Rooted in the Renaissance.

The Jesuit Mission at Saint Louis University

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Founded in 1818, Saint Louis University, where I teach theology, boasts of being the first university west of the Mississippi. That makes us older than Berkeley, Stanford, or even Washington University, our parvenu sister across the city. Personally, I take more satisfaction at being part of a U.S. network of twenty-eight Jesuit colleges and universities (some 160 university faculties worldwide), with a heritage going back to 1548. That gives all of us at Jesuit schools a pedigree eighty-eight years older than Harvard's, and153 years older than Yale's. It gives all of us a family tree with roots in the Renaissance.

Merold Westphal in this issue of *Conversations* makes the case that any college or university that claims to be Christian must offer a genuine liberal education founded in a Christian humanism. He goes on to argue for a spectrum of concentric circles, with one's distinctive (in our case Catholic) humanism at the center, but then moving out first to other Christian humanisms, then other monotheistic traditions, and finally other religious and secular humanisms, ancient and modern.

I agree wholeheartedly with Westphal. If we fail to introduce our students to the rich heritage of Catholic, Judeo-Christian, humanist culture, we are not living up to our respective mission statements and open ourselves to the allegation of dishonest advertising. But there is more than one brand of Catholic humanism. Drawing on Westphal's proposition, I would argue that having a Jesuit identity and mission requires us at Jesuit colleges and universities to place Jesuit humanism at the center of all those concentric circles of humanisms.

Renaissance Humanism

Saint Louis University's mission statement describes us as "guided by the spiritual and intellectual ideals of the Society of Jesus." Those ideals, as one should expect, were profoundly shaped by the era and culture in which the Society originated. Contrary to popular misconcep-

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tion, that era was not the Counter-Reformation. The Society of Jesus first took root in an era and culture steeped in Renaissance humanism.

Contrary to another popular misconception, Renaissance humanism was not a school or system of philosophy. Even less was it pagan or anti-Christian. Rather it was a cultural and educational program whose center can roughly be described as literature — the Latin and Greek classics. In the student slang of Italy's 15th century universities, the *umanisti* were the counterpart and colleagues of the *canonisti* and *artisti*. But they studied and taught not canon law or art, not theology or metaphysics, but grammar and rhetoric, history and ethics — what today we call the humanities but what they called, borrowing a phrase from Cicero, the *studia humanitatis*. From these Renaissance *umanisti* came the idea of humanism.

The humanist movement constituted a new orientation in education and culture and eventually turned into something of an educational revolt. Humanists disdained what they regarded as the debased Latin of the medieval schoolmen and criticized the cerebral approach of their summas and commentaries. The humanists' criticism of medieval scholasticism has often been misread as an attack against Christianity and religion. But it was in fact an attempt by practitioners of one discipline to overcome the intellectual hegemony of another. Though some contemporary usage has come to identify "humanism" with atheism or irreligion, modern scholarship finds that practically all the Renaissance humanists were genuinely Christian. The humanist movement, in short, was neither religious nor irreligious but literary.

From their classicism came other characteristics of Renaissance humanism.The very name for the discipline, *studia humanitatis*, implied a claim that an education in classical literature served to cultivate a certain desirable kind of human being. One expression of that ideal was the "uomo universale" or whole person, developed as far as possible in all forms of human virtue. Petrarch, arguably the father of Renaissance humanism, criticized any education that was merely cerebral. The humanist credo was that good literature would produce good character.

The whole person, from the Renaissance perspective, conjoined theory to practice, and civic to private virtue. The study of Latin orators and statesmen like Cicero and Seneca led naturally to the ideal of an active over a reclusive life. Good oratory was prized not only for its aesthetic qualities but its capacity to shape public opinion, enhancing the orator's ability to fulfil civic duties.

The humanists' view of classical antiquity obviously affected their thinking about other cultures and themselves as individuals. It influenced their ideas about human dignity, education, and civic, social responsibility. Those ideas had germinated in Italy but by the 16th-century spread throughout all of Europe, becoming the most pervasive component of Renaissance culture. Before beginning professional training at a university, practically every 16th century scholar received a humanistic education in a secondary school. This certainly was the case for Ignatius Loyola and the companions he gathered around himself in Paris. Despite their differences in social class and national origins, all of them had been educated by humanists. That influence would remain with them as individuals and as a community. It would become part of the very substance and ethos of the Society of Jesus and the mission it espoused.

Jesuit Humanism and Mission

We ordinarily don't think of Ignatius Loyola as a humanist. He obviously does not fit the modern definition or the mistaken stereotype of a neo-pagan intellectual. But if you think of Renaissance humanism as an orientation in education and culture, with the characteristics outlined above, then Ignatius and his companions were first the products and then the purveyors of humanistic education and culture.

The very vow that Ignatius and his companions took on Montmartre on August 15, 1534, was peculiarly stamped by Renaissance rhetoric. They resolved to stay together and go to the Holy Land to serve God and help people. But if they could not find passage within a year, they would present themselves to the Pope and ask him to tell them where to serve. That proviso, odd perhaps to us, was typical of the times. Those first Jesuits had learned in their humanistic studies the rhetorical requirement of accommodating one's words to one's audience, and therefore one's actions to one's circumstances.

Jesuit education, Jesuit ministries, and even Ignatius's Spiritual Exercises exemplify the influence of Renaissance humanism. The Exercises engage the "whole person," imagination and will as well as mind, as one discerns the voice of God in one's deepest desires. The rhetorical principle of accommodation is evident as Ignatius instructs the director to adapt the exercises to the age, education, and ability, the circumstances and spiritual condition of the person making them. Toward the end of the Exercises, in the celebrated contemplation on love, Ignatius reminds us that love is demonstrated

"more in deed than in words." Contemplation is meant to result in active service in the world, a key component of Jesuit mission.

Directing people in the Spiritual Exercises, the Jesuits' first ministry, became the paradigm for all their others. The first Jesuits moved people first to listen for God's voice, to reflect and discern, and then to love and serve God by loving and helping people. And from the very beginning it was clear that helping people meant "whole persons," not disembodied spirits. Waiting in Venice for the ship that never came to take them to the Holy Land, the first Jesuits not only preached in town squares but scrubbed floors and nursed patients in a hospital for incurables, most of them suffering from syphilis.

Once in Rome the Jesuits engaged in other ministries, but always to whole persons. When they preached it was to the heart as well as the head. After only a year, the city was struck by an unusually severe winter, and the Jesuits found the streets of Rome filled with hundreds of homeless people driven there from the countryside, exhausted from hunger. Accustomed to begging for their own bread, the Jesuits now begged for the homeless, moved them into their own quarters and other shelter, and fed them.

Their response to that winter would become a pattern for future Jesuit activities and a component of their identity. They enlisted the help of lay men and women as partners to address the social crises and problems confronting them. After several years in Rome, in 1543, Ignatius opened Casa Santa Marta, a kind of halfway house for women driven by poverty and other circumstances into prostitution. Jesuits elsewhere followed suit, organizing efforts to find these women housing, work, and even husbands. They did so with the help of lay people, especially women, organized into confraternities, who eventually took the work over altogether. This too became a pattern — beginning a ministry and then turning it over to lay partners.

In 1548, at the request of the city fathers at Messina, Sicily, the Jesuits opened their first school. They had already been educating their own recruits, but founding their own school was something new. The idea was appealing — to form young men who could eventually make a difference in society. Shaped themselves by humanist teachers, Ignatius and the companions espoused the humanist credo that good literature produced good persons. And there was no institution more characteristic of the humanist enterprise than the school.

Their venture into founding schools proved to be such an immediate and resounding success that education soon became the dominant activity of the fledgling society. Educating young men was an ideal way of influencing their families as well as the next generation of leaders, and their schools gave the Jesuits an entree into the civic life of communities that they could never have enjoyed otherwise. Jesuits began not only teaching the natural sciences but writing books on them, going on to establish observatories and laboratories. Teaching the highly valued art of eloquence led Jesuits to introduce drama into their curriculum, from whence evolved music, dance, and even opera, as Jesuits began seeing themselves as having a cultural as well as a religious mission.

Teaching the pre-Christian, Latin classics, however, remained at the heart of Jesuit education, with Cicero enjoying pride of place. Little wonder then that when Matteo Ricci found himself reading Confucian classics in China, he could do so with the same respect and admiration as he had learned as a boy for the classical Latin authors. Similarly Roberto de Nobili in India studied the classic texts of Hindu religion and culture and assumed the lifestyle of a Hindu ascetic so he could engage in conversation with Brahmin scholars. Here was accommodation at work once again, and the humanist conviction that truth was where you found it.

In 1975, at its 32nd General Congregation, the Society of Jesus under the leadership of its Superior General, Pedro Arrupe, declared in its celebrated fourth decree that "the mission of the Society of Jesus is the service of faith, of which the promotion of justice is an absolute requirement." The decree went on to state that "in one form or another, this has always been the mission of the Society." I hope that, brief as they are, the foregoing remarks on Renaissance and Jesuit humanism show this to be true.

Jesuit historian John O'Malley, who has written extensively about the early Jesuits, points out that education for Renaissance humanists was the primary instrument for reforming church and society. Its aim was not knowledge for its own sake but the "formation of good taste and right values and the cultivation of the ability to act effectively and responsibly in the public sector."[1] In

[1] John O'Malley, S.J., "The Jesuit Educational Enterprise in Historical Perspective," in Rolando E. Bonachea (ed.), *Jesuit Higher Education: Essays on an American Tradition of Excellence* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1989), p. 16.

other words, as Westphal rightly insists, the "ideals" of Jesuit education, ensconced in so many words in all of our respective mission statements, presumes that we provide more than vocational training. But what does it mean to act responsibly and effectively in the public sector? And what did the 32nd General Congregation mean by justice? Not only more than vocational training, I would suggest it means as well that we provide more than service learning and social awareness.

At their most recent (1995) 34th General Congregation, the Jesuit delegates expressed their conviction that the service of faith and the promotion of justice require that the faith be inculturated and engaged in inter-religious dialogue and that injustice be seen as embedded in cultural attitudes as well as economic structures. Here the Congregation can point to the pioneering experience of Ricci and de Nobili. The faith that does justice, in other words, must embrace the cultural dimensions of social life and the way cultures define themselves with respect to that which gives meaning to life.

Decree Two of the 34th General Congregation declared faith, justice, culture, and inter-religious dialogue to be inseparable from one another as integrating principles of all Jesuit ministries. The *patres congregati* put it bluntly:

"Today we realize clearly:
No service of faith without
promotion of justice,
entry into cultures,
openness to other religious experiences.

No promotion of justice without
communicating faith,
transforming cultures,
collaboration with other traditions.

No inculturation without
communicating faith with others
dialogue with other traditions
commitment to justice

No dialogue without
sharing with others
evaluating cultures
concern for justice." [2]

If any of us are looking for criteria for gauging how well we are doing when it comes to living the Jesuit mission, those four principles — faith, justice, culture, and dialogue — provide as good a template as any I know.

The Jesuit Mission at Saint Louis University

Though its campus is graced by any number of fountains, gardens, and statues Saint Louis University's Renaissance heritage is most evident in the humanist education it seeks to provide its students and in the campus culture it tries to create with a variety of programs. Without attempting to list all of them here, I will try to highlight some of the more successful, using the four principles of Jesuit mission cited above.

Faith — however you define it, engages the whole person in a response to life and the question of its meaning. For Ignatius as for Jesus, that kind of faith engagement called for partnership and community. Living the faith dimension of the Jesuit mission at Saint Louis University has been greatly a matter of creating a sense of partnership and community, particularly among faculty and staff. The 34th General Congregation spoke of an "extended Ignatian family" that reaches beyond the confines of the Jesuit community. Without using that kind of language, the office of Mission and Ministry has spearheaded work with non-Jesuit faculty and staff to do just that — to create a sense of belonging to something greater, of being partners with the Jesuits in their Renaissance tradition of educating whole persons, addressing the spirit and heart as well as the mind.

Addressing the faith dimension of our students' lives is primarily the task of campus ministry, with its popular Sunday 10 p.m. Masses, team retreats, and shared prayer groups. But campus ministry cannot do it alone, and the Office of Mission and Ministry has sought to create a culture of mission akin to the academic culture on campus by addressing the need for faculty and staff development. In 1998 the University sponsored a "Journey Conference" similar to the Heartland conferences on mission and identity. This has been followed up by a series of "Journey Luncheons," at which students as well as faculty and staff speak on one or another aspect of Jesuit mission. Such projects are supported by the Marchetti Jesuit Endowment Fund, itself made possible by the contribution of the University's Jesuit community.

No project, however, has involved more faculty and staff than the organized group discussions surrounding *Shared Vision*, the three-part video series on the origins, development, and present state of Jesuit mission. *Shared Vision* was never intended solely for private viewing or

[2] Documents of the 34th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus. (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1995), p. 37.

passive learning. It was conceived from the beginning to be a catalyst for conversation. Since the spring of 1996, more than 1,700 faculty, staff, and administrators have participated in group discussions around one or another segment of *Shared Vision*. More than five hundred have completed the entire three-part video series. The explanation for those impressive numbers is the support of the University President, who sends a letter every semester, encouraging faculty and staff to participate in the program. The staff, in particular, appreciate the fact that the opportunity to learn and talk about the Jesuit mission comes on the University's clock, not their free time.

If the group discussions around *Shared Vision* have been fruitful, much of the credit goes to the forty faculty and staff who have volunteered to serve as trained facilitators of the conversations. With a very few exceptions, these facilitators are not Jesuits or members of the campus ministry staff. They are men and women who by freely giving of their time embody and exemplify the ownership the program seeks to inspire. They make it possible for more than a dozen sessions to be offered each semester. The group discussions have always been invitational. I would suggest, however, that graduate students granted teaching assistantships and entrusted with teaching undergraduate classes might well be required to learn about the origins and distinctiveness of Jesuit education before they are allowed to participate in it.

Along with several of my colleagues, I have used the *Shared Vision* video series with success in various undergraduate classes. I find that our students are genuinely interested in what makes their education different. They come to understand and appreciate the rationale behind all the philosophy and theology requirements in the core. I have had students ask why they did not learn about Jesuit education and identity sooner, in their first years at the University.

The Office of Mission and Ministry also offers evenings of recollection for faculty and staff, twice a year at Advent and Lent. It also sponsors weekend retreats and a monthly series of Mondays in the Ark, at which faculty and staff discuss their spirituality in light of the Ignatian tradition. But the most important effort in this vein has been the Bridges Program, which offers an experience of the full Ignatian spiritual exercises, according to the so-called 19th annotation.[3]

In the 19th annotation of his *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius wrote, in good Renaissance humanist fashion, that for those who could not leave their work or responsibilities for a thirty-day retreat, the Exercises should be

CONVINCED THAT THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A VALUES FREE EDUCATION THE JESUIT MISSION IS EXPLICIT AND INTENTIONAL IN ITS COMMITMENT TO EDUCATING "MEN AND WOMEN FOR OTHERS

[3] Much of the success of the *Shared Vision* discussion groups and the Bridges Program is due to the organizational skill and work of Assistant to the Vice Provost for Mission and Ministry, Mary Flick. For further information, she can be contacted by email at (flickmj@slu.edu).

accommodated to their circumstances. Since the inception of Bridges in the fall of 1994, more than eighty-five faculty, staff, alumni, and friends have made the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises in this accommodated manner. Over a period of some eight months, retreatants make the spiritual exercises for an hour or more daily, meeting with their spiritual directors weekly, gathering with others making the exercises several times at major stages in the retreat.

Bridges offers faculty and staff a "radical" professional development opportunity. Those who make the exercises find themselves deeply affected not only in their personal lives and spirituality but, often enough, professionally and academically as well. If a claim can be made for the existence of a Jesuit pedagogy, it is one that emulates the spiritual exercises — by valuing experience, eliciting reflection on experience, and fostering conversation. From my experience with students and their course evaluations, those are precisely the kinds of qualities our students welcome. If anything makes our institutions distinctive from secular universities, it is that faculty can use "the word 'God'" in a classroom without embarrassment. Bridges gives faculty, staff, and administrators the courage to do so.

Justice — as the 34th General Congregation pointed out—is more than a matter of economic structures. It is personal, professional, social, and global, cutting across all aspects of our lives as individuals, communities, and societies. Convinced that there is no such thing as a values-free education, our Jesuit mission is explicit and intentional in its commitment to educating "men and women for others." But that ideal requires us to take a long academic look at all that it means to augment our teaching of information and skills with the consideration of values. Once again, at Saint Louis University this has meant beginning with faculty development.

The most ambitious project along these lines has been Ethics Across the Curriculum.[4] Now in its third year, the program was initiated with a small-scale qualitative study of faculty attitudes on the meaning of ethics to determine how ethics could best be taught. It was discovered that a surprising number of efforts focusing on ethics already existed in a variety of academic units. The program respects the autonomy of these various efforts but seeks to enhance them by facilitating exchange of information among them.

Ethics Across the Curriculum aims to impact students by stimulating conversation among faculty about ethical issues. To this end it has sponsored lectures and workshops and offered awards for research and curriculum development. The program has looked at ethics in undergraduate, graduate, and professional education and helped develop two different courses on computer science technology and ethics.

Ethical issues, at least with respect to professional ethics, are deemed appropriate subject matter for every discipline and are not relegated solely to the philosophy and theology departments. These latter two, however, bear a special responsibility in the core curriculum to provide the information and tools for responsible decision-making on what it means to live justly under today's social conditions. Academic study, however, does not do this alone. Justice, like love, is learned as well as expressed by deeds more than words.

The Community Outreach Center coordinates student volunteer work and service learning. It enlists the participation of nearly two thousand students who give some twenty-nine thousand hours of service a year in the local community — mentoring and tutoring inner-city children, visiting the elderly, providing hospitality and help to the homeless, working with agencies like Habitat for Humanity, Ronald McDonald House, and the Salvation Army Harbor Light. Similarly, Campus Ministry sponsors a massive food and fund raiser at Thanksgiving and spring break service trips to Appalachia and Catholic Worker Houses around the country.

Instilling students with a sense of the faith that does justice requires reflection as well as action. No program does so more intensely than Micah House, a residential, academic, and service program integrated around the theme of social justice and peace in urban America. Students of all faiths, whatever their majors, are welcome to participate. They live together in a community and take team-taught inter-disciplinary courses, exploring the ideals of justice and social order in the Judeo-Christian, Greco-Roman traditions. In psychology and advanced writing courses, they examine the psychological and social problems that hinder the realization of those ideals — at the same time doing community service, learning leadership skills, and attending weekly meetings to reflect on their experience.

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[4] Ethics across the Curriculum is directed by John Kavanaugh, S.J. with the able assistance of its program coordinator, Donna Werner. More information on the program can be obtained by contacting the coordinator by email (wernerdj@slu.edu).

The University's commitment to educating students for justice was highlighted last November, when it provided free transportation and accommodations for any students who wanted to go to Fort Benning, GA, to join in the national effort to close the School of the Americas, responsible for training some of the worst human rights abusers in the western hemisphere. All the Jesuit colleges and universities were represented at the peaceful protest and teach-in, but none with a larger contingent than that from Saint Louis University. That was because our President was willing to commit University funds to facilitate our students' participation, even though it meant opening himself to some criticism.

Culture and *Inter-Religious Dialogue* can be treated here in tandem because they are intrinsically related. Religion constitutes the depth dimension of any culture and invariably grounds its unexamined assumptions, values, and ideals. The global village has become a truism as well as a cliché. Similarly our Jesuit campuses have rendered oceanic divides inconsequential and have come to mirror the same global diversity. But at the same time we have the most to do here. Inter-religious dialogue and cultural exchange are only in their initial stages at our university. We have yet to take full advantage of the opportunities our students afford us. But there are beginnings.

When I teach my comparative course on the Abrahamic faiths (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), the discussions are not about "them" but about "us." The same is true of my colleagues teaching Oriental religions and culture or any of the courses that meet the diversity requirement in our core. Believing, as I do, in the pedagogical value of experience for achieving insight, I regularly require my students to attend services at one of the Jewish temples in the city and the Islamic center on our campus. (Dare I confess? I also require them to experience Mass at an Episcopal church at which a woman priest presides.) The students reflect on their experiences and draw their own conclusions, but invariably acknowledge that they have learned as much about themselves and their own religious tradition as about other traditions.

The clearest proof of the University's respect for cultural and religious diversity is the annual inter-faith service that marks the spring semester. For the past five years, a prayer service has been conducted each February in the College Church at which Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian students participate. Students from one religious tradition introduce friends from another religious tradition, relating how they have come to value them and their religious heritage. Sacred texts from the various traditions are read. All have a similar theme. The highlight of the service, however, is always the dance, in which one or two young women in Indian costume move gracefully across the sanctuary floor to the music of the sitar, re-creating the worship in a Hindu temple.

Looking down from lofty pedestals on the high altar, the statues of Ignatius Loyola and Francis Xavier survey a scene and an era they themselves could hardly have imagined. We have come a long way since their day. But the humanist values they espoused — accommodated to new circumstances down the centuries by Jesuits like Ricci and de Nobili — endure and continue to unfold in ways even we cannot foresee. The Jesuit heritage and mission live on at Saint Louis University thanks to an active and growing partnership between the Jesuit community and their "extended Ignatian family." With its roots in the Renaissance, it is a family tree of which we can all be proud.