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Julia Brumbaugh

Assistant Professor, Department of Religious Studies, Regis University & Alumna, Seattle and Fordham Universities,
jbrumbau@regis.edu

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What Does Having a Pope Who Was Formed as a Jesuit Mean for Jesuit Universities?

Julia Brumbaugh
Assistant Professor, Department of Religious Studies
Regis University
Alumna, Seattle and Fordham Universities
(jbrumbau@regis.edu)

It came as quite a surprise when, on the 13th of last March, the name of the new pope was announced. My own attention was taken up at first by the clear distinctiveness of Pope Francis' style. I was drawn to his humility, to his self-identification as the new bishop of Rome, and to his choice of the name Francis. But once the first wave of surprise passed, a second wave crested. He is a Jesuit? (How can that be?) He *is* a Jesuit! Once the flurry of questions about the history Jesuits and their relationship to the papacy subsided, there emerged more substantive questions about what it will mean to have a man as pope who was formed in the spirituality of St. Ignatius and spent much of his religious life as a Jesuit. For those of us working in Jesuit colleges and universities, this question becomes specified in a question about what that formation will mean for how Pope Francis engages our institutions.

The question is not merely academic. There is a long history, up to our own day, of ecclesiastical concern about what happens in universities, beginning with the emergence of the great European universities, like Oxford and Paris, in the 12th and 13th centuries. In recent history, John Paul II intervened in the US Catholic college and university community with the publication of Apostolic Constitution *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* in 1990. *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* is a statement on the role of Catholic institutions of higher education in the United States. The reception of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* proved to be a difficult one. When US Bishops and presidents of US Catholic colleges and universities responded, as they had been invited to, with a plan to implement the papal document, their initial plan was rejected for lacking sufficient juridical means for defining appropriately the relationship between the Church and the Catholic university. One point of particular tension has been the implementation of a *mandatum* (or

mandate) from the local bishop required of Catholic theologians teaching Catholic theology. However difficult the reception, the promulgation of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* and the subsequent discussions and debates about what it means to be a *Catholic* university continue to influence our national and local conversations about Catholic identity and mission.

In addition to weighing in on discussions pertaining to mission and Catholic identity, and to those areas, like Catholic theology, in which the Church has a clear claim to influence teaching, popes have also weighed in on arguments with broader implications for our academic work. During the same period as the early discussions about *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, John Paul II published an encyclical titled *Fides et Ratio* (1998), in which he engaged questions of truth and criticized many contemporary philosophical movements for abandoning the search for Truth. In many ways, Pope Benedict XVI's concerns about secularism and relativism are of a piece with the concerns articulated by his predecessor in *Fides et Ratio*.

These are just two examples of how recent popes, on the one hand, have used their juridical authority over those matters that are within its proper authority, and, on the other hand, have engaged in serious arguments pertaining to questions about the relationship between faith and reason, the nature of truth, as well as a whole host of other moral, philosophical and cultural questions that are relevant to many university disciplines as well as to the life of the university as a whole.

In light of this history, how might the new pope relate to our colleges and universities? And, how might his Jesuit formation influence that engagement? There are at least two sources that

are suggestive for how he might relate to our institutions. The first is what we know about the Spiritual Exercises and some of the features that characterize those who try to live from them, and the other is the cues we take from his ministry as the bishop of Rome so far.

As a Jesuit, Pope Francis would have gone through St. Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises as a retreatant at least twice, and he probably led others through the Exercises in his role as novice director. Because Pope Francis has been shaped by the Spiritual Exercises, it is likely that Jesuit colleges and universities will find that we share a language with him for speaking about faith and spiritual experience. Many of our colleagues have been formed in the Spiritual Exercises in a direct way, through retreats in everyday life, the 19th annotation, or through extended silent retreats and other contemplative opportunities. Even more of our colleagues, though, have been formed in these traditions through living the Jesuit Catholic mission of our schools in their varied roles. The language of the Ignatian tradition we share with the new pope is frequently on our lips: men and women for others, finding God in all things, discernment, caring for the whole person, *magis*, and imagination. Because we share this language we can hope for resonances between Pope Francis' way of engaging the world and our own ways, even where we have different tasks and responsibilities. Nowhere will those resonances be more clearly evident than in how our shared Ignatian heritage compels us to link faith and justice.

Many of Pope Francis' first actions as bishop of Rome illustrate the link between faith and justice, a link that characterizes all Jesuit initiatives. For Jesuit colleges and universities, this link is manifest in how we orient our work toward the world and toward the world of the poor in particular. Pope Francis has repeatedly expressed that he wants the Church to be oriented toward the world, and he understands that to be in and for the world means to take risks. In his March 25th letter to his fellow Argentine bishops, he wrote to them that

We must come out of ourselves to all the existential peripheries and grow in boldness. A Church that does not go out, sooner or later gets sick in the vitiated atmosphere of

her enclosure. It is true also that to a Church that goes out something can happen, as it can to any person who goes out to the street: to have an accident. Given this alternative, I wish to say to you frankly that I prefer a thousand times an injured Church than a sick Church.¹

How might this challenge to his brother bishops to grow in boldness rather than risk becoming self-enclosed translate into university life? Perhaps Pope Francis, who has recently unblocked the canonization process for Archbishop Oscar Romero of San Salvador, might echo the words of Ignacio Ellacuría, S.J., the murdered rector (president) of the University of Central America in San Salvador, who, upon receiving an honorary doctorate from Santa Clara University in 1982, said the following:

A Christian university must take into account the gospel preference for the poor. This does not mean that only the poor will study at the university; it does not mean that the university should abdicate its mission of academic excellence--excellence which is needed in order to solve complex social issues of our time. What it does mean is that the university should be present intellectually where it is needed: to provide science for those without science; to provide skills for those without skills; to be a voice for those without voices; to give intellectual support for those who do not possess the academic qualifications to make their rights legitimate.²

Ellacuría's challenge continues to provoke us as we endeavor to shape more and more of our works toward the needs of the world. If we are faithful to our mission as Jesuit colleges and universities, to use the resources of our communities to serve the world, then our shared formation, language and experiences with Pope Francis will unite and strengthen us in our various works. In particular, if US Jesuit colleges and universities really listen to the pope's invitation to boldness in turning toward the world in its need, we might find we have new ears to hear the words of Jon Sobrino, S.J. Fr. Sobrino, upon giving a commencement address to Regis College's class of 1990, told the graduates: "If a Christian University never, never never gets into some sort

of serious conflict with those who have power in this world, it is not a Christian University.”³ Such a challenge to boldness does not give us permission to abdicate our responsibilities to offer excellent academic programs, but it opens the door to vital questions about how we enact the solidarity with the poor and marginalized peoples of the world. Solidarity requires risk and vulnerability rooted in love. How can we, as institutions and as vibrant human communities, take greater risks for love and service?

For Pope Francis, as for the Jesuits, the invitation to take risks for the sake of solidarity with others is founded on a response to a personal invitation to follow Jesus. Religious faith in the person of Jesus and what his life means for the world inspires and guides him. While many of us share that personal foundation, a critical strength of our communities is that they are filled with many different people inspired by a wide variety of intellectual and wisdom traditions, and formed by love of many things. It is the deep-rootedness in love that makes our work distinctive (though not unique) in the landscape of US higher education. Ultimately, our institutions are strengthened in their efforts to build communities of solidarity and to resist the commodification of education, the reduction of students to consumers and of faculty and staff to mere service providers by those deep foundations in faith and love. Out of respect for the rich diversity of spiritual foundations affirmed by members of our communities, we are sometimes cautious about articulating how so much of our best work finds its source from those deep foundations. The new pope may well challenge us to be more articulate about those foundations, and to be more explicit about their connections to the work of justice.

Everything essential about who we are calls us to *magis* – to be more – for our students, for the communities we create and live in, for our local communities, and for the world. We can and should be emboldened in the forms of solidarity we stake our lives and work on. And we should be emboldened by the new pope to name the faith – in Jesus Christ, in God, in humanity, in love, in life – that inspires and drives us. There is good evidence that Pope Francis will recognize the work of the Holy Spirit when it leads us into creative, new and even risky projects that enact

the solidarity to which we are called. In his homily of April 16, he spoke about the danger of trying to tame the Holy Spirit. “He said that we wish ‘to calm down the Holy Spirit, we want to tame it and this is wrong.’ ... ‘because the Holy Spirit is the strength of God, it’s what gives us the strength to go forward’ but many find this upsetting and prefer the comfort of the familiar.”⁴ In our world of great need, and from within institutions navigating the turbulent waters of US higher education today, we will need all the strength and wisdom the Holy Spirit has to offer, all the love we can muster, and all the gifts, resources and skills of the academy skills we possess to meet the needs of the world. I believe that the more courageous we are in bringing our gifts to the world, and the more clearly speak from the spiritual truths that animate our hearts, the more we will find an ally in the new bishop of Rome. HJE

Notes

¹ “Francis’ Letter to Argentine Bishops’ Assembly,” Vatican City, April 18, 2013, accessed April 29, 2013, <http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/francis-letter-to-argentine-bishops-assembly>.

² Ignacio Ellacuría, S.J.’s June 1982 Commencement Address, Santa Clara University, accessed April 29, 2013, <http://www.scu.edu/jesuits/ellacuria.html>.

³ Jon Sobrino, S.J., “Commencement Address,” Regis College, May 6, 1990.

⁴ The Vatican Radio Website, “Pope : 2nd Vatican Council, Work of the Holy Spirit but Some want to turn Back the Clock,” accessed April 29, 2013, http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2013/04/16/pope: 2nd_vatican_council_work_of_holy_spirit_but_some_want_to_turn_back_the_clock/1-683419.

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