

Justice and Jesuit Higher Education

Dean Brackley, S.J.

Universidad Centroamericana “José Simeón Cañas”

San Salvador

I want to thank the organizing committee for inviting me to this Conference marking the fifth anniversary of Peter-Hans Kolvenbach’s historic address at Santa Clara on the promotion of justice in higher education.¹ As we share experiences and reflect on how to meet that challenge better, I want to offer some suggestions on how to give the promotion of justice a central, defining role –more than a marginal or extracurricular one-- in Jesuit-sponsored colleges and universities.

I take as my starting point two momentous signs of our times: first, spreading injustice, violence and environmental degradation around the world, along with hopeful signs that another world is possible, and second, cultural pluralism. These two realities intertwine in our educational work. Obviously, helping people learn about injustice and what to do about it is a necessary part of education today. Less obviously, that can be crucial in helping them find their way in a pluralistic world.

In our schools we constantly wrestle with the way people think, dream and act differently. This both enriches and unsettles us, provoking crises of identity and mission for both individuals and institutions. I experienced this myself in college. I will never forget the crisis that overwhelmed me. It began when I found I couldn’t arbitrate between the different worldviews I was encountering inside and outside the classroom. It was the late sixties, a time of cultural revolution and the questioning of all things traditional. Though I was a Jesuit scholastic, one day I walked out of church, because I was not sure I could receive communion with integrity. That precipitated four years of painful searching. Much more than a worldview was at

¹ Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., “The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice in American Jesuit Higher Education,” discourse given at Santa Clara University, Santa Clara, California, Oct. 6, 2000, in *Promotio iustitiae*, no. 74 (2001), pp. 9-20.

stake; I was searching for an identity and a mission. Anybody who works with university students today is familiar with this kind of crisis.

I was especially blessed. After graduation I was sent to work on Manhattan's Lower East Side. There I was mugged by reality, not by the reality of the corporate boardroom like the neocons, but by the reality of the Bowery, of poverty, of drug-related violence. The dense life-and-death drama, with its daily crucifixions and resurrections, helped gather together my scattered self. Out of the chaos a wider worldview slowly came into focus. There were wonderful people available to give me sound advice and serve as models of generous faith. In time, the experience drew me back (or forward, I guess) to a more mature faith. Just then the Jesuits' 32nd General Congregation unexpectedly affirmed the service of faith and promotion of justice as the axis of all Jesuit ministries. I began to feel I was called to something worth giving my all to.

This experience also led me, eventually, to the kind of educational vision which Peter-Hans Kolvenbach outlined at Santa Clara. That vision takes us beyond the liberal and conservative models commonly held up to us. Jesuit colleges and universities dare not measure educational excellence by the exact same yardstick as Harvard or Stanford --and not only because they can't compete with Ivy League endowments and laboratories. But neither are they called to be confessional Catholic enclaves. Today's needs and the heritage entrusted to us demand a more comprehensive set of academic standards than either the pure-reason paradigm of the Enlightenment or pseudo-Catholic fundamentalism.

The Ignatian vision suggests to me seven higher standards for higher education: First, a Jesuit university strives to understand *reality*, the real world. Second, since Christian education pursues wisdom, the central focus of study is the drama of *life versus death*, of *good versus evil*, injustice versus liberation. Third, we must pursue a discipline that will *free us from bias*. Fourth, education should help people discover their *vocation* in life, above all their vocation to love and serve. Fifth, a Jesuit university must be a place where the *Catholic faith* is studied and handed on to those who would embrace it. Sixth, we must reach out to *those who otherwise could not afford to come*. Finally, we must *communicate knowledge* and criticism *beyond the campus*, into the wider society.

Giving Priority to Reality

Ignacio Ellacuría, the martyred president of the Central American University (UCA) in El Salvador, used to insist that the university's principal object of study is *la realidad nacional*, national reality. The first higher standard I propose is that reality be the primary object of study. This is less obvious than it sounds. Many people graduate from college with little understanding of key issues like homelessness, abortion or U.S. military adventurism. Last year polls revealed a striking degree of ignorance on such vital issues during the U.S. electoral campaign. One explanation I gave to foreign friends was that schools in the U.S. devote insufficient attention to social reality.

Scholars certainly need to master the literature of their fields. By all means, let us lose ourselves in fiction, poetry, drama and the arts. That will, we hope, teach us about life and shape us in ways that will help us live better. But let us resist the kind of obsession with dominating "the literature" of narrow sub-specialties that hides the wider reality from us. When that happens, "the literature" dominates us. The deficient U.S. political culture is one sign that students are not learning enough about the world in which they live. Citizens of the world's only super-power have a special responsibility to learn about the world beyond their borders, the *realidad mundial*.

The Life-and-Death Questions

A second higher standard is related: *focus on the big questions*. The chief goal of education is wisdom, not mere information. When that goal structures education as it should, university life turns around the axis of the most important questions, questions about life and death, injustice and liberation, good and evil, sin and grace. Yes, there are differential equations to solve, obscure insects and obscure authors to study. But let that be part of a quest to understand what life means, how life (human and non-human) are threatened and how they can flourish. In the language of faith: the cross is the center of reality --Jesus' cross and all the other crosses. From the foot of the cross reality comes into focus. From there the most important

questions arise: Who are the crucified people today? What are they suffering and why? How can we bring them down from their crosses?² Without that focus wisdom turns to folly.³

Cognitive Liberation and Reason Integrally Considered

Third, we need to pursue a discipline that will broaden our horizons and *free us from bias*. Teachers frequently offer answers to students who lack the questions because the problems lie beyond their experience. We also know how debates in the classroom and the lounge about free trade and the war in Iraq can drone on without resolving much, even though participants can marshal impressive arguments for or against. Why? Often because of unexamined assumptions and prejudices.

We need cognitive hygiene, or cognitive liberation to overcome our biases and limited experience. Otherwise, our search for truth is open to challenge *on strictly academic grounds*.

From our families and cultural formation, we inherit benefits but also biases that circumscribe our imagination and intelligence. Psychologists and social scientists have long labored to surface the kinds of partly-conscious myths and assumptions that constitute the horizon of each person's world, the "grid" within which we interpret things. Because some of these assumptions resist enlightenment, seeking truth is more than pushing back the frontiers of ignorance. It involves unmasking distortion and hidden interests. If we take sin seriously – personal sin, original sin, and so on--, then we have to draw the cognitive consequences; we have to take personal, habitual, original and structural distortion seriously. We need to help university students unmask deception especially in times like these, when war is waged on false pretenses and Fox News claims to be impartial.

² Cf. I. Ellacuría, "Las iglesias latinoamericanas interpelan a la Iglesia de España," *Sal Terrae* 3 (1982), p. 230.

³ In a provocative essay, Gil Bailie argues that Western philosophy has attempted to explain reality while ignoring the violence which lies at the base of all human societies. Appealing to René Girard's analysis of culture, Bailie believes that Western philosophy has now entered into crisis, along with most of our social institutions, now that we can no longer hide the foundational violence of our social life. When we avoid the victims of history, we lose our way. Gil Bailie, *Violence Unveiled: Humanity at the Crossroads* (New York: Crossroad, 1995), Chapter 13.

In the spirit of the Enlightenment, most modern thinkers prescribe more reason and conscious awareness to overcome bias. I doubt that is enough. Although reality is reasonable, it is naïve to suppose that reason alone will take us to it. Only an “enriched reason” that engages the whole person --intellect, will and emotions-- produces wisdom. This is reason rooted in experience and practice and nourished by contemplation, affectivity and imagination. Above all, modern, liberal thinking frequently overlooks the fact that distortion is rooted in unconscious commitments and habits of the heart. That means that cognitive liberation requires personal transformation, or conversion. In the end, prejudice is embedded in my identity, so that to question my world is to question *me*. For these reasons, wholesome crises can expand our horizons. This frequently happens to students when they engage poor and suffering people.

Santa Clara University sponsors a great semester-abroad program in El Salvador for students of U.S. Jesuit universities, the Casa de la Solidaridad. When students arrive for the program and deplane, most are apprehensive. They have heard about the past war, poverty and endemic crisis. To their surprise, they spend much of their time in El Salvador wondering why these poor people are smiling and why they insist on sharing their tortillas with strangers like them. But as the humanity and dignity of the poor crashes through their defenses, the people break their hearts. They feel disoriented, as people do when they fall in love. In fact, what happens is sometimes just that, a kind of falling in love. As the poor emerge from their two-dimensional anonymity, students’ horizons open. Their world shakes and eventually gets re-configured. Some things move from the margin to the center and others from the center to the edge.

You don’t have to travel far for this. It can happen close to home. But isn’t this a necessary part of education for our middle-class people, who populate private colleges and universities today?

As this kind of experience shows, feelings play a vital role in reason integrally considered. Students have to work through the powerful feelings and the thoughts which their encounter with the victims of injustice provoke. These often include the interior movements Ignatius of Loyola calls “consolation” and “desolation.” Both have powerful educational implications. The sadness, inner turmoil and leaden discouragement which are desolation pull us back into ourselves and shrink our vision. Consolation --which is peace, joy, a sense of fullness-

- draws us beyond ourselves to greater freedom and generosity.⁴ It expands our horizon and dissolves intellectual bias. Consolation leads into the light.⁵

Clearly, these three standards --focusing on reality, especially suffering reality, and the need for cognitive liberation-- aim at greater academic rigor and intellectual authenticity.

Discovering Our Deepest Vocation

Engaging suffering people and injustice frequently awakens in students the crucial question: What am I doing with my life? And that suggests a fourth higher standard. Education of the whole person, in the Ignatian style (as Paul Crowley says), helps students discover their vocation in life, above all their *vocation to love and serve*.

Students confront different worldviews and more versions of the good life than ever before. For some, the world falls apart about once a semester! They ask themselves: What is really true, what is right? More is at stake than ideas. Facing contradictory role models --a Mother Theresa, on one hand, a Britney Spears on the other-- they struggle to find themselves. Postmodern capitalism might offer them a job, but the only vocation the dominant culture proposes is getting and spending. This message threatens everyone's dignity. Besides helping students with their careers, educators must help them discover their vocations.⁶

That vocation might be to raise kids, to discover galaxies, to drive a truck --or a combination of these. Whatever it is concretely, faith and reason point to a deeper *human calling* that we all share: namely, to spend ourselves in love. People actually "hear" this call in daily life, in the form of consolation --enthusiasm for service. Former U.N. Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld wrote, "I do not know Who --or what-- put the question. But at some point I did

⁴ Cf. Ignatius Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, nos. 313-336.

⁵ Paul Ricoeur says the symbol gives rise to thought. P. Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), pp. 347-57. Consolation gives rise to liberating symbols. It undermines the original prejudice that divides the world into important people and unimportant people.

⁶ See the reflections of Jim Wallis, *God's Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005), pp. 362-63.

answer ‘Yes’ to Someone --or Something-- and from that hour I was certain that existence is meaningful and that, therefore, my life, in self-surrender, had a goal.”⁷

Vocations are called forth from us, especially by role models and mentors, including generous teachers, but also by poor and suffering people who show us how much we are needed. A few months before she was killed in El Salvador 25 years ago, Maryknoll sister Ita Ford wrote to her young niece, Jennifer, back in Brooklyn, “I hope you come to find that which gives life a deep meaning for you. Something worth living for -- maybe even worth dying for -- something that energizes you, enthuses you, enables you to keep moving ahead. I can’t tell you what it might be. That’s for you to find, to choose, to love.”⁸ Ita invited Jennifer to discover her deepest calling, to find herself by losing herself. Higher education should awaken not only the dramatist or the chemist in students, but also that deepest vocation which St. Ignatius recognized as the call of Christ.

As Peter-Hans Kolvenbach said, “The real measure of our Jesuit universities lies in who our students become . . . and the adult Christian responsibility they will exercise in future towards their neighbor and their world.”⁹ “Women and men for others” will help transform an unjust world, not just “succeed” within it.

Today poverty, violence, AIDS and environmental crisis are spreading, and traditional political actors have lost credibility. At the same time ordinary citizens are mobilizing all over the world and pushing for change from the bottom up. Struggling neighbors, indigenous people, women, ethnic minorities, consumers, migrants, environmental and human rights organizations, unions, small and medium-size businesses, cooperatives and communal banks are sowing the seeds of a new social order.

However, from Zambia to Baltimore, these micro-initiatives are up against macro-obstacles. So they are networking locally and globally. From poor countries they forge ties with NGO’s, sister cities and congregations, universities and unions in the U.S. and Europe. Rights workers ally with Human Rights Watch, environmentalists with Greenpeace. The alliances give

⁷ Dag Hammarskjöld, *Markings* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), p. 205.

⁸ I am grateful to Ita’s brother, Bill, for providing me with the full text of the letter.

⁹ Kolvenbach, “The Service of Faith,” pp. 16-17.

local actors a fighting chance against those who control the market and the means of violence. In this way they form part of a growing movement of international solidarity which can now pressure powerful governments to sign a global land mine treaty (1996) and concede debt relief to the world's poorest nations (2005). As they say each year at the World Social Forum: another world is possible. With God's help we can narrow the gap between rich and poor, wage peace and defend the environment --but only if we continue to globalize solidarity, as John Paul II urged.

This will depend, crucially, on a critical mass of people in rich countries who are savvy about trade, finance and human rights law and who will become steady allies of the poor. They are indispensable, but where will they come from? Well, if they don't come from colleges and universities like ours, the future looks bleak. Jesuit higher education should play a signal role in forming a new generation for solidarity and, especially in these United States, for international solidarity.

This past May Amherst College awarded an honorary degree to Nelson Mandela, who used the occasion to appeal to the U.S. academy:¹⁰ "In this world under threat, colleges and universities remain our best hope," Mandela said. "Your central mission, the pursuit of truth, must lead the way. We depend on you for leaders who care for, are engaged in and will serve the community, who are schooled deeply and broadly, in all corners of knowledge. We depend on you to point us toward solutions to our problems."

Who Gets In?

Mandela then raised the issue of who gets into universities. "The challenges of ensuring full access, according to ability rather than wealth or privilege, have not been met," he said. "Until they are, we will forfeit some of the talent and genius that the world sorely needs. All institutions of higher education have the obligation to open the door more widely." That goes for Jesuit colleges and universities, too. That is a fifth standard to be met.

In recent years, tuition at these Jesuit institutions has been increasing at an average yearly rate of over 6.5%. If this continues, they will soon have an annual price tag of \$50,000. Since

¹⁰ "Nelson Mandela's Address to Amherst College," May 12, 2005, St. Bartholomew's Church, New York, Boston *Globe*, May 13, 2005.

financial aid has been falling, we run the risk of excluding low-income students more than ever. In the complex business of managing admissions and finances, a Catholic and Jesuit university has to ensure a substantial presence not just of minorities but of the economically poor. The diversity that we celebrate on campus must include economic diversity.

Keeping Faith

A sixth higher standard is truth in advertising. Catholic universities should welcome people of other communions and faiths, and no faith, as first-class citizens. At the same time, they must be places where *the Catholic tradition is studied, understood and handed on*. Now that we take pluralism for granted, we no longer take traditions, or faith, that way. While pluralism presents rich opportunities, we should fear for the future if students were to graduate from Jesuit colleges with first-class training in, say, economics, and only a first-communion, or a Newsweek-level, understanding of Christian faith.

Through serious study of Christian faith and life, our colleges and universities should help the church overcome unjust practices that are unworthy of it, as well as the ideologies that support them.

Orthopraxis demands justice throughout the university community. Catholic colleges and universities should be conspicuous in defending the dignity of women and of gay and lesbian people.

Proyección Social

The six Jesuits and two women murdered in El Salvador in 1989 were killed because the UCA pursued a just peace in a time of war.¹¹ The university did this *universitariamente*, that is, in the manner proper to a university, not that of a church, a political party or some other kind of

¹¹ On the UCA killings, see Martha Doggett, *Death Foretold: The Jesuit Murders in El Salvador* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press/Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, 1993). This is the most thorough account of the killings, the cover-up, the legal case and the political implications. Teresa Whitfield treats the wider story masterfully in her *Paying the Price: Ignacio Ellacuría and the Murdered Jesuits of El Salvador* (Philadelphia, Penn.: Temple University Press, 1995). For a concise chronicle, see Dean Brackley, "Murder in the University: A Chronicle of Events," in idem, *The University and Its Martyrs: Hope from Central America* 2nd edn. (San Salvador: Centro Mons. Romero, 2005), pp. 6-24.

organization.¹² It did so by teaching, research and above all what we call *proyección social*. Social projection includes all those means by which the university communicates, or *projects*, knowledge beyond the campus to help shape the consciousness of the wider society. This includes unmasking the lies which support an unjust status quo, denouncing abuses and proposing constructive solutions. In practice, this means public speaking, including appearances in the media, writing for publications, the work of the Human Rights Institute, the Pastoral Center, the university radio and similar instruments of communication. At least in theory, *proyección social* is the most important function of the UCA, because the society is so unjust and so few can aspire to higher education.

Nine months after the killings at the UCA, Pope John Paul II published his exhortation on Catholic higher education, *Ex corde ecclesiae*. In the U.S., *Ex corde* has stirred controversy over whether Catholic identity threatens free inquiry. But the document presents other challenges which have received less attention, including *proyección social*. *Ex corde* says that the Catholic university must “demonstrate the courage to express uncomfortable truths, truths that may clash with public opinion but that are also necessary to safeguard the authentic good of society” (no. 32). Social projection is another higher standard of Catholic higher education.

Conclusion

These reflections leave me with five items pending which I offer for your consideration: First, how do we help our students unmask deception? Does impartiality mean giving equal time

¹² The writings of murdered university president Ignacio Ellacuría on higher education have been collected in Ignacio Ellacuría, *Escritos universitarios* (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1999). See also the book by Ellacuría’s predecessor as university president, Román Mayorga, *La universidad para el cambio social*, 3rd edn. (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1976). In English, see the articles by Ellacuría and Ignacio Martín-Baró in Hassett and Lacey (eds.), *Towards a Society That Serves Its People: The Intellectual Contribution of El Salvador’s Murdered Jesuits* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1991, “Section III. The University and Social Justice,” pp. 171-242. For the history and educational philosophy of the UCA, see Charles J. Beirne, S.J., *Jesuit Education and Social Change in El Salvador* (New York: Gartland, 1996). For a concise presentation of the philosophy of education at the UCA, see Dean Brackley, “The Challenge of the UCA,” in *The University and Its Martyrs*, pp. 25-42.

to the Swift-boat veterans? If not, what does it mean in practice in the classroom and informal conversation?

Second, shouldn't service of some kind among poor and suffering people be required of all students at our institutions? Peter-Hans Kolvenbach said that this "should [be] . . . at the core of every Jesuit university's program of studies."¹³ How can we advance toward that goal?

Third, how do you get *your* institution to start up, alone or in collaboration, a study-abroad program in a poor country? How about a temporary freeze on more semester-abroad programs in Western Europe?

Fourth, how can our institutions attract and retain more poor and more African-American and other under-represented minorities? Financing and enrollment involves difficult tradeoffs. To keep Jesuit schools financially viable, administrators commonly strive to provide facilities that will attract more affluent students who can pay full freight and compensate for scholarship students who cannot. This sometimes means providing a first-rate food service, pools, fitness centers and other amenities. To what extent does this strategy foster an unhealthy upscale consumer culture on campus that undermines the promotion of justice and compounds the alienation of lower-income students? How can we cut this Gordian knot? Here are three suggestions: Promote a culture of simplicity on campus. (Remember Ignatius's Two Standards!) Maximize scholarships based on need, rather than athletic or scholastic ability. Raise \$50 million for scholarships in the next capital campaign. What else can be done?

Fifth and finally, what kind of *proyección social* is appropriate in the U.S. where it raises questions –and eyebrows— both on campus and off? Who speaks for the university? How take into account the various stakeholders and constituencies? How ensure accountability and the right to dissent? U.S. Jesuit colleges and universities already practice social projection, for example, when they take a public stand on abortion-related issues. What other forms of social projection have been practiced or might be practiced? Should your university community call

¹³ "The Service of Faith," p. 17. Bernice Lerner, director of Boston University's Center for the Advancement of Ethics and Character, recently commented on whether service should be mandatory for students. "It depends very much on the program," she said. "Sometimes they are done very well, and sometimes they are not. If you get the right person in charge, and they are doing it thoughtfully, giving students an opportunity to reflect and have an educational component involved, it can be very strong." Quoted in Valerie Strauss, "Hurricane Nurtures More Models of Compassion," *Washington Post*, Sept. 13, 2005.

for an end to the death penalty? Speak out against torture at Abu Ghraib, the violation of rights at Guantánamo and destruction of Fallujah? Criticize inequitable tax policy and the lack of health care for the poor? Point out how hurricane Katrina revealed serious neglect of the common good? Defend the rights of gay and lesbian persons? In all this, wisdom is needed, but also daring. Martin Luther King chided the decent standers-by: I know where you stand on prudence; I don't know where you stand on courage. Perhaps universities can help the Catholic Church recover its voice and moral authority in the aftermath of the crisis of sex abuse scandals.

Five years ago Peter-Hans Kolvenbach affirmed the centrality of justice in Jesuit higher learning. Ten years earlier *Ex corde* had said, "The Christian spirit of service to others in promoting social justice is especially important for each Catholic university and should be shared by professors and fomented among students" (no. 34). This is not just a matter of extra-curriculars but of university life as a whole. Research activities will

include study of serious contemporary problems, such as the dignity of human life, the promotion of justice for all, the quality of personal and family life, the protection of the natural environment, the search for peace and political stability, a more equitable distribution of world resources and a new economic and political order that will better serve the human community at the national and international level. University research will have to be directed toward in-depth study of the roots and causes of the grave problems of our time (no. 32).

The document adds that the university should help promote the development of the poor countries of the world (cf. no. 34).

We are called to fashion a new kind of university, building on the rich heritage of Catholic and Jesuit education. This "new" university makes an option for the poor and for justice that refocuses tired debates of liberal vs. conservative, confessional vs. secularist.¹⁴

¹⁴ Ignacio Ellacuría wrote, "It is often said that the university should be impartial. We do not agree. The university should strive to be free and objective, but objectivity and freedom may demand taking sides. . . . Our university as a university has an acknowledged preferential option for the poor We take this stand with them in order to be able to find the truth of what is happening and the truth that all of us must be seeking and building together. There are good theoretical reasons to think that such an effort is well grounded epistemologically, but in addition, we think there is no alternative in Latin America, in the Third World, and elsewhere, for universities and intellectuals who claim to be of Christian inspiration." I. Ellacuría, "The

A university that strives to understand reality, especially the great life-and-death issues; that struggles to overcome bias; that helps students discover their vocation to service; that embraces the Catholic tradition in dialogue with others; that opens its doors to minorities and the poor; that takes public stands on vital issues: that community of learning is committed to greater academic excellence. This may provoke conflict, persecution, even financial troubles. (At the UCA, it has cost 18 bombings and martyrdom.) It may entail a loss of prestige as the world defines it. But it will also provide a stronger sense of identity and mission and more universal and lasting good for the glory of God.

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Challenge of the Poor Majority,” in John Hassett and Hugh Lacey (eds.), *Towards a Society That Serves Its People*, p. 175.