



# Heartland III

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## Themes of Jesuit Higher Education

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*Key ideas contained in two addresses by the Superior General of the Society of Jesus delivered June 7, 1989, at Georgetown University and Georgetown Prep are summarized and edited here by John J. Callahan, S.J. Items in brackets are additions by the editor. For a more complete explanation of the "Ignatian world view," please refer to [Discovering a Sacred World](#)."*

### Jesuit Mission In Education

The Society of Jesus proclaims that the service of faith through the promotion of justice is the mission that must be integrated as a priority into each Jesuit work.

Our purpose in education, then, is to form men and women "for others." The Society of Jesus has always sought to imbue students with values that transcend the goals of money, fame and success. We want graduates who will be leaders concerned about society and the world in which they live. We want graduates who desire to eliminate hunger and conflict in the world and who are sensitive to the need for more equitable distribution of the world's goods. We want graduates who seek to end sexual and social discrimination and who are eager to share their faith with others.

In short, we want our graduates to be leaders-in-service. That has been the goal of Jesuit education since the sixteenth century. It remains so today.

The question is whether or not the schools we now call "Jesuit" still retain their Jesuit identity. While some people in our institutions may care little about Jesuit ideals, many others do identify strongly with Jesuit education, and still more will want the university or college to retain at least its identity as a "Jesuit" school and then to develop it.

But what do we mean by Jesuit education? To answer that, to establish Jesuit identity, we must look to St. Ignatius Loyola, founder of the Society of Jesus. We must link our work in education with the Ignatian spirituality which inspires it.

Here let me mention but a few Ignatian themes that enlighten and give impetus to our work in higher education:

#### *The Ignatian world view*

◆ is world-affirming: [For Ignatius, to know the world better is to know God better. There can be no contradiction between human knowledge and faith. At most, there can only be a failure in understanding. Ignatius' sense of the goodness and beauty of all things also leads a person to be a responsible steward of creation.]

- ◆ is comprehensive: [There is a call to a genuinely humanistic education -- literature, history, arts, science, philosophy and theology -- in addition to professional studies. In the Ignatian view, to become more fully human is to become more fully divine.]
- ◆ faces up to sin, personal and social, but points to God's love as more powerful than human weakness and evil,
- ◆ places emphasis on freedom: [Liberated from the constraints of ignorance, prejudice, limited horizons, and distorted values and desires, a person, with God's help, is free to develop a positive set of values.]
- ◆ stresses the essential need for discernment: [A person must know the world, examine attitudes, challenge assumptions, and analyze motives. In this way, one may discern God's loving desire and select values which become the basis for principled decision-making.]
- ◆ is altruistic: [Adopting the mind and heart of Christ, a person is called to compassion, to concern for others, and to the work of justice.]
- ◆ gives ample scope to intellect and affectivity in forming leaders: [Ignatius calls for the development of the whole person, head and heart, intellect and feelings. The purpose, however, is not centered on the development of the self alone. Rather, the purpose is to develop leaders who are committed to ideals and values to such an extent that they will work to change society.]

### *Value Oriented Education*

Jesuit education is value oriented. There is no aspect of education, not even the so-called hard sciences, which is neutral. All teaching imparts values.

A value literally means something which has a price, something dear, precious or worthwhile and, therefore, something that one is ready to suffer or sacrifice for, which gives one a reason to live and, if need be, a reason to die.

Values, then, bring to life the dimension of meaning. Values provide motives. They identify a person, give one a face, a name and character. Without values, one floats, like driftwood in swirling waters. Values are central to one's life and define the quality of that life, marking its breadth and depth.

Values are anchored in the "head." I see reasons why something is valuable and I am intellectually convinced of its worth.

Values are also anchored in the "heart." The language of the heart tells me that something is worthwhile. I am able to perceive something as of value. I am also affected by its worthiness.

Values are also anchored in the "hand." When the mind and the heart are involved, the whole person is involved. Values lead to actual decisions and real actions -- and necessarily so.

Each academic discipline, when honest with itself, is well aware that the values transmitted depend on assumptions about the ideal human person and the ideal human society which are used as a starting point.

It is here especially that the Jesuit mission of the promotion of justice can become tangible and transparent in our educational works. For this mission must guide and inspire the lawyer and the politician, the manager and the technician, the sociologist and the artist, the scientist and the author, the philosopher and the theologian.

Our institutions make their essential contribution to society by embodying in our educational process a rigorous, probing study of crucial human problems and concerns. It is for this reason that Jesuit colleges and universities must strive for high academic quality. We are speaking of something far removed from the facile and superficial world of slogans and ideology, of purely emotional and self-centered responses, and of instant and simplistic solutions.

We have learned to our regret that mere appropriation of knowledge does not inevitably humanize. One would hope that we have learned that there is no value-free education. But the values imbedded in many areas of life today are presented subtly, often by assumption. We need to discover ways that will enable students to form the habit of reflecting on values.

Habits are not formed only by chance occasional happenings. Rather, habits develop only by consistent, planned practice. The goal of forming habits of critical reflection needs to be worked on by teachers in all subjects in ways appropriate to the maturity of students at different levels.

This habitual reflection should be applied to the human sciences students learn, the technology being developed, and the whole spectrum of social and political programs suggested by both prophets and politicians.

A value-oriented educational goal like ours -- forming men and women for others -- will not be realized unless it is infused within our educational programs at every level. The goal is to challenge our students to reflect upon the value implications- of what they study, to assess values and their consequences for human beings.

### *Promotion of Justice*

The service of faith through the promotion of justice remains the Society's major apostolic focus. That is why it is urgent that this mission be operative in our lives and in our institutions. Words have meaning; if a college or university describes itself as "Jesuit" or "in the Jesuit tradition," the thrust and practice of the institution should correspond to the description.

It should be operative in a variety of ways. The recruitment of students must include special efforts to make a Jesuit education possible for the disadvantaged.

But let it be noted, and let there be no misunderstanding: The "option for the poor" is not an exclusive option; it is not a classist option. We are not called upon to educate only the poor and the disadvantaged. The option is far more comprehensive and demanding, for it calls upon us to educate all -- rich, middle class and poor -- from a perspective of justice.

Ignatius wanted Jesuit schools to be open to all. We educate all social classes so that people from every stratum of society may learn and grow in the special love and concern for the poor.

Concern for social problems should never be absent. We should challenge all of our students to use concern for the poor as a criterion, so that they make no significant

decision without first thinking of how it would impact the least in society.

### *Interdisciplinary Education*

Jesuit education is interdisciplinary. A qualitative integration of inquiry which can lead to an appreciation of more comprehensive truth is the goal. How far this is from the view that portrays the university as merely an administrative umbrella for unconnected fields of research.

It is a pity that an interdisciplinary approach, the only significant way to heal the fracture of knowledge, is still considered a luxury reserved to occasional staff seminars or a few doctoral programs. Of course, an interdisciplinary approach is not without problems: It runs the risk of simply over-loading students, of teaching them relativism, of inadmissible violation of the methodology of individual disciplines.

But a love of the whole truth, a love of the integral human situation can help us to overcome even these potential problems. What single academic discipline can pretend to offer comprehensive solutions to real questions like those concerning genetic research, corporate takeovers, definitions concerning the start and end of human life, homelessness and city planning, poverty, illiteracy, developments in medical and military technology, human rights, the environment and artificial intelligence?

These require empirical data and technological know-how. But they also cry out for consideration in terms of their impact on men and women from a holistic point of view. They demand, in addition, sociological, psychological, and theological perspectives if the solutions proposed are to demonstrate moral responsibility and sensitivity.

Continually developing capacities to control human choices present us with moral questions of the highest order. These questions are not solved in an unidisciplinary manner, for they embrace human, and not simply technical, values. Are we preparing our students to know that just because some technological advance is possible for us, we are not thereby justified in its development and use?

Do we challenge the leaders of tomorrow to reflect critically on the assumptions and consequences of "progress?" Do we challenge them to ponder both the wonderful possibilities and the limits of science? Do we help them to see that often significant civil financial decisions are not merely political manifestos but also moral statements?

This concern for a more holistic inquiry should be true of any college or university. But it ought to be the case that in a Jesuit educational institution teaching and research are not even conceivable without the integration of different forms of knowledge with human values and with theology.

Our universities, of course, must do this precisely as universities, following our heritage and tradition. This heritage and tradition promotes a culture that emphasizes the values of human dignity and the good life in its fullest sense. This heritage is made real today by fostering academic freedom, by demanding excellence of schools and students, and by treating religious experience and questions as central to human culture and life.

Concrete means to achieve such an integrated program might be sought in the substance and methodologies employed in the core curriculum or in significant capstone courses for senior students on social, cultural, and ethical responsibilities --

and in that contemplative capacity for God and the world which lies at the very center of human existence.

### *Internationalization*

Our mission is global. Our interdependence on this planet is becoming more evident every day in realities across a broad spectrum from economics to ecology. In response to this rapidly shrinking world, we seek education for responsible citizenship in the global village.

Will we really help to form men and women for others in the world community of the twenty-first century if we do not adapt to the changing international culture? This is a corporate responsibility, with all of us participating in some way according to resources and interests, and with a genuine desire to help all others.

In the recent past education has sometimes focused exclusively on self-actualization of the individual. Today it must be the world community that forms the context for growth and learning. Curricula must be broadened to include major world cultures. Especially encouraged is diversity of cultural backgrounds in our student bodies and more international exchanges of both teachers and students.

Efforts at internationalization are signs of the impulse to incorporate a global dimension into our educational programs -- not as occasional special events, but as part of the fiber of what it means to be Jesuit colleges or universities. I ask you to intensify these efforts.

### *Mission and Staffing*

The mission of forming men and women for others has implications, too, for staffing. It is obvious, and has been obvious for many years, that our educational institutions cannot survive without the presence and assistance and partnership of many dedicated people who are not Jesuits. Jesuits have been blessed by working with many colleagues who have shared our vision and our principles, and have worked with real dedication. The roots of this partnership in ministry as set out in the Second Vatican Council are theological. Events of the last quarter century have accelerated the need for implementation of this collegiality. In Jesuit education today, more than ever, lay men and women are invited to share in this ministry at every level.

A significant challenge in the collaborative process is whether and how the hiring and promotion practices of Jesuit institutions reflect the priority of developing the Ignatian vision, while being just to potential colleagues and protective of the academic standards of the institution. With all due respect for academic freedom, hiring is sometimes a missed opportunity as well as an overlooked obligation in justice to acquaint prospective administrators, professors and staff with the spirit of the institution and to ask if they desire to share its spirit. All members of the educational community should be invited and expected to contribute to the on-going mission of the institution. We need to do more to create an educational community united in mission.

All too often we have seen cases where new colleagues are welcomed into Jesuit institutions solely on the basis of academic or other professional credentials. Unless there is a prior clarity concerning a statement of the mission of the institution, and a prior acceptance and commitment to foster this mission, it seems unrealistic to expect that we can hope for an institution to continue "in the Ignatian tradition."

Growth in understanding and commitment needs to be cultivated through faculty seminars, discussions and the like, as well as through individual conversations and friendships. Clearly, opportunities for closer involvement in sharing in the spirit and mission of the institution should be offered through colloquia, retreats and liturgies for those who are open to and desirous of them.

This is not the case of too few Jesuits needing to seduce the laity into acting like Jesuits. That thinking is not worthy of us. Rather, the many views of all members of the higher education community who follow Ignatius with their own perspective must come together to affect the university's life and the developing Ignatian tradition. In this way value-centered education evolving out of the ideals of Ignatian spirituality and the Gospels will continue in Jesuit institutions.

### *The Jesuit Community*

What is the role of the Jesuit community at a Jesuit college or university in bringing about the Ignatian vision?

In the first place, we cannot ignore -- we should even foster -- the autonomy of the college or university, an autonomy which is institutional. The institution is independent of the group of Jesuits.

Secondly, the distinctive role of the Jesuits in a Jesuit college or university is to share the basic Ignatian purpose and thrust with the educational community. I believe that this communication of the Society's apostolic inspiration to all members of the academic community is really owed to these people, so that they can become sharers in it, each in his or her own way.

To communicate this purpose in an official and authoritative way is the role of the competent university authorities, especially if they proclaim that the institution is "in the Jesuit tradition."

But to incarnate it in daily life through the multiple relationships and activities which form the fabric of university life, this is the task and the responsibility of all Jesuits missioned to the univer-sity.

Let me be very clear about this: The Jesuit community at the university ought to exercise not power, but authority. Its role, with and for all the members of the educational community, is that of guaranteeing the transmission of the values which are the distinctive mark of Jesuit education.

So we are speaking of a process, a permanent process. We are speaking of a way of life. The alternative is clear: an institution, of whatever academic quality, slowly or rapidly drifting aimlessly.

But collaboration is not an end in itself. It exists precisely so that we can offer more effective service to those who need us. If educational institutions are not finally instruments of hope, for the Good News, then their identity is in crisis as Jesuit apostolates. From freshmen in high school to the researchers in laboratories of our best graduate departments, no one can be excused from our final purpose: to enable the human person and the human community to be the loved ones God calls them to be. It is the task of the Jesuit education family to work together to incarnate this vision in our troubled world.