

THEOLOGY

The Meaning of *Magis*: What *Magis* Adds to the FYS Theme, the Greater Good

Marcus Mescher, Ph.D (Theology)

Mentor: Timothy Brownlee (Philosophy)

Introduction:

Since its inaugural semester in fall 2015, CORE 100 (the First Year Seminar at Xavier University) has afforded faculty the opportunity to connect an area of interest to the common theme, the “Greater Good.” But what does the Greater Good mean? Some might use language of authentic or integral human flourishing. Others might think of this term in light of the principle of the “common good” in Catholic social teaching. The website¹ that outlines course goals for faculty states, “The Jesuit tradition of *Magis* invites us to work in a spirit of generous excellence—to consider the greater good in all that we do, including our academic work. Faculty from across the university are encouraged to interpret this theme from their disciplinary and personal perspectives” and suggests that faculty encourage students to attend a campus event, read texts, or adopt a project that explores the “Greater Good.” While it is fitting for faculty to explore and adopt the “Greater Good” in their own way, if we do not share a common understanding of the meaning of this phrase, we risk reducing it to platitudinous lip service. This would betray the Jesuit identity and mission that animate the work we do, especially as it relates to the intellectual, moral, and spiritual/religious formation of first year students.

This project aims to provide faculty and students with material to enhance their sense of the meaning of the “Greater Good” by considering this phrase through the lens of the Jesuit value, *Magis*. After an exposition of key content, this essay demonstrates connections between *Magis* to five core virtues: love, mercy, justice, solidarity, and hope. Ultimately, the goal of this project is to encourage members of the Xavier community to integrate *Magis* into one’s life through habits of contemplation, imagination, and vocation discernment.

Taking a closer look at *Magis* is important in our socio-cultural context for a variety of reasons. Rising political partisanship undermines the conditions necessary to facilitate challenging conversations across differences. Widespread moral relativism allows individuals to determine what is right or good for themselves, independent of social or religious norms. Students often invoke the mantra, “I do me, you do you,” which suggests radical tolerance and non-judgmentalism. Although tolerance is an essential ingredient for a vibrant and inclusive society, it is 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.” If we are unable to communicate our core values and discuss the moral norms that generate agreement and accountability, we come close to what philosopher

¹ “Faculty Guide to the FYS Course Goals” Xavier University, <https://www.xavier.edu/core/facstaff/course-goals.cfm>.

John Dewey describes as the “eclipse of the public.”² In short, *Magis* provides the *raison d’être* for Xavier University as a Jesuit institution, the horizon for what it means to belong and contribute to this community. We can disagree about some of the implications and applications of *Magis*, but we should come to consensus that *Magis* sparks and shapes our “mode of proceeding,” whether we are faculty, staff, or students.

What does *Magis* Mean?

Magis is a Latin adverb that means “more” or “to a greater degree.” In his thorough exegesis of the word as it appears in the history of the Jesuit documentary heritage, Fr. Barton Geger S.J. suggests the best translation of *Magis* is “the more universal good.”³ This definition can be traced all the way back to the founder of the Jesuits, Saint Ignatius of Loyola. Ignatius (1491-1556) 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.”⁴ 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.”⁵ Geger explains that the “glory of God” refers to “God’s truth, beauty, wisdom, and power becoming evident to human beings.”⁶ 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 Lyon’s claim that the “glory of God is the human person fully alive.”⁷ In this way, A.M.D.G. or *Magis* imply a call to work for the fullness of life for all, the conditions that allow individuals and communities to flourish, a vision rooted in human dignity, human rights, and responsibilities to the common good of all.

Geger sorts through numerous references to *Magis* in the Jesuit tradition to demonstrate that it cannot be reduced to a concept of excellence or generosity. Instead, *Magis* is rooted in “interior

² John Dewey, *The Public and its Problems*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1927.

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” (142).

³ Barton Geger S.J., “What *Magis* Really Means and Why It Matters” *Jesuit Higher Education* 1:2 (2012), 16-31.

⁴ Geger, 19.

⁵ Geger, 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).

⁶ Geger, 22.

⁷ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book 4, Chapter 34, Section 7. In other words, as we become more fully human, we become more divine. This is relevant because a liberal arts education (i.e., our approach to education at Xavier University, which combines an interdisciplinary approach to and integration of truth, beauty, and wisdom) is viewed through the lens of humanization: the goal is to help students become more freely and fully alive through critical thinking, social analysis, theological reflection, ethical evaluation, and taking responsibility for personal development as well as the socio-ecological common good.

freedom” that authorizes each individual—in the sanctity of one’s own conscience⁸—to reflect and discern what the “Greater Good” uniquely means and requires. The task, then, is to determine the *greater* good, “the more universal good,” or “that which makes the widest impact.”⁹ Here the word “greater” means making a well-informed decision that opts for 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. We should pursue what will promote greater dignity, freedom, and responsibility for ourselves *and* others (or, what will prevent or alleviate the suffering of others). Decisions to pursue *Magis* must be informed by careful reflection (paying attention to one’s life—for example, noticing what brings peace and purpose or anxiety and confusion—in order to glean wisdom from one’s experiences) and discernment (tuning into one’s thoughts and feelings, deepest desires and core needs, in order to make prudent decisions for the present and future).¹⁰

Magis may be personal, but it is not private. It is totally incongruent with egoism or moral relativism. Egoism is interested only in what is good for *me*; moral relativism allows each person to decide what is good for him or herself. While this may sound attractive at first, we can quickly recognize the shortcomings of these ethical positions. When it comes to egoism, if I am only interested in my own good, then I never have to be concerned about or responsible for anyone else (indeed, I should never have to make a sacrifice for another human being). Such egoism would make me a terrible friend, partner, or parent. And moral relativism is problematic because if everyone gets to decide what is right, true, good, and just, then morality becomes 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. (CORE 100 prepares students for subsequent courses in Xavier University’s E/RS Focus program, engaging every student in learning and living reflectively and responsibly for this purpose.¹¹)

To understand the implications of *Magis*, it is first necessary to establish two basic moral norms:

⁸ 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.

⁹ 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 (Geger, 18-19).

¹⁰ The goal of discernment is to pay attention to one’s life to become more aware of what is leading a person toward or away from God (or, if you prefer, toward or away from the process of humanization). For a more robust treatment of discernment and some practical exercises, see: Tim Muldoon, *The Ignatian Workout: Daily Spiritual Exercises for a Healthy Faith*. Chicago: Loyola Press, 2004 (especially pages 18-22).

¹¹ To learn more about this program, visit: <https://www.xavier.edu/ers/ERS-Focus.cfm>.

the inherent dignity of the human person and the common good of all. This means that human dignity is innate and intrinsic, not earned or lost. Because human beings are inherently social beings, the good of the person is inescapably linked to just relationships and the building up of a community oriented toward justice. The human dignity of each person and the shared good of the entire human family provide the horizon for thinking about justice. 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.¹² Geger proposes that Jesuit education, when ordered to *Magis*, “has the potential to transform [one’s] whole society” if we fully embrace its meaning.¹³ This underscores the essential bond between Jesuit education and the promotion of justice in the world.¹⁴

The Heart of Jesuit Education

Jesuit university students should be familiar with the Jesuit commitment to form “women and men for others” as described in Fr. Pedro Arrupe S.J.’s 1973 address in Valencia, Spain.¹⁵ Arrupe’s successor, Fr. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach S.J., went further in a speech at Santa Clara University in 2000, explaining that the essential task of Jesuit education is the “service of faith and promotion of justice.”¹⁶ In addition to these classic texts, two other passages help illustrate the core objectives of Jesuit education in the world today. The first is by Fr. Ignacio Ellacuría S.J., who was murdered while president of the University of Central America in San Salvador on November 16, 1989. Ellacuría 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.¹⁷

¹² 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.” Moral norms help us create the standards that can be shared in most cases, while allowing for exceptions based on unique abilities and needs.

¹³ Geger, 19.

¹⁴ As Geger writes, “Jesuit dedication to social justice is a clear manifestation of the *magis* in action” (24).

¹⁵ The full text of this speech is available here:

<http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/men-for-others.html>.

¹⁶ The full text of this speech is available here:

<http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/Kolvenbach/Kolvenbach-SantaClara.pdf>.

¹⁷ Fr. Ignacio Ellacuría S.J., “The Task of the Christian University,” Commencement Address at Santa Clara University, June 12, 1982. Available here:

<https://www.scu.edu/ic/programs/ignatian-tradition-offerings/stories/ignacio-ellacuria-sjs-june-1982-commencement-address-santa-clara-university.html>.

According to Ellacuría, the Jesuit university exists to help make students become more aware of reality so that they take responsibility for transforming it. In other words, each and every Jesuit university student should see their education as an opportunity to learn more about how justice is central to their education and personal development. In 1997, Fr. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach S.J. directly addressed students to express this vision for student formation. He proclaimed,

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.¹⁸

These passages from 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. The Jesuit value of *Cura Personalis* (meaning “care for the whole person”) instills a commitment to personal and communal formation that is attentive and responsive to the unique gifts and interests of each individual. Every one of us is 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.”¹⁹ In a world that prioritizes self-interest and personal achievement, *Magis* re-orientes our vision to the shared good of all, where the logic of interdependence reminds us that the good of each person is inherently linked to the good of the entire community.²⁰ This includes human as well as nonhuman creatures; Pope Francis (also a Jesuit priest) stated in his 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si’* that the earth and its inhabitants, the environment and its climate 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

¹⁸ As cited by Rockhurst University and available here: <https://ww2.rockhurst.edu/about/jesuit-mission>.

¹⁹ Geger, 26.

²⁰ 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” (no. 26).

relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment.” Since the earth and its ecosystem represent our only home (which we share with all), then protecting nonhuman creation is inextricably linked to our duties to our human brothers and sisters (as well as to 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.²¹

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 do not have peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other.” *Magis* requires fostering inclusive belonging since the “Greater 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. The “Greater Good” 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 because 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).

²¹ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, nos. 23, 156-159. Available at: http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

For these reasons, *Magis* cannot be reduced to vague concepts like excellence or generosity; it represents a vision of the “Greater Good” that is “powerfully counter-cultural,” especially in a world marked by so much despair, division, and injustice.²² 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.”²³ In addition to pursuing truth, beauty, and wisdom, *Magis* inspires a cultural critique that unveils whatever dehumanizes or disempowers; it prevents us from becoming complacent with an unjust status quo. Because God is the Creator of everything that exists, the God of Life and Love, then *Magis* (understood as “the Greater Glory of God”) is realized when we commit ourselves to the promotion of life and love. The heart of Jesuit education is to take up this work, bringing each and all closer to the fullness of life.

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 relevant vision of the good life, that which advances the flourishing of all creation. In philosophy and theology, the road to flourishing is marked by specific virtues, or good attitudes and habits that form the kind of moral character that promote personal and communal flourishing.²⁴ To illustrate practical connections between the Jesuit value of *Magis* and specific dispositions and actions, I propose five key virtues as pathways to explore the possibilities of living toward the “Greater Good.” By exploring **love, mercy, justice, solidarity, and hope** in the next section of this essay, I hope these virtues will help faculty and students discover points of entry into *Magis* across all disciplines. 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. 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

²² Geger, 27.

²³ Pope Francis, “Address to the 36th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus” (24 October 2016), available:

https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/october/documents/papa-francesco_20161024_visita-compagnia-gesu.html.

²⁴ 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 Saint 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.

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 of love that 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 we are saved 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 with you).²⁵ Importantly, the Christian tradition holds that no person—not even enemies—is exempt from our obligation to love. Saint John of the Cross summarizes this clearly: “love 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.²⁶ 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.” 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).

²⁵ 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.

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

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.²⁷

Pope Francis explains that he understands God's character and purpose through the lens of the gerund "mercifying:" *doing* mercy.²⁸ God is known through mercifying and God expects mercifying from and 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.²⁹ In his 2017 *TED Talk*, Pope Francis insists that tenderness is not weakness but fortitude.³⁰ Tenderness creates the conditions for us to recognize that we are loved, lovable, and capable of loving others since we belong to each other. Fr. 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

²⁷ Pope Francis, *The Name of God Is Mercy* tr. Oonagh Stransky (New York: Random House, 2016), 8-9.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁹ *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 88. Available:

https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html.

³⁰ Pope Francis, "Why the Only Future Worth Building Includes Everyone" *TED* (April 2017), available:

https://www.ted.com/talks/pope_francis_why_the_only_future_worth_building_includes_everyone/transcript?language=en.

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.³¹

Boyle later adds, "only the soul that ventilates the world with tenderness has any chance of changing the world."³² If our lives radiate tenderness, we will be in the world who God is.³³

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."³⁴ 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 continually 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 community³⁵).

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 "Action 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

³¹ Gregory Boyle, *Barking to the Choir: The Power of Radical Kinship* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2017), 54.

³² Boyle, 204.

³³ 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 *Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion* (New York: Free Press, 2010) 66.

³⁴ 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 S.J. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1977), 69 (emphasis removed). Donahue describes Jesus as "the sacrament of God's justice in the world" (Ibid., 88).

³⁵ A prime example of restorative justice is making reparations for the descendants of slaves. See Ta-Nehisi Coates' compelling essay, "The Case for Reparations" *The Atlantic* (June 2014), available: <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>.

redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation.”³⁶ Too often, Christians narrow their focus on personal piety or acts of optional service. 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 or endangers life.

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.”³⁷

In other words, justice addresses 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, non-persons, or even fated to a pre-mature death. This is what Catholic social teaching means in calling for the “preferential option for the poor,” a term coined by Fr. Pedro Arrupe S.J. in a letter to his Jesuit brothers in May 1968.³⁸ 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.”³⁹ Both Arrupe and Tutu highlight God’s preference for the least, the last, and the lowly 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.⁴⁰ Our task is to draw near those considered least, last, and lowly. For if we do not know people who are

³⁶ 1971 Synod of Bishops, “Justice in the World,” available:

<https://www1.villanova.edu/content/dam/villanova/mission/JusticeInTheWorld1971.pdf>.

³⁷ Cornel West, *Brother West: Living and Loving Out Loud* (New York: SmileyBooks, 2009), 232.

³⁸ Alfred T. Hennelly (ed.) *Liberation Theology: A Documentary History* (Maryknoll, Orbis, 1990), 77-83.

³⁹ As quoted in Robert McAfee Brown, *Unexpected News: Reading the Bible with Third World Eyes* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1984), 19.

⁴⁰ Jonathan Sacks, *To Heal a Fractured World: The Ethics of Responsibility* (New York: Schocken, 2005), 103.

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 when it comes to the demands of justice.

Solidarity: Although this word is often used to imply unity or strength in numbers, in Christian ethics, 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.⁴¹ 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, it is worth noting that race itself is a social construct; there is only one race (the human race) but we live in a society that confers unearned privilege and power to people who are white, while denying equal access to resources and social participation to people of color.⁴² 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

⁴¹ Christopher Ingraham, “Three quarters of whites don't have any non-white friends” *The Washington Post* (25 August 2014), available: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2014/08/25/three-quarters-of-whites-dont-have-any-non-white-friends/?utm_term=.363861d4d407.

⁴² For a more detailed discussion, see: Dahleen Glanton, “Yes, white ‘privilege’ is still the problem” *Chicago Tribune* (29 March 2018), available: <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/columnists/glanton/ct-met-white-privilege-dahleen-glanton-20180328-story.html>. See also: Meghan Clark, “For white Christians, non-racism is not enough” *America* (16 August 2017), available: <https://www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2017/08/16/white-christians-non-racism-not-enough>; George Yancy, “The ugly truth of being a black professor in America” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (29 April 2018), available: <https://www.chronicle.com/article/The-Ugly-Truth-of-Being-a/243234>.

demonizing will stop. We situate ourselves right next to the disposable so that the day will come when we stop throwing people away.⁴³

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 our 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.”⁴⁴ Solidarity is fundamentally about inclusive belonging, manifest through shared respect and responsibility, leaving out no one.⁴⁵

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 and deficient trust that leads to despair. 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.⁴⁶ 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.

Hope keeps us from panicking or becoming passive. It also softens the pain of suffering; Fr. William Lynch S.J. suggests that “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.” 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.”⁴⁷ 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 world marked by doubt 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

⁴³ Gregory Boyle, *Tattoos on the Heart*, 190.

⁴⁴ Boyle, *Barking to the Choir*, 165.

⁴⁵ At Xavier, we say “All for One and One for All.” If this were to apply to all persons—not just members of the Xavier community—this would strike close to the core meaning of solidarity.

⁴⁶ William F. Lynch S.J., *Images of Hope: Imagination as Healer of the Hopeless* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1974), 32.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 37, 40, 42.

possible.⁴⁸ Hope is not confined to wishing and waiting; it means living into the vision of the future you most deeply desire for yourself and the world. Fr. 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 over again. William James wrote, “The 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.”⁴⁹ Hope gets us out of bed in the morning and gives us reason to keep fighting, 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*.”⁵⁰ 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* through the lens of “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 “Greater Good.” This also helps us grow closer to God. In the words of Greg Boyle, *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.”⁵¹ Put differently, we grow closer to the “Greater Good” when we desire what God desires: the fullness of life for all, the common good that results from practicing love, mercy, justice, solidarity, and hope.

Appropriating the Greater Good:

To this point, our discussion has focused on what *Magis* means, why it matters, and how it provides a vision for human flourishing. The five virtues of love, mercy, justice, solidarity, and hope provide concrete attitudes and actions that can help us draw closer to *Magis*. Unless and until *Magis* is appropriated by individuals and communities, it will remain just another concept to read, write, or talk about. At this point, the key question becomes: how do I integrate *Magis* into my life so that I can orient myself to the “Greater Good”? **Contemplation, imagination, and vocation discernment** offer three tools to incorporate *Magis* into the personal habits and social fabric of life at Xavier University.

Contemplation is, as Fr. Walter Burghardt S.J. describes, “taking a long loving look at the real.”⁵² This means immersing oneself in reality, not to analyze it or argue about it, but to

⁴⁸ For other examples of the impact of hope, see Scott Barry Kaufman, “5 ways hope improves your success” *Fulfillment Daily* (2 October 2014), available: http://www.fulfillmentdaily.com/5-ways-hope-improves-success/?utm_content=buffer933ba.

⁴⁹ As quoted by Greg Boyle in *Barking to the Choir*, 85.

⁵⁰ Gabriel Marcel, “The Encounter with Evil,” in *Tragic Wisdom and Beyond* tr. Peter McCormick and Stephen Jolin (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 143.

⁵¹ Boyle, *Barking to the Choir*, 16.

⁵² Walter Burghardt, S.J., “Contemplation: A Long Loving Look at the Real” *Church* (1989), 89-98.

experience it, to recognize our unity with all that exists.⁵³ 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.”⁵⁴ 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.⁵⁵ 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.⁵⁶

In our busy world, 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, “Our goal should be to live life in radical amazement ... get up in the morning and look at the world in a way that takes

⁵³ To illustrate our connection with everything in the cosmos, I use a *Time* magazine interview with Neil deGrasse Tyson. Tyson reflects on the “the most astounding fact” he’s learned in his career as an astrophysicist. 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.” A compelling video of this reflection is available at: <https://youtu.be/9D05ej8u-gU>.

⁵⁴ Geger, 26.

⁵⁵ 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.

⁵⁶ Mindfulness is a related practice. Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh defines mindfulness as “the practice of being fully present and alive” in a way that unites the body and mind. He continues, it “is the energy that helps us to know what is going on in the present moment.” Mindfulness is awareness without judgment. And, just as contemplation aims for communion, so mindfulness leads to a sense of “inter-being,” the recognition of the unity of all that exists. For more on this topic, see Thich Nhat Hanh, *Love in Action* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1993) or *Living Buddha, Living Christ* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1995), among numerous other titles.

nothing for granted. Everything is phenomenal; everything is incredible; never treat life casually. To be spiritual is to be amazed.”⁵⁷ 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.⁵⁸ 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.⁵⁹

What does contemplation look like at college? It might be easy to take a “long loving look at the real” 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 Caf, or returning to your room and 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.⁶⁰ 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.⁶¹

⁵⁷ See “Radical Amazement” in *Abraham Joshua Heschel: Essential Writings* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2017), 58-59.

⁵⁸ 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.

⁵⁹ Burghardt, 94-98.

⁶⁰ Donna Freitas traces the exhausting effects of appearing happy, popular, and successful on social media, which backfires by leaving people feeling depressed, anxious, and isolated. See *The Happiness Effect: How Social Media is Driving a Generation to Appear Perfect at Any Cost*. Oxford University Press, 2017.

⁶¹ Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*. Abbey of Gethsemani, 1965.

Saint 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. We have to fight through the “honeymoon phase” of the initial excitement, stay faithful to the commitment over time, and eventually it will become like second nature.⁶²

A second tool is **imagination**. For some, imagination implies fantasy or illusion. But imagination is not escapism; it is a “vehicle for liberation.”⁶³ 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.⁶⁴ 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, 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.”⁶⁵ Pope Francis adds, “Whoever has imagination does not become rigid, has a sense of humor, always enjoys the sweetness of mercy and inner freedom.”⁶⁶ 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, “The possible’s slow fuse is lit by the imagination,” Fr. 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. 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

⁶² Jason Selk, “Habit-Formation: The 21 Day Myth” *Forbes* (15 April 2013), available at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jasonselk/2013/04/15/habit-formation-the-21-day-myth/#1f1fef1bdebc>.

⁶³ Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology* tr. J. Matthew Ashley (New York: Herder & Herder, 2007), 177-178.

⁶⁴ William Lynch, *Images of Hope*, 32.

⁶⁵ William Lynch S.J., *Christ and Prometheus: A New Image of the Secular* (University of Notre Dame, 1970), 23.

⁶⁶ Pope Francis, “Discourse to the Community of *La Civiltà Cattolica*” *La Civiltà Cattolica* (9 February 2017), available: <https://www.laciviltacattolica.it/articolo/discourse-of-the-holy-father-francis-to-the-community-of-la-civiltà-cattolica/>.

us from superficiality and torpor and awaken us to larger hopes and possibilities.”⁶⁷ Put simply, the more we stretch our imagination, the more we grow.

What does engaging the imagination look like at college? It 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, “It 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.” 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 when we sign up for a new club or activity, when we study abroad, or take 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.

This brings us to the third tool, **vocation discernment**. *Vocatio* in Latin means “calling.” Discerning your vocation has more to do with your purpose in life than with your occupation. If you do not yet have a clear sense of the meaning or purpose of your life, your Jesuit education at Xavier should help you discern what makes you tick, what you most want for your future, and who you desire to become. Fr. 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.”⁶⁸ 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?⁶⁹ 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 might help to journal about what you’ve enjoyed doing, learning, and tried to fix. It could also be useful to speak 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?⁷⁰ 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,

⁶⁷ Michael Paul Gallagher S.J., “Culture and Imagination as Battlegrounds” Shaping the Future: Networking Jesuit Higher Education for a Globalizing World Conference in Mexico City (21-25 April 2010), 3, 7.

⁶⁸ Michael Himes, *Doing the Truth in Love: Conversations about God, Relationships, and Service* (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), 56.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 57-58.

⁷⁰ Mark Manson, “The Most Important Question of Your Life” (6 November 2013), available: <https://markmanson.net/question>.

higher 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.⁷¹ If this sounds like resilience or grit, they may be linked. 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).⁷² For Saint 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.⁷³ Taking our vocation seriously is the result of feeling grateful for what we have received and affirming the good we have to offer the world. The more grateful and generous we can be, the more we contribute to the “Greater Good.”

Conclusion:

Magis not only serves as the reason why Xavier University exists, but can help spark and shape why you are here and the meaning you make from your experiences in and outside the classroom. The “Greater Good” serves as the moral norm to foster 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. This is the gift of our Jesuit education and the task that we have to carry out during our time together at Xavier University. Together. For Others. A.M.D.G.

* * * * *

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

- 1) What does *Magis* add to your sense of the FYS theme, the “Greater Good?” Why does it matter that you’re a part of this Jesuit university community? How do you want to be formed while at Xavier? What do you hope to contribute to this community – and beyond?
- 2) How does this discussion of love, mercy, justice, solidarity, and hope compare to your vision of “the good life”? What do these specific virtues invite you to ponder, question, and imagine possible? What would it take to incorporate these five values into your life, especially to “become more aware of reality in order to take responsibility for transforming it”?

⁷¹ Thomas Edison tried thousands of different prototypes before completing his light bulb. When asked about how he felt, having failed so many times, he replied: “I never failed once. I succeeded in proving those other ways will not work.”

⁷² Grit is more about gratitude, compassion, and pride than self-control according to David DeSteno in his article, “We’re teaching grit the wrong way,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (18 March 2018), available: <https://www.chronicle.com/article/We-re-Teaching-Grit-the/242854/>.

⁷³ Saint 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.”

- 3) How could you incorporate contemplation into your everyday routine? What would you hope to see, think, and feel? What change could practicing contemplation make possible in you and around you?
- 4) Henry David Thoreau wrote, “This world is but a canvas to our imagination.” What could your life be like if you felt more free to be authentic, vulnerable, compassionate, courageous, and generous? Using your imagination to paint the canvas of the world, how will your time at Xavier spark and shape the kind of future you want to create, the kind of society you want to help build, and the kind of person you hope to become?
- 5) How does *Magis* provide a lens for you to consider your vocation? How might this fit with your interests in particular areas of study, or potential occupations? Given the aim of Jesuit education to form “women and men for and with others” who “live a faith that does justice,” how might you commit your life to addressing ethical issues? How could you invite others to join your efforts to make a difference in the world?

* * * * *