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Ignatian Justice in Higher Education

The Vocation of the Teacher in the Ignatian Tradition

When we practice our vocations we become fully ourselves. Reaching this state, we become like the bell Gerard Manley Hopkins rings in his poem “As Kingfishers catch fire.” The Jesuit poet says that every mortal thing is created to express its inner being. The bell is made to ring; in knowing our inner being, we become like the bell, bringing our beauty to the world. When the bell rings, “*myself* it speaks and spells,/ Crying *What I do is me: for that I came.*” The completing purpose and full satisfaction that the bell expresses, singing out its name: that is the joyful work that the Ignatian tradition invites us to discover as educators.

Jesuits are famous for favoring deeds rather than words, and even Jesuit poets have been known to celebrate doing more than writing. In the same poem, Hopkins proclaims that much as the bell rings, in pursuing his own particular calling, the “just man justices.” Expanding upon that compact phrase, let us consider the way the just teacher is called to do justice. That consideration will lead to two corollary questions that guide this talk: How does a specifically Ignatian justice strengthen the practice of a teacher’s vocation? And what does doing justice mean in the context of our work in Jesuit higher education?

Not surprisingly, the concept of doing justice to fulfill a calling rings throughout the 450-year history of the Jesuit order. Hopkins’ poem from the nineteenth century is in

The Jesuit traditions of justice and of higher education stem from Ignatian spirituality. Our universities were founded on ideals of Ignatian spirituality and justice, and as teachers called to work at Jesuit schools, we should take advantage of this rich tradition to better serve

what we today describe as a retreat (O'Malley 47). Both on retreat and in our daily lives, the power of Ignatian spirituality is that it leads us to better understand ourselves and others. Ignatian spirituality fosters deeper self-awareness, deeper community on our campuses and in our places of worship, and a deeper relationship with the world.

That spiritual practice continues to animate the life and work of Jesuits and of lay women and men from many faith and ethics traditions. Laypersons are vital to Jesuit works. As Fr. Kevin Gillespie noted recently, worldwide 20,000 Jesuits and 1 million laypeople are engaged in Jesuit works.

The 28 U.S. Jesuit colleges and universities have the distinction of comprising the largest number of Jesuit universities to exist in a single count

form students for the real world, Fr. Kolvenbach declares, “A Christian university must take into account the Gospel preference for the poor...[T]he university should be present intellectually where it is needed: to provide science for those who have no science; to provide skills for the unskilled; to be a voice for those who do not possess the academic qualifications to promote and legitimate their rights” (30). The Ignatian justice that Fr. Kolvenbach describes is one in which academic excellence is strengthened by service and immersion programs, community-based learning and research, and the Ignatian spirituality that inspires and animates the commitment to justice.

A motto of Jesuit education is *cura personalis*. Ignatian justice also attends to persons and their deepest joys and needs, ideas and their most potent consequences; as such, perhaps the fullest expression of Ignatian justice in higher education may occur if faculty respond to this call. We are at the heart of the institutions that are called to form men and women for others, to bring university knowledge and resources to bear on social divisions, ignorance and poverty, and environmental destruction. We are at the heart of institutions called to recognize that the inequalities and injustices of our world result from what human beings have done and have chosen not to do.

We are at the heart of institutions called to pursue, Fr. Kolvenbach declares, “the

To give a brief recent history of the strong focus on Ignatian justice in higher education: Fr. Kolvenbach delivered this call to faculty in October of 2000, at the “Commitment to Justice in Jesuit Higher Education” conference hosted by Santa Clara. Delegations from the 28 schools took the call back to their home campuses, inviting each institution to strengthen their commitment to Ignatian justice. The initiatives that each school enhanced or developed in response have inspired two additional national conferences, in 2002 at Loyola Chicago and 2005 at John Carroll. The John Carroll conference last October featured delegations from all 28 schools and was attended by more than 300 people. The next national conference is scheduled for June 2009 at Fairfield. A wealth of information on the way Ignatian justice and spirituality are practiced at all 28 schools is available at Justice Web, the website created by the national steering committee and hosted at www.loyola.edu/justice

As these conferences demonstrate, faculty are one of the primary means by which our universities become present where they are needed. If we take up the invitation to help form students for the real world, and if in the process we also permit *ourselves* to be transformed, the potential of our universities is practically limitless. Accepting the invitation to contribute to the Ignatian tradition honors the academic excellence and traditional disciplinary rigor that is the *sine qua non* of Jesuit and Catholic education (Locatelli 63-64). It also makes room to build upon our disciplines’ strengths, allowing us to teach our disciplines and make them meaningful for our students’ lives, inviting us to help students make connections among their various areas of study and with their lived experience. As such, it celebrates the deepest motives that inspire teaching and learning, the impulse to know oneself and our neighbors and the world, the impulse to share that

knowing for the common good, and the impulse to live out that knowing, open to ongoing transformation. Viewed in this light, teaching and learning become key forms of the human desire to discover and pursue that which makes us most fully alive.

The Jesuit tradition of higher education thus endorses faculty commitment to free inquiry, to creative work and disciplined research: more, it honors that commitment as a fundamental part of what makes us human. One elegant expression of this idea is offered by the twentieth-century Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner. He suggests that when we ask questions about ourselves and our world we also ineluctably ask questions about the divine. The impulses to know and understand, to reason and imagine--in other words the very things that make us human and that form the impetus and result of the teacher-student relationship--lead us toward God (21-23, 34, 48-49). Matter and spirit are related so constitutively that inquiry about one leads to the other.

It is worth emphasizing again that the Ignatian tradition that inspires such insights is highly adaptable, accessible, and inclusive. It celebrates our vocations as teachers, scholars, mentors, and administrators. Keeping in mind the generosity of spirit invited by this tradition, let us examine some of the specific terms that Ignatius proposes.

The aim of Ignatian spirituality is to help those who practice it come to know, to become, and to share their truest selves. Ignatian spirituality founds Jesuit justice and universities; we lay people who now hold the faculty positions once held by Jesuits benefit from understanding how this tradition enhances our work.

Ignatius suggests that in the most intimate places in our hearts and the vastest reaches of our universe, God is always actively present. "God works and labors for me in

all things created on the face of the earth," he declares, "the heavens, elements, plants, fruits, cattle...[and] myself" (*Spiritual Exercises* n. 236). Ignatius does not propose abstract, distant truths. Instead, he reminds us, God is working and vital: in your heartbeat and your breath *right now*, in your neighbor's face *right here*.

This foundation, in practice, involves nothing less than transforming who we are and what we do. And for each of us that transformation is into a person who, as Hopkins has it, "justices." The closing contemplation of the *Spiritual Exercises* guides us "to ask for interior knowledge of all the great good I have received, in order that, stirred to profound gratitude, I may become able to love and serve the Divine Majesty in all things" (n. 233). With a characteristic combination of courage and humility, Ignatius suggests that we already *have* this great good; we are invited to use such contemplations in order to experience and to serve this great good more fully.

The *Contemplatio*, which leads from the *Spiritual Exercises* into daily life, invites us to recognize that all that we are is gift; in this light, our lives belong not to us, but to others and to the highest good. In his most recent book, Walter Burghardt identifies this insight as central to Ignatian justice and Catholic social te

We thus open ourselves to our relationships not only with God but also with people. As the biblical scholar John Donahue suggests, fidelity to the demands of our relationships is the definition of justice (69). Fidelity to the demands of our relationships. To honor that which establishes the possibility of human existence, we would seek the justice that is at the heart of the Ignatian tradition. The most recent statement of the contemporary Jesuit mission declares, “The Society continues to insist on the promotion of justice. Why? Because it corresponds to our very spirituality” (Kolvenbach cited in GC 34, 73 24).

That spirituality leads to both honoring our relationships with those most in need and to the educational mission we share today. Understanding the relationships between and among people who seem vastly divided from one another allows us to better understand who we are and what we do in our teaching and our research and service. It allows us to connect the potentially distinct areas of our work, and to connect our work with our world. It lets us teach students not only our subject matter but also the

of studies contribute to this larger education. Helping them to establish this coherence makes their studies more meaningful. It also, dare we say, produces better term papers.

To return to the Ignatian spirituality that founds Jesuit justice and higher education, Ignatius sees God making our world, and Christ present in human faces. To quote further from Hopkins's "Kingfisher" poem, "For Christ plays in ten thousand places,/ Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his/ To the Father through the features of men's faces." Hopkins follows Ignatius in seeing Christ present everywhere, but especially in human hands and eyes and faces, always flashing through the world toward the divine.

The vision of the constant human movement toward the divine is not just a matter of celebrating beauty, humanity, or divinity; it drives action. In the spirit of Luke's Gospel, Ignatius sees the kingdom of God right here among us; that is a radical insight, one that challenges us. For having encountered the Ignatian tradition, we cannot wait for kingdom come. We are invited to take an active, aware part in creating "the justice of the Kingdom" (GC34, 53 4), working to foster "genuine solidarity, where all can have a rightful place at the banquet of the Kingdom" (GC34, 56 7).

In the Ignatian tradition, it is not only those who have made the *Spiritual Exercises* who are able to see God working in the world. Rather, whether we recognize it or not, like it or not, our very constitution impels humans toward the divine. We are formed in such a fashion that we constantly ask questions, and that we are able to give ourselves in love; these human abilities lead us to the sacred. The twentieth-century Jesuit theologian and philosopher Bernard Lonergan declares, "Just as unrestricted questioning is our capacity for self-transcendence, so being in love in an unrestricted

fashion is the proper fulfillment of that capacity”(106). Lonergan suggests that the unlimited human desire to ask why bears a direct relationship with God’s unlimited love.

Relevant to our work in higher education, this tradition

devote themselves, in love, to serving “the brokenness of our world, living in solidarity with the poor and outcast” (GC 34, 66 17).

Let us make explicit the invitation that is implicit throughout this talk and this conference. In light of this vision, how may faculty best serve the mission of our Jesuit institutions? And what does specifically Ignatian justice enable us to do in our work as teachers, scholars, mentors, and administrators?

Commitment to Ignatian justice recognizes the vocation of the teacher as integral to our Jesuit colleges and universities; the knowledge and expertise we hone in dialogue with our students constantly transforms our students, our institutions, and potentially ourselves and our world. Reciprocally, Ignatian justice enables lay and Jesuit faculty alike to deepen our existing work in light of the tradition we are invited to help carry forward and build upon; the *Magis* that is at the heart of the Ignatian enterprise allows us to achieve *more*, not necessarily quantitatively more but qualitatively more, inviting us always to pursue that which is better and deeper. Ignatian justice recognizes the beauty and the joyful work that a vocation may produce, as when the bell rings itself into the world; it shows us the way to meet some of the world’s deep needs by helping our students discover and pursue their own calling.

A full reciprocity exists in all of these formulations: academic excellence is complemented by Ignatian justice, which highlights where ideas meet the world and the world meets ideas. Teaching and working in this light, faculty both contribute to and potentially transform their disciplines. More, the vocations we practice and help our

students find make us more fully alive to both the deepest possibility and hunger in ourselves and our world.

To identify what we are already doing to foster this living tradition, and what more we might do, consider practicing what appears in Ignatius's Exercises as the consciousness Examen. Recall that forming students to take responsibility for the real world, educating students to stand with those in need, is the distinctive element of the faculty mission at Jesuit schools. A faculty form of the Examen might ask, In our work, where are we responding to the call to form students to take responsibility for the needs of the real world and the greater good? Where are we turning away from the call? How might we move forward from here? Practicing such attentiveness makes us and our teaching and writing more fully alive. It also allows us to become present where we are needed, and to bring university knowledge to bear where it is needed.

In this way of proceeding, "both the noun 'university' and the adjective 'Jesuit' always remain fully honored" (GC 34, 408 5). This way of proceeding allows us to both fulfill and strengthen the standards of our disciplines. The community-based research in Ignatian justice made possible by Loyola Baltimore's Kolvenbach Awards, to give a brief example, is eminently publishable and often revises major assumptions of the discipline in question. The director of field placement for Loyola's graduate program in psychology, for instance, received a grant to research career counseling provided to formerly homeless men in an ecumenical housing program. She reports that the major textbooks in the field prepare students to provide career counseling, while the men at Baltimore's Harford House wanted not a career but a job.

Perhaps everyone should want careers rather than jobs. On the other hand, our work benefits when we meet people “as they actually are and not as we think they ought to be” (Kolvenbach cited in GC 34, 73 24). Gaps between our disciplinary structures and gritty reality may be more and less obvious; recognizing them through such work extends the discipline and potentially better serves communities most affected by these concepts.

In addition to considering the relationship between our research and reality, each of us is invited to bring the Ignatian tradition into our classes. That invitation encompasses not only what we teach but also the way we teach, why we teach, and how we understand whom we teach. What might we do to make this tradition more alive in our classes?

We might make explicit values and ethics that are implicit in our courses. We might transform existing courses by adding a course goal, an assignment, a reading, or a reflection that connects the course content to the Jesuit tradition. We might create a new course that examines the methods and parameters of our discipline in light of that tradition. We might help students understand the hallmarks of Jesuit education and practice them in all of our courses.

These approaches do not necessarily ask us

transformation, we remain more fully alive to the subject we teach and the subjects *whom* we teach. The productive paradox here is that authority may be born of humility, freedom born of discipline, and deep personal fulfillment of devoting oneself to others. Being open in these ways of course involves risk. But if we would ask that our students meet the demands of reality, we too should be willing to journey with them.

Teaching in this manner emulates important aspects of the *Spiritual Exercises*, which help to eliminate bias and predispositions and produce knowledge that enables us to choose the greater good. Teaching in this manner creates “informed amazement” in ourselves and in our students (Renard 57). It also prepares students to encounter the “innocent suffering” that too often defines human life (Kolvenbach 34), and gives students the ability to practice not only intellectual analysis but also moral reflection and ethical action. Teaching in this manner creates the Ignatian justice based on human dignity and resulting in human freedom (Kavanaugh 173).

Joy and urgency meet in this kind of teaching. It produces graduates like Katie League, '05. When defining what characterized “the Jesuit difference” in her undergraduate education, she declared, “Dare to be a student forever--and for a higher purpose.”

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