are marginalized and excluded, if we do not care about them as people, if we do not make their cause our own, then we will be blind, deaf, mute, and numb to the demands of justice. Justice does not mean that we serve as a “voice for the voiceless” but that we use our privilege and power to make room for the voiceless to lift up their own voice, so they can be agents of their own future.⁵⁹

Solidarity: Although this word, in Christian ethics, is often used to imply unity or strength in numbers, solidarity actually refers to inclusive social bonds that overcome differences. Solidarity stands in contrast to the tribalism that divides us into lifestyle enclaves of people who do (or do not) look like us, think like us, and act like us. Sociologists, like Robert Putnam, have observed a rise in segregation by race and class, which means that we have less exposure to people who are different from us. A study from Public Religion Research Institute found that 75% of white Americans don’t have a single black friend and that two-thirds of African-Americans don’t have a single white friend.⁶⁰ How can we build empathy and understanding across the color line when we don’t know anyone—to say nothing about caring for anyone—who comes from a different ethnic or racial background?

The word for “solidarity” does not appear in the Bible, but the word has strong roots in the Christian tradition when viewed through the lens of kinship: all people stand as equals in the eyes of God since we are siblings bound together by our shared source and destiny. Living in a time of rising racial discrimination and unrest, solidarity requires that we combat anti-black racism and white supremacy just as we would any form of discrimination or exclusion, whether based on sex or gender, sexual orientation or class, religion or political party, age or ability. No one should be considered “less than” for any reason.

Solidarity combines love, mercy, and justice to build a culture of inclusive belonging. Boyle describes this beautifully when he writes:

Soon we imagine, with God, this circle of compassion. Then we imagine no one standing outside of that circle, moving ourselves closer to the margins so that the margins themselves will be erased. We stand there with those whose dignity has been denied. We locate ourselves with the poor and the powerless and the voiceless. At the edges, we join the easily despised and the readily left out. We stand with the demonized so that the demonizing will stop. We situate ourselves right next to the disposable so that the day will come when we stop throwing people away.⁶¹

If we take the challenges of solidarity seriously, that means overcoming a fear of intimacy, being judged, or left out. It requires a more universal sense of loyalty and a commitment to mutuality that fosters reciprocity as equal partners. Solidarity is only possible when we replace anxiety with awe and trade judgment for vulnerability. Solidarity is about celebrating what connects us as humans; it welcomes both our strengths and our weaknesses. Boyle proposes that the measure of solidarity “lies less in our service of those on the margins, and more in our willingness to see ourselves in kinship with them. It speaks of a kinship so mutually rich that even the dividing line of service provider/service recipient is erased. We are sent to the margins NOT to make a difference but so that the folks on the margins will make *us* different.”⁶² Solidarity is fundamentally about

inclusive belonging, manifest through mutual respect and responsibility, leaving out no one.

Hope: Hope is trust that God will deliver on God's promises; it welcomes the future and embraces opportunities for growth and change. As a virtue, hope is the midpoint between two extremes: excessive expectation that is presumptuous on the one hand and deficient trust that leads to despair on the other hand. It avoids the temptation to be fatalistic (for better or worse), urging us onwards to realize our potential. Hope is fundamentally a conviction of what is possible, whereas hopelessness is being mired in the impossible.⁶³ In Christianity, Jesus' resurrection is the greatest reason for hope (1 Peter 3:15): God conquers sin and death. Easter foreshadows our destiny and that of all creation, a reminder that God makes new life possible even when it seems highly unlikely.

Hope keeps us from panicking or becoming passive. It also softens the pain of suffering. Rev. William Lynch, S.J. suggests: "If we expect something in the future, if we have hope, we actually suffer less. The present moment is less preoccupying ... [hope] is the great gift of being able, in an emergency, to act as our last, best, and deepest inward resource."⁶⁴ At the same time, Lynch adds, exercising hope also gives credence to the "sense that there is help on the outside of us" which is important because "in our national culture, there is a deep repression of the need for help."⁶⁵ Hope connects us to the community, reminding us that we are never forced to face our problems alone and that we will not be abandoned in our time of need.

In a social context marked by mistrust and division, hope not only encourages us to trust that things can get better, it actually provides the potency to act in order to realize that vision. Hope builds resilience, fosters creativity, cultivates openness to growth, and makes new relationships possible. Hope is not confined to wishing and waiting; it means living toward the vision of the future you most deeply desire for yourself and the world. Noted peace activist Rev. Daniel Berrigan, S.J. insisted: "If you want to be hopeful, you have to do hopeful things." Living with hope is not a choice made once and for all, but an ongoing intention that has to be embraced over and again.

William James wrote, "[t]he greatest revolution of our generation is the discovery that human beings, by changing the inner attitudes of their minds, can change the outer aspects of their lives."⁶⁶ Hope gets us out of bed in the morning and gives us reason to persist, even in the face of daunting odds. Hope reminds us that we are in this together; the philosopher Gabriel Marcel reminds us "there can be no hope which does not constitute itself through a *we* and for a *we*."⁶⁷ In other words, hope is communal and is most fully realized in collaboration among friends.

Taken together, these five virtues provide a framework for "the good life." Love, mercy, justice, solidarity, and hope help us better understand who God is and what God wants. This is crucial for understanding *magis* as "the Greater Glory of God" (A.M.D.G.). If our attitudes, actions, relationships, and institutions are characterized by love, mercy, justice, solidarity, and hope, then we are living for the "more universal good." This also helps us grow closer to God. Returning to Boyle's proposal to view *magis* as desiring what God desires, we grow closer to *magis* when we desire the fullness of life for all—the common good that results from practicing love, mercy, justice, solidarity, and hope. These virtues also provide a shared standard of the good in the face of moral relativism—not just for *knowing* what is good, but for *doing* the good.

Teaching *Magis* through Contemplation, Imagination, and Vocation Discernment

To this point, our discussion has focused on what *magis* means, why it matters for Jesuit higher education, and how it provides a vision for human flourishing in contrast to the widespread stress on achievement, self-interest, and tolerance. The five virtues of love, mercy, justice, solidarity, and hope provide concrete attitudes and actions that can help us begin to identify the moral norms necessary for combating moral relativism in the spirit of *magis*. This final section of the essay pivots to the praxis of teaching *magis* so that it can be appropriated by individuals and communities. **Contemplation, imagination, and vocation discernment** offer three tools to incorporate *magis* into the personal habits and social fabric of life at Jesuit colleges and universities.

Contemplation is, as Rev. Walter Burghardt, S.J. describes, “taking a long loving look at the real.”⁶⁸ This means immersing oneself in reality, not to analyze it or argue about it, but to experience it, to recognize our unity with all that exists. To see with eyes of love is to see the goodness in us and around us; to see with eyes of love is to see as God sees. This also means practicing the Jesuit value of “seeking God in all things,” recognizing that everything exists within the reality we call God, which means that “every place and all created things” can reflect the “presence and activity of God.”⁶⁹ If this is true, then recognizing the nearness of God relies on our being awake to that reality. Contemplation is attentiveness, using one’s entire being to experience what is real. Taking a *long* look means not rushing the process, savoring the goodness in us and around us. It generates wonder and awe; contemplation means being filled with gratitude instead of disappointment in oneself or comparison with others.⁷⁰ Through contemplation, delighting in creation leads to love for all that exists, even when it is not always pleasant. In the face of sin or injustice, contemplation produces compassion, an expression of love for the one who suffers, and a desire to ease their burden. Ultimately, contemplation orients us to commune with one another.

In the midst of busyness, it is not easy to make time for contemplation. Some might not even know where to start. Burghardt suggests a few habits to facilitate contemplation. This includes withdrawing from the routine of daily life, even for a short while, to interrupt the banality of our schedule and point of view. He calls this mini-retreat a “desert experience,” where we can find peace and perspective, in order to press the reset button on our lives. Burghardt also suggests “festivity” and “play,” which foster a sense of appreciation, affirmation, and renewal. Taking time for levity helps us lighten up and let go of our preoccupations and never-ending to-do lists that add to our mental load. This gives us a chance to enjoy life, not just progress through it, or be mired in anxiety or stress. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel insists, “[o]ur goal should be to live life in radical amazement . . . get up in the morning and look at the world in a way that takes nothing for granted. Everything is phenomenal; everything is incredible; never treat life casually. To be spiritual

is to be amazed.”⁷¹ Festivity and play remind us to celebrate life. And Burghardt offers another suggestion for incorporating contemplation: making friends with people who practice this way of living. Sometimes this means reading the work of folks like Rabbi Heschel or the Trappist monk Thomas Merton, mystics who summon us to gaze at and experience the world with love, aiming for communion with all that exists. Poetry often opens a new mode of perception, and literature in general can stretch our vantage point to see the world with new eyes.⁷² Friends offer support—as well as accountability—so that we can integrate contemplation into our way of life. Burghardt insists that contemplation “is not a luxury” but “the mark of a Christian” and a person who loves.⁷³

In the courses I teach, I often begin with a video where astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson reflects on the “the most astounding fact” he’s learned in his career. He reports that the atoms that comprise life on earth (including our bodies) are traceable to the stars in the sky. He adds, “when I look up at the night sky and I know that yes, we are part of this universe, we are in this universe, but perhaps more important than both of those facts is that the universe is in us. When I reflect on that fact, I look up—many people feel small because they’re small and the universe is big—but I feel big, because my atoms came from those stars. There’s a level of connectivity.”⁷⁴ I ask students to contemplate this reality and to reflect on why it matters that everything belongs and is connected. When they look around campus, do they see more signs of connection or disconnection—and to what effect? Contemplation might be easy when spending time in prayer or worship, or when gazing at colorful leaves on trees, a fresh snowfall, cheerful spring flowers, or a stunning sunset. But what would it take to practice contemplation while walking to class, sitting in the cafeteria, or encountering your roommate? Contemplation starts with slowing down, being still, and embracing quiet. It includes consciously unplugging from electronics, especially when we consider the impact of social media on our mental and emotional health. It involves looking around with eyes of love, wonder, and awe. Thomas Merton offers an illustration of his own mystical experience, which dawned on him one day in March 1958:

In Louisville, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the center of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all those people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers. It was like waking from a dream of separateness, of spurious self-isolation in a special world, the world of renunciation and supposed holiness ... This sense of liberation from an illusory difference was such a relief and such a joy to me that I almost laughed out loud ... I have the immense joy of being man, a member of a race in which God Himself became incarnate. As if the sorrows and stupidities of the human condition could overwhelm me, now I realize what we all are. And if only everybody could realize this! But it cannot be explained. There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun.⁷⁵

Ignatius encourages us to be “Contemplatives in Action,” people who integrate being, seeing, and loving. When we allow ourselves to be (and resist the urge to busy ourselves with doing), when we see others with eyes of love (instead of guilt or shame, comparison or judgment), we can love more freely and fully, especially keeping in mind that God loves us unconditionally and endlessly. The task, then, is to be someone who is simultaneously reflective and active, willing to grow ever deeper in love. It takes time to incorporate a new habit into our lives. Making time for contemplation in my classroom helps students center themselves and feel reconnected, which is especially fruitful in stressful times of the semester.

A second tool is **imagination**. For some, imagination implies fantasy or illusion. But imagination is not escapism; it is a “vehicle for liberation.”⁷⁶ Imagination is the fruit of our deepest desires: it is the combination of our wishing and willing, illuminating our hope for ourselves and the world.⁷⁷ Imagination, like hope discussed previously, transcends the present moment in a creative act for a new future without disdaining or rejecting the world as it is. In the face of sin, suffering, and injustice, exercising the

imagination is an act of resistance to evil and resilience to promote the good. We cast our eyes into the future so that we are not preoccupied with the past or confined to the present. We act in hopeful trust generated by confidence in God, others, and our own self. To be a Christian is “literally to imagine things with God.”⁷⁸ Pope Francis adds, “[w]hoever has imagination does not become rigid, has a sense of humor, always enjoys the sweetness of mercy and inner freedom.”⁷⁹ Imagination allows us to explore, to open up the world to new possibilities, and to become more agile and flexible.

Invoking a line from the poet Emily Dickinson, “[t]he possible’s slow fuse is lit by the imagination,” Rev. Michael Paul Gallagher, S.J. contends that the imagination is the ability “to glimpse and grasp possibilities ... a gradually explosive power of new perception” that is more holistic than rationality alone.⁸⁰ Imagination has become a “key battleground for meaning, values, and in particular for religious faith” due in part to the fact that it “is where the quality of our lives is shaped and where we shape our vision of everything. Imagination is the location both of our crisis and of our potential healing. It is crucial for the quality of our seeing, because it can save us from superficiality and torpor and awaken us to larger hopes and possibilities.”⁸¹ Put simply, the more we stretch our imagination, the more we grow.

In the classroom, imagination begins with tuning into our deepest desires, to imagine what *could* be, instead of being confined by what is or worrying about what *should* be. Nothing happens in history without it first happening in our imagination. J. K. Rowling claims, “[i]t is impossible to live without failing at something, unless you live so cautiously that you might as well not have lived at all—in which case, you fail by default.”⁸² Fear of failure can be like a self-imposed straightjacket, keeping us from experiencing life. It prevents us from making use of our talents, interests, and opportunities. Exercising the imagination implies a willingness to fail, to learn from our mistakes, and to go outside our comfort zone. Imagination broadens our horizons, and invites us to see ourselves as discoverers. This finds traction by signing up for a new club or activity, studying abroad, or taking a class that sounds interesting

but isn't required for graduation. Imagination leads us to enlarge our friend group to be more diverse and inclusive, expanding the circle of whom we follow and what we read on social media. All of our experiences and relationships add to our identity; imagination helps us to realize what *more* we can be and do.

Empathy is ultimately an exercise of imagination: we explore what it means to think, feel, see, speak, and act as another person. Music, artwork, and literature are all powerful media for imagining what it is like to be someone else. If we can feel with another person, we can fight the temptation to perpetuate the culture wars of "us" vs. "them." We can also better grasp the complexity of the human experience, which cannot be reduced to simplistic categories of heroes and villains. In my undergraduate studies, reading Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Morrison's *Beloved* helped me to consider the world from a different perspective. Narrative speaks to us on a human level, enabling us to relate in ways we might not ever expect. In our courses, taking time to share stories—whether our own or those of others—can enliven reality, incarnate ideas, and humanize divisive issues. The imagination is a crucial tool for empowering our students to see that what we share in common is far greater than whatever differences might separate or subjugate certain individuals or groups. The next task focuses on building the scaffolding for students to do this work with their peers in a collaborative spirit in order to overcome ignorance, apathy, and inaction. Students can serve as effective advocates and allies for solidarity and social justice, if only they imagine what it would take to move their peers to discover the ways they are connected to those who suffer from injustice.

This brings us to the third tool, **vocation discernment**. *Vocatio* in Latin means "calling." Discerning one's vocation has more to do with one's purpose in life than an occupation. Jesuit education should help students discern what makes them tick, what they most want for their future, and who they desire to become. Rev. Michael Himes, a professor at Boston College, frames vocation discernment as seeking to "[d]iscover what it is that you most really and deeply want when you are most really and truly you."⁸³ If it's not already evident what you really

and deeply want when you are most really and truly you, Himes proposes three "nearly infallible" questions to consider: What brings you joy? What do you love learning about? What does the world need from you?⁸⁴ Your vocation is your overlapping answer to what you find most fulfilling, what areas of growth you especially enjoy, and what problem you can help solve. If it is not clear what brings you joy, what you love learning about, or a problem you can address, it can be helpful to journal about these questions or discuss with a friend or mentor who can reflect back to you when you seem to be most fully alive, free to be yourself, or simply engrossed in an idea, question, or activity.

Mark Manson suggests thinking about this another way: What pain are you willing to sustain?⁸⁵ If we only enjoy something because it comes easily or is the path of least resistance, then we just mold our life to outcomes, rather than living intentionally in order to reach a more challenging goal. Manson opines, "our struggles determine our successes." It's not easy to always tell the truth or to be dependable, patient, and forgiving. Nevertheless, if we want to be the kind of person who has integrity, who is trustworthy, loyal, and compassionate, then we have to be willing to struggle to make those habits of our character. If we want to be the kind of person who achieves this or accomplishes that, then we have to be willing to struggle to see ourselves cross the finish line. If this sounds like resilience or grit, they may be related. But it's not just about willpower; it's also about love for ourselves (valuing our deepest desires), being supported by friends and family (who empower us and hold us accountable), and feeling gratitude (reminding us of all the resources on which we can rely).⁸⁶ For Ignatius, the Christian life is a movement from paying attention to our many gifts (reverence) to gratitude for all the ways God has blessed us (praise), to feeling empowered to respond generously (service) with others because of the blessings we have received.⁸⁷ Taking our vocation seriously is the result of feeling grateful for what we have received and affirming the good we can offer the world, which is both a personal and communal enterprise. The more grateful and generous we can be—as individuals and as members of institutions—the more we live into *magis*.

Conclusion

Magis not only serves as the reason why Jesuit colleges and universities exist, but can help spark and shape the meaning and purpose of students' lives, our roles as partners in mission, and the foundation for moral responsibility in a world marked by unjust inequalities and interpersonal divisions. *Magis* points to moral norms necessary for fostering agreement and accountability as we live into the vision of who we are, who we strive

to become, and the kind of society we hope to build—one marked by love, mercy, justice, solidarity, and hope—in order to promote the flourishing of all creation. *Magis* helps us to “see with new eyes” so that through contemplation, imagination, and vocation discernment each and all can promote integral flourishing and justice on personal, social, and institutional levels. This is the gift of our Jesuit education and the task that we have to carry forward in honoring our Ignatian inheritance. ¶

Notes

¹ Timothy Hanchin, “Messianic or Bourgeois?” *America*, May 8, 2006, <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2006/05/08/messianic-or-bourgeois>.

² Ibid.

³ Gregory Boyle, S.J., *Barking to the Choir: The Power of Radical Kinship* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2017), 16.

⁴ Pope Francis, “Address to the 36th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus,” (speech, Rome, Italy, October 24, 2016), https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/october/documents/papa-francesco_20161024_visita-compagnia-gesu.html.

⁵ Barton Geger, S.J., “What *Magis* Really Means and Why It Matters,” *Jesuit Higher Education* 1, no. 2 (2012): 16-31.

⁶ Ibid., 19.

⁷ Ibid., 18. Geger later adds that *magis* “is the distinguishing characteristic of the Jesuit way of proceeding, the special emphasis or charism that Jesuits and colleagues bring to the Church and the world at large” (20).

⁸ Ibid., 22.

⁹ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book 4, Chapter 34, Section 7.

¹⁰ Geger, “What *Magis* Really Means,” 27.

¹¹ Geger explains that the “widest impact” can take various shapes: serving the greatest need, long-term influence, where the most people will be reached, and where conditions are optimal (Ibid., 18-19).

¹² Ibid., 24, 19.

¹³ The classic definition of justice was popularized by the Roman orator Cicero, which means treating “each person according to their due.” This idea of justice insists that each person be treated as a subject (an end) rather than an object (or a means to another end). It also reminds us that justice has to be appropriate to each person, which is in tension with the idea that justice should be “blind.” Justice also includes a

systemic/structural level that evaluates institutions based on their impact on individuals and society.

¹⁴ Ignacio Ellacuría, S.J., “The Task of the Christian University,” (commencement address, Santa Clara University, June 12, 1982), <https://www.scu.edu/ic/programs/ignatian-tradition-offerings/stories/ignacio-ellacuria-sjs-june-1982-commencement-address-santa-clara-university.html>.

¹⁵ Rockhurst University, “Jesuit Mission, the Heart of RU,” accessed May 1, 2018, <https://ww2.rockhurst.edu/about/jesuit-mission>.

¹⁶ Geger, “What *Magis* Really Means,” 26.

¹⁷ In Catholic social teaching, each person is inherently sacred and social, which is the basis for the “common good,” the rights and duties to participate in human society in the pursuit of security, stability, peace, and justice. For example, in the 1965 document released at the end of Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, the church teaches that “Every day human interdependence grows more tightly drawn and spreads by degrees over the whole world. As a result the common good, that is, the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment, today takes on an increasingly universal complexion and consequently involves rights and duties with respect to the whole human race. Every social group must take account of the needs and legitimate aspirations of other groups, and even of the general welfare of the entire human family”; Paul VI, *Gaudium et Spes Encyclical Letter* (Vatican City, Italy: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1965), sec. 26, accessed May 1, 2018, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html.

¹⁸ Francis, *Laudato Si' Encyclical Letter* (Vatican City, Italy: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015), accessed May 1, 2018, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

¹⁹ “Mother Teresa Reflects on Working Toward Peace,” (essay, Santa Clara University, retrieved October 19, 2018), <https://legacy.scu.edu/ethics/architects-of-peace/Teresa/essay.html>.

²⁰ John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1927), 142. Dewey argues that “Till the

Great Society is converted into a Great Community, the Public will remain in eclipse. Communication can alone create a great community. Our Babel is not one of tongues but of the signs and symbols without which shared experience is impossible.”

²¹ John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1916), 418. Dewey adds, “Education is morality, not just preparation for such a life.”

²² See, for example, Richard Kadison and Theresa Foy DiGeronimo, *College of the Overwhelmed: The Campus Mental Health Crisis and What to Do About It* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004).

²³ Even as more teens are diagnosed with depression, anxiety, and other forms of mental illness, there has been no corresponding rise in treatment. For example, a study drawn from the National Surveys on Drug Use and Health found a 37% rise in teenage depression from 2005 to 2014, without an increase in mental health treatment. See the report by Ramin Mojtabai, Mark Olfson, and Beth Han, “National Trends in the Prevalence and Treatment of Depression in Adolescents and Young Adults,” *Pediatrics* 138, no. 6 (2016): e20161878. See also: Susanna Schrobsdorff, “Teen Depression and Anxiety: Why the Kids Are Not Alright” *Time*, October 27, 2016, accessed May 1, 2018, time.com/4547322/american-teens-anxious-depressed-overwhelmed/. For years, the CDC has been issuing warnings about the rise in teen suicide ideation and attempts. For recent information and resources, visit: <https://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/suicide/index.html>.

²⁴ Sarah H. Konrath, Edward H. O’Brien and Courtney Hsing, “Changes in Dispositional Empathy in American College Students Over Time: A Meta-Analysis,” *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 15, no. 2 (2011): 180-198.

²⁵ Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More From Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 157.

²⁶ According to the ERIAL Project, a collaborative effort between five Illinois universities, 32 percent of teens who use media for 16 or more hours per day reported feeling sad, whereas only 22 percent of teens reported feeling unhappy among those who used media for three hours or less. See the published findings in *College Libraries and Student Culture: What We Now Know* (Chicago: American Library Association, 2012).

²⁷ danah boyd, *It’s Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 47. Here, boyd cites sociologist Erving Goffman, who uses this term to describe the “social rituals involved in self-presentation” created by individuals in the context of wider groups (which establish norms for what might be considered popular, funny, sexy, etc.).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 53.

²⁹ Donna Freitas describes this as a “Facebook Cleanup” to remove anything that reveals negative emotions, mean comments, expressed unpopular or divisive opinions (e.g., about religion or politics), embarrassing or illicit behavior, posts that garnered few “likes” or “favorites,” which makes

someone look boring, silly, and otherwise unpopular. Donna Freitas, *The Happiness Effect: How Social Media Is Driving a Generation to Appear Perfect at Any Cost* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 48.

³⁰ Christian Smith with Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford University Press, 2005), 162.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 162-163.

³² As an example, two-thirds of those surveyed say involvement in congregations is unnecessary to be religious (*ibid.*, 76). More to the point, Smith finds a surprising lack of civic engagement among emerging adults, with very few claiming to be active in their neighborhood or local organizations, or politically aware and invested. Smith argues that digital technology and social media make it easier to create a state of “nearly total submersion of self into fluidly constructed, private networks of technologically managed intimates and associates.” See Christian Smith, et al., *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 223.

³³ Smith notes that these surveys were collected in 2008, a year that has typically been described as crucial for empowering youth involvement in politics. On the contrary, the National Study of Youth and Religion data show that most emerging adults feel “disempowered, apathetic, and sometimes even despairing when it comes to the larger social, civic, and political world beyond their own private lives.” The 4% who claimed to be “actively political” were almost exclusively male. The remaining 27% reported being only “marginally political” which included such low standards as reading the news to be somewhat informed (Smith, et al., *Lost in Transition*, 196, 206-208).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 270 (n. 5). Smith finds that nearly 70% of emerging adults identify as apathetic, uninformed, distrustful, or disempowered (197-204).

³⁵ Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 173.

³⁶ Smith et al., *Lost in Transition*, 21, 36.

³⁷ These statistics are reported by Christian Smith in *What Is a Person?: Rethinking Humanity, Social Life, and the Moral Good from the Person Up* (University of Chicago Press, 2010), 38-39. Smith reports two-thirds of the emerging adults he studied were incapable of coherent moral discernment (59).

³⁸ Smith et al., *Lost in Transition*, 59-66 (at p. 60). Incidentally, this is true among Catholic emerging adults, for whom “morality is simply not a pressing issue for many of them,” Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 215.

³⁹ In the Catholic tradition, an individual has a special obligation to inform and obey one’s conscience. The conscience is the “Vicar of Christ” and the “sanctuary” to hear the voice of God (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 1776-1778). This reflects the dignity of every human person, who is equipped and empowered by God to discern what is right, true, good, and just.

⁴⁰ In *The Republic*, Plato identifies four cardinal virtues: temperance, fortitude, prudence, and justice (see Book 4, paragraphs 427e and 435b). In the Christian tradition, these cardinal virtues (affirmed by Ambrose and Augustine) complement three theological virtues: faith, hope, and love (as Paul discusses in 1 Corinthians 13). Sometimes it is helpful to think of a virtue as a mean between two extremes; for example, the virtue of courage represents the proper midpoint between excessive (and perhaps foolish) brazen action and deficient, cowardly inaction.

⁴¹ The “Golden Rule” states that you should treat others as you would want to be treated. Some suggest a revision (the so-called “Platinum Rule,” which does not presume to know what others want): treat others as *they* would want to be treated. Wendell Berry offers a third option, stressing our interdependence: treat those who are downstream as you would want those who are upstream to treat you.

⁴² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II, question 26, article 4.

⁴³ Paraphrased from Dorothy Day, *On Pilgrimage*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1999), 247. <https://books.google.com/books?id=F4yZu5yGT5UC&pg=PA247&vq=love%20the%20east&pg=PR6#v=onepage&q&f=false>

⁴⁴ Pope Francis, *The Name of God Is Mercy*, trans. Oonagh Stransky (New York: Random House, 2016), 8-9.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁴⁶ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium, Apostolic Letter* (Vatican City, Italy: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2013), accessed May 1, 2018, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html.

⁴⁷ Pope Francis, “Why the Only Future Worth Building Includes Everyone” *TED Talks* video, 17:52, April 2017, accessed May 1, 2018, https://www.ted.com/talks/pope_francis_why_the_only_future_worth_building_includes_everyone.

⁴⁸ Boyle, *Barking to the Choir*, 54.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 204.

⁵⁰ Boyle reflects, “If we long to be in the world who God is, then, somehow, our compassion has to find its way to vastness.” See Gregory Boyle, S.J., *Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion* (New York: Free Press, 2010), 66.

⁵¹ John Donahue, S.J., “Biblical Perspectives on Justice” in *The Faith that Does Justice: Examining the Christian Sources for Social Change* ed. John C. Haughey (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1977), 69 (emphasis removed). Donahue describes Jesus as “the sacrament of God’s justice in the world” (*ibid.*, 88).

⁵² A prime example of restorative justice is making reparations for the descendants of slaves. See Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Case for Reparations,” *The Atlantic*, June 2014, accessed May 1, 2018,

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>.

⁵³ 1971 Synod of Bishops, “Justice in the World,” accessed May 1, 2018, <https://www1.villanova.edu/content/dam/villanova/mission/JusticeIntheWorld1971.pdf>.

⁵⁴ Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., “The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice in American Jesuit Higher Education” (lecture, Santa Clara University, Santa Clara, CA, October 6, 2000), <http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/Kolvenbach/Kolvenbach-SantaClara.pdf>.

⁵⁵ Cornel West, *Brother West: Living and Loving Out Loud* (New York: SmileyBooks, 2009), 232.

⁵⁶ *Liberation Theology: A Documentary History*, ed. Alfred T. Hennelly (Maryknoll, Orbis, 1990), 77-83.

⁵⁷ As quoted in Robert McAfee Brown, *Unexpected News: Reading the Bible with Third World Eyes* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1984), 19.

⁵⁸ Jonathan Sacks, *To Heal a Fractured World: The Ethics of Responsibility* (New York: Schocken, 2005), 103.

⁵⁹ Gustavo Gutiérrez, “The Option for the Poor Arises from Faith in Christ,” *Theological Studies* 70 (2009): 325.

⁶⁰ Christopher Ingraham, “Three Quarters of Whites Don’t Have Any Non-White Friends,” *The Washington Post* August 25, 2014, accessed May 1, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2014/08/25/three-quarters-of-whites-dont-have-any-non-white-friends/?utm_term=.363861d4d407.

⁶¹ Boyle, *Tattoos on the Heart*, 190.

⁶² Boyle, *Barking to the Choir*, 165.

⁶³ William F. Lynch, S.J., *Images of Hope: Imagination as Healer of the Hopeless* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1974), 32.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 40, 42.

⁶⁶ As quoted by Greg Boyle in *Barking to the Choir*, 85.

⁶⁷ Gabriel Marcel, “The Encounter with Evil,” in *Tragic Wisdom and Beyond*, trans. Peter McCormick and Stephen Jolin (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 143.

⁶⁸ Walter Burghardt, S.J., “Contemplation: A Long Loving Look at the Real,” *Church* (1989): 89-98.

⁶⁹ Geger, “What *Magis* Really Means,” 26.

⁷⁰ Contemplation interrupts the cycle of “compare and despair” which makes it too easy to feel “less than” in comparison with others. Theodore Roosevelt is credited with the insight “comparison is the thief of joy” in Kenneth

Cooper, Nels Gustafson, and Joseph Salah, *Becoming a Great School* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), ix.

⁷¹ See “Radical Amazement” in *Abraham Joshua Heschel: Essential Writings* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2017), 58-59.

⁷² See, for example, the poetry of Mary Oliver (especially poems like “The Summer Day,” “The Swan,” “Morning Poem,” “Wild Geese,” or “Song of the Builders”), the work of writers like C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, Zora Neale Hurston, Flannery O’Connor, Annie Dillard, Alice Walker, Marilynne Robinson, or Toni Morrison.

⁷³ Burghardt, “Contemplation,” 94-98.

⁷⁴ Dr. Neil DeGrasse Tyson, *The Most Astounding Fact*, YouTube video, 3:30, posted by Max Schlickemeyer on March 2, 2012, <https://youtu.be/9D05ej8u-gU>.

⁷⁵ Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (New York: Image, 1965), 156-157.

⁷⁶ Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*, trans. J. Matthew Ashley (New York: Herder & Herder, 2007), 177-178.

⁷⁷ William Lynch, S.J., *Images of Hope*, 32.

⁷⁸ William Lynch, S.J., *Christ and Prometheus: A New Image of the Secular* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1970), 23.

⁷⁹ Pope Francis, “Discourse to the Community of *La Civiltà Cattolica*,” February 9, 2017, accessed May 1, 2018, <https://www.laciviltacattolica.it/articolo/discourse-of-the-holy-father-francis-to-the-community-of-la-civiltà-cattolica/>.

⁸⁰ Michael Paul Gallagher, S.J., “Culture and Imagination as Battlegrounds” (paper presented at Shaping the Future: Networking Jesuit Higher Education for a Globalizing World Conference, Mexico City, April 21-25, 2010): 3, 7. <http://ibero.mx/shapingthefuture/files/3-Topics-Identity/Identity-Mission-Gallagher-EU.pdf>

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² J. K. Rowling, “Commencement Address,” Harvard University, June 5, 2008, <https://vimeo.com/1711302>.

⁸³ Michael Himes, *Doing the Truth in Love: Conversations about God, Relationships, and Service* (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), 56.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 57-58.

⁸⁵ Mark Manson, “The Most Important Question of Your Life,” accessed May 1, 2018, <https://markmanson.net/question>.

⁸⁶ Grit is more about gratitude, compassion, and pride than self-control according to David DeSteno, “We’re Teaching Grit the Wrong Way,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 18, 2018, accessed May 1, 2018, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/We-re-Teaching-Grit-the/242854/>.

⁸⁷ Ignatius believed that ingratitude is the root of all sin and the antidote to feeling ungrateful is savoring the goodness in and around us. We remain in right-relationship with God, others, and ourselves when we are filled with gratitude and inspired to be generous after taking a “long, loving look at the real.”