Jesuit Education for Justice

A liberal arts education is an education which liberates. But, as the French theologian Jesuit Henri de Lubac put it, "the truth frees, not sincerity". Authentic freedom is not simply choosing; authentic freedom chooses what is good, what is just. Liberating education searches for the truth about the human to foster authentic freedom.

Now, Jesuit education: vision, choice, the promotion of justice

Vision. A controlling symbol for Ignatius, that of his Lord, is the Kingdom of God, a future created out of love and shaped in justice.

One does not have to be at a Jesuit university to put the question of controlling vision. But at a Jesuit university the question of an ultimate, all-embracing vision must be posed at a university which undertakes a liberating education, whatever the answer of any individual.

Choice. A central focus of Jesuit spirituality is action. More than just truth for its own sake, the point of Jesuit education is choice - to use Ignatius expression, caritas discreta: choice that is informed, self-critical, discerning; the point of Jesuit education is formation of contemplatives in action, summoned to active engagement in shaping our shared history in the world.

Justice. Vatican Council II, discerning “the signs of the times,” elaborated the Church’s responsibility - I use its words - to know our world, learn from it, appreciate and critique its movement, and serve its development. A follow up Synod of Bishops declared: “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”. The Society of Jesus, in turn, set forth as a guiding purpose of all its work “the service of faith and the promotion of justice.”

What is the story here? Quite clear: movement away from faith considered purely individual and interior to a faith that takes seriously the world and the history we shape in the world.

Question: What is the cash value of talk about new life, resurrection, a kingdom of love, justice and peace if one understands faith as a matter purely individual and interior? Answer: zilch.

A university in the Jesuit tradition will, in the manner appropriate to a university, inform its life with work for the promotion of justice.

Now, promotion of justice: definition, spirit, structure

Definition. Justice means right relationships. Philosophers such as Aristotle, Kant, Mill, Rawls can help clarify structures of justice. But our understanding of justice: that the Catholic, Ignatian tradition derives from the gift of revelation. The Word of God lays out the dynamic fundamental to justice, right relationships. So, spirit.

Spirit. The Word of God speaks clearly: the fundamental dynamic in justice is love, compassion. Compassion love: that spirit establishes right relationships within our world (natural as well as cultural), with one another in society (close in and globally), with God. Purely rational analysis does not reach to that fundamental dynamic, caring love. And, in any case, mind does not supply for heart.

Structure. God created the world out of love. Essentially bound into, essentially part of that world are human persons, psycho physical creatures: body essentially ensouled, soul
essentially embodied. Human persons are not angels, pure spirits manque; we are essentially inner worldly beings, essentially social, essentially historical, responsible for the world and for shaping a shared history in the world.

So, creation of our world out of love. But deeper: creation for Incarnation. God radically identifies with the world and our history. And finally, fully, resurrection. Resurrection, not immortality of the soul. Fulfillment beyond death of the whole person, fulfillment of the world of which persons are part. Resurrection reveals no next life; it reveals the fulfillment of this life. St. Paul: “The whole of creation groans for the revelation of the children of God.”

> In sum, by God we are called to care for this world out of love, called, like Christ, to do what we can, with God, for the redemption and fulfillment of this world. That fact, as I see it, is central in the vision of a university animated by Catholic, Jesuit spirituality. If not fantasy or mere wishing, this account of our hope requires a multidimensional commitment.

This afternoon we focus commitment to sustainability. So, I close with lines from a poem of the Jesuit, G. M. Hopkins, “God’s Grandeur”:

Generations have trod, and trod, and trod:
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man’s smudge and share man’s smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot fell, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the deepest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs -
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

May God’s Spirit at work in us hatch this university brood well.

Otto Hentz, S.J.
Trustee Day
University of Scranton
2.9.05