



REFLECTIONS ON THE LIVING TRADITION

The Predicament of Jesuit Higher Education

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Undo our captivity, O LORD,
like a torrent in the southern desert.

*Converte, Domine, captivitatem nostram,
sicut torrens in austro.*

—Psalm 126:4

Prefatory Notes

1. This critical analysis aims to produce a refocused unity, a shared concept, and a greater apostolic effectiveness in Jesuit higher education. This essay may, however, lead to intense *disputatio*, denial, or dismissal. Solid, sober, and well-grounded criticism of these ideas is certainly welcomed by the author.
2. Jesuits and their close allies may be involved in education as a spiritual work of mercy (“instructing the ignorant,” that is, providing the needy with basic learning that helps them to attain to a better life). This paper, however, is not at all about such a socially beneficial endeavor. No one should dispute or denigrate the social good that is being provided for the needy, even within the present framework that is being taken to task here. But the subject of this essay is *Jesuit education properly* so called—an enterprise quite different from the spiritual work of “educating the ignorant.” Without this distinction, this essay will necessarily be misinterpreted and some counter-arguments will likely be proposed in vain.

A healthy education is essential to the common good. After parental example, it is the means *par excellence* by which the young might be helped to become mature, positive-minded, well-grounded, responsible, and productive persons, persons who are able in turn to improve on what they have inherited, serve the common good appropriately, participate in the fashioning of a unified working society, and successfully parent another productive generation. The very effort to provide a healthy education itself motivates the older generation to reflect well upon what is life's best and to try to live up to their high ideals as well as possible. Such an effort enhances the tone of the entire community.

The essential and many-sided spiritual and civic values of education was no doubt one reason why the Society of Jesus has been, even from its primitive coalescence at the University of Paris in 1534, deeply invested in the project of Christian studies.¹ The current social and educational crises in America, well and widely belabored in print for decades now, urgently call for a review of Jesuit higher education in the American context.

It is time to look back with a discerning eye. Have the Society's choices over the last 60 years been for the best? Has the Society "kept up" in essential fidelity to its identity and mission? Has it provided the good stewardship and exemplary leadership that might reasonably be expected of it, precisely in the face of the current challenges? Where would a thorough corporate *examen* lead Jesuits and their close allies now?² If something must be changed, what kinds of reconfigurations of mind, heart, and administration are needed? This paper offers positions on three major aspects of the Society's educational work that urgently invite careful scrutiny and timely action, as they seem to pose serious obstacles to apostolic success. In conclusion, I will propose a concrete way to begin to reverse the misdirections, challenging any interested readers to suggest a better way forward.

I. In or Out?

Within the Society of Jesus in the United States, two models can usefully frame Jesuit thinking about its higher educational institutions. One model has the Society being mostly "out"; the other, significantly "in." It is essen-

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- 1 See Claude Pavur, S.J., *In the School of Ignatius: Studious Zeal and Devoted Learning* (Chestnut Hill, MA: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2019). See also the letter drafted by Juan de Polanco for Ignatius on the Society's involvement in studies ("The Society's Involvement in Studies [1551]," in *Jesuit Pedagogy, 1540–1616: A Reader*, ed. Cristiano Casalini and Claude Pavur, S.J. [Chestnut Hill, MA: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2016], 55–59.) Of course, the Church has always been invested in education, quite in line with its Jewish ancestry (*Torah* = "instruction").
 - 2 An *examen* is a prayerful, probing analysis of the movements of grace and sin in one's life. It can also be employed beyond the individual level.

tial to get this basic orientational decision right. Let me first explain what I mean by these two models.

Model 1: “Out”

The Society of Jesus has stepped back from its governing of the universities. It is the age of the laity, so the previous religious “owners” are turning over the most extensive management to lay colleagues and they will maintain as long as possible a presence in service of Jesuit ideals at a lay-run institution. Jesuits will act primarily as professionals among professionals, in the classrooms and labs, in departmental and faculty meetings, in campus ministry activities, and in various administrative posts, carrying whatever apostolic impact they can in those positions—as leaven in the dough. Jesuits’ credentials must parallel those of the others in such positions, according to the understandings prevalent in higher education today.

A variation on this model allows for some linkage to local or regional Jesuit authorities: documents produced by the Society of Jesus provide a general template for the essentially lay-run institution to follow if it is to claim Jesuit identity.³ A representative of the province *curia* (headquarters) makes a yearly visitation and conducts interviews with selected people to get a sense of how the university might be fulfilling Jesuit criteria. This liaison agent has no direct authority. He writes up a report for the provincial to review. Presumably, if the school is not in compliance, some undefined period of time might be given for a specified improvement. If in serious default, the institution could conceivably be declared “non-Jesuit,” or it might simply decide it was time to renounce its Jesuit identity—though presumably it would still be able to advertise itself as “Jesuit-founded” or “in the Jesuit tradition.” The Society in this variation of Model 1 does not have on-site power to shape the details and workings of the apostolate in a timely, hands-on, substantive way. The institution runs itself. Jesuits will tend to be one voice (or, more typically, a collection of voices) among the many voices of the institution, albeit with some historical connections that others do not have.

Model 2: “In”

The Society of Jesus is expected by the original understandings of the separate incorporation agreements to continue to have a substantively directive

3 See the document entitled “Characteristics of Jesuit Higher Education: A Guide for Mission Reflection,” originally produced in 2013. A link to the current version is available at <https://ajcunet.edu/mission-and-identity/mission-priority-examen/>, accessed February 7, 2025.

role in the running of the institutions.⁴ It is part of the Society's *apostolic responsibility* (not the result of a grasping for power and control) to have significant say in certain matters bearing on the core mission of the school, for it is not simply an educational institution but a *Jesuit* educational institution. There must be differences that distinguish Jesuit institutions from secular counterparts. Those differences must derive from the Society's Institute, that is, its mission as officially stated, its self-understanding, and its foundational charters and documents. The provincial is to be understood as an agent *within* the organizational flowchart for the university, not as an "outside element." His review of situations can lead to real results in "real time" (not postponed for a general annual review and eventual institutional follow-up). His remit is relatively limited but essential in certain mission-related matters.⁵

Making the Choice

Most American Jesuits assume that Model 1 is operative, valid, and satisfactory. It is certainly the one most obviously being followed. The clearest sign of this is that almost all Jesuit colleges and universities now have quickly moved to install lay presidents, usually with the approbation of the Society.⁶ Secondly, Jesuit professors generally serve their departments as "good citizens of the Academy." The departments can veto their applications or their hiring at the very start, regardless of their mission-related po-

4 "Separate incorporation" means the legal separation of the Jesuit community from the ownership and total governance of the institution, and it also implies the chartering of the institution's own governing Board of Trustees (which could be designed to include both lay and Jesuit membership). Sometimes there was a second "higher" board, the Board of Members, which was an all-Jesuit board with the ultimate power to re-write or amend the charter. Separate incorporation began to take place in United States Jesuit colleges and universities in 1967, with changes being made at St. Louis University. An interesting historical and canonical question is this: Where do we find the warrant or permission for this alienation of Church property?

5 An outmoded form of Model 2 gives the local provincial charge of the oversight of the whole institution. For example, he once had the authority to appoint certain departmental chairs directly and to approve or deny all proposed institutional expenses that exceeded a certain amount. No argument is being made here for a return to this version of the model.

6 The first lay president of a Jesuit institution of higher education in the United States was the Dominican sister Maureen Fay, president of the University of Detroit Mercy from 1990 to 2004. The first lay president not a member of a religious congregation was John J. DeGioia, installed at Georgetown University in 2001. The number of Jesuit presidents for the twenty-seven American Jesuit colleges and universities now stands at four (and is expected to fall to three soon).

tential for the university. The Jesuits usually compete with other applicants on an open search to get hired on standard secular criteria, and they follow the typical tenure-track procedures in departments, often with little or no account taken of their ten extra years of Jesuit training and experience. What does it typically matter to a physics department if the person might have degrees in spirituality, philosophy, and theology? Secular standards are more stringently enforced for Jesuits than Jesuit standards are enforced (or even defined) for lay colleagues, who might perhaps be asked in their hiring interviews if they “can live with” the mission statement published for the institution. Thirdly, very influential Jesuit voices have spoken up publicly for the approach described as Model 1, with no demurral coming from the Society’s leadership. The most striking historical example of this comes from a special Jesuit heritage day lecture given at one Jesuit university in the mid-1990s: a very prominent Jesuit priest told the lay faculty that the Society had essentially given them “a blank check.” The clear message was that the mission was being left solely in their hands and not at all with the Society of Jesus.

Lastly, there are minor but telling expressions of support for Model 1. These have been directly witnessed by or trustworthily reported to the author of this essay. For example, at one prominent Jesuit university that had chosen its first lay president, it was reported that two Jesuits had been nominated for the position but had declined. One Jesuit there, clearly working from a Model 1 mentality, opined that “It is about time for [this university] to have a lay president.” In the 1990s, a Jesuit campus minister at a Midwestern Jesuit institution stated at a Jesuit gathering: “We Jesuits should never meet on our own to talk about the university because it is a lay collaborative endeavor.” Such an idea would seem to preclude any “Jesuit position” ever being taken through the focused deliberation of the local Jesuit community, even while other groups might meet and work out their own positions, or even form voting blocs. At that same university, an attempted informal breakfast gathering for Jesuit board members and the Jesuit community failed to draw more than a very few Jesuit trustees. It seemed that such a gathering, modest as it was, might too easily be taken as Jesuit connivance for power rather than as a *bona fide* way of keeping the Jesuit voice coherent and audible. Such an interaction of Jesuit community and Jesuit trustees was never attempted again.

The disconcerting likelihood is that, despite the Society’s option for Model 1, that model is apparently *not at all* consonant with (and may be directly contradictory to) the original understandings of the separate incorporations. If research into the university archives someday proves this to be the case, then it is doubtful that there should be any sanction for such a

radical recasting of this original understanding without a very hard review and thoroughgoing deliberation by the Society. Even without such documentary confirmation, we know what the historical record tells us: many institutions directly stipulated the necessity of a continuing Jesuit presidency, strong Jesuit board membership, ongoing relationships with the provincials, Jesuit communities on campus, Jesuit and Catholic self-identification, and promotion of that identity in the brochures. These things suggest not just Jesuit *ad hoc* presences, but real Jesuit heft (though *not* “imperial control”) in management. They certainly do not suggest Model 1. So declares the official but rarely cited statement from the Society’s 34th General Congregation (1995):

The complexity of a Jesuit university can call for new structures of government and control on the part of the Society in order to preserve its identity and at the same time allow it to relate effectively to the academic world and the society of which it is part, including the Church and the Society of Jesus. More specifically, in order for an institution to call itself Jesuit, periodic evaluation and accountability to the Society are necessary in order to judge whether or not its dynamics are being developed in line with the Jesuit mission. The Jesuits who work in these universities, both as a community and as individuals, must actively commit themselves to the institution, assisting in its orientation, so that it can achieve the objectives desired for it by the Society.⁷

Here the Society is expected to be *a major directive influence*, not only by general periodic review but also by the direct engagement of the individual Jesuits working at the institution. The Jesuit order was not intended to be simply an advisory or companioning body, but an engaged, guiding force, working to achieve in the institution “the objectives desired for it *by the Society*.” The Jesuit voice simply cannot be one of many—as if the IHS were to be inscribed alongside the many popular and familiar interest-group acronyms of the day. Pope Paul VI had made the same point quite directly and authoritatively to university leadership during the very years when lay boards were being established:

Certainly, today the difficulties which a Catholic University faces are grave. But they should not cause discouragement nor lead us to the temptation, either open or covert, of abandoning this field of work and leaving it for others to take up. In this context, we should note that it is certainly praiseworthy and necessary to have the collaboration of the laity and of priests who are not

7 General Congregation 34, Decree 17 (1995), “Jesuits and University Life,” in *Jesuit Life & Mission Today: The Decrees of the 31st–35th General Congregations of the Society of Jesus*, edited by John W. Padberg, S.J. (St. Louis, MO: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2009), 629–32.

Jesuits for carrying on the work of the university, but it is necessary to be sure that this comes about in such a way that the Society is able to retain the authority necessary to face up to its Catholic responsibilities. The Society should not, therefore, relinquish its authority in those universities which belong to it. To lose this worthwhile tradition would signify not only losing something of your “identity” but also, and above all, losing something of which the Church has need and which she cannot do without.⁸

Model 1 therefore seems at the very least a *serious misdirection*, and at the worst a *grave and ultimately fatal error* preventing the Society from becoming and remaining fully what it is meant to be at its institutions of higher learning. If the Jesuit presidential leadership simply *must* attenuate in light of historical circumstances, then the remit of the Jesuit apostolate should be *re-negotiated* soberly and in good faith. That is, there must be some way for the Jesuits to be *substantively directive* (even when not *determinatively* so) in the details of certain mission-related matters; for example, in reference to

- core curriculum content for all college students;
- oversight structures for course content or delivery;
- procedures for handling any serious conflicts in any area (e.g., student life and organizations, campus ministry, academic programming) with the character and aims of a Jesuit Catholic institution;
- norms and expectations for new hires regarding respect for and support of the institution’s mission and identity;
- the employment, review, promotion, and retirement of Jesuit hires;
- the proper scope and roles of the employed Jesuit community in ministry and mission-related matters.

The conclusion: The Society of Jesus needs to remain “in.” It cannot responsibly choose to be “out.”

II. Research or Formation?

Even if appropriate Jesuit directiveness were to be re-established, there would still be another major divide to face, simply because the American university has come to incorporate at least two very different dynamics in the academic mission:

8 Appendix 1 Address of the Holy Father [Pope Paul VI] to the Rectors and Presidents, August 6, 1975, reprinted in *Project I: The Jesuit Apostolate of Education in the United States: Agreements and Decisions*, no. 6, October 1975. Published by the Staff of the Jesuit Conference as an aid to American Jesuits engaged in the apostolate.

1. From the *graduate-school* perspective, where professionals are being formed, a Jesuit university or college might seem to be necessarily a *pluralistic and mainly secular operation*, following the commonly accepted norms of the day, with semi-autonomous disciplines and departments, operating mostly separately, at least in theory, as in the Land o' Lakes statement of 1967.⁹ People are hired for professional expertise and standing. Their mission is professional instruction and advancing various fields of knowledge. The institution strives for excellence according to contemporary standards.
2. From the *college* perspective, where souls are being formed in light of the traditional Jesuit understanding of Christian liberal arts education, the institution might rather be understood as *not at all* an essentially secular work but rather a formational enterprise undertaken from a particular religious, ethical, and educational tradition of wide scope and depth, one that attends to the students' intellectual, cultural, moral and religious conversions, that is, to their well-rounded personal maturation.

The Jesuit tradition does not disavow or even dislike research and high professional excellence. In fact it appreciates and promotes such excellence. The Society has a long history of great researchers and advanced thinkers, from the mathematician Clavius to renowned Jesuit scholars and intellectuals like Francisco Suarez, Robert Bellarmine, Peter Canisius, Teilhard de Chardin, John Courtney Murray, Henri de Lubac, Karl Rahner, Bernard Lonergan, Walter Ong, and Joseph Fitzmyer, not to mention countless others, lay and Jesuit, who from a Jesuit context have made solid but less publicized contributions. Yet it is in the second dimension mentioned here, the formational enterprise of the *collegia*, that the Society of Jesus should above all find its academic center of gravity. One might even make the case that the advanced achievements of gifted intellects have significantly *depended on* the steady massive investment that the Society had made in the robust motivational infrastructures maintained in its *collegia*.

I have elsewhere made the case that a very deep stream of Jesuit spirituality is best expressed by the phrase "*docta pietas*" (learned devotion). *Pietas* is primary. It is an integral part of the framework that gives meaning,

9 For a critique of this document, see Claude Pavur, S.J., "The Land o' Lakes Derailment—And a Way to Get Back Homeward in Catholic Higher Education," in Claude Pavur, S.J., *Saving Culture, Saving Souls, Saving Grace* (Chestnut Hill, MA: Independent imprint, 2022), 136–61.

direction, and energy to the whole enterprise. The Society's educational mission is thus at core a *formational* one, oriented to the deep conversions of the person—not so much to a particular religious denomination, but to the transcendental domains of the true, the good, the beautiful, and the holy. Advanced research can be understood as an organic outcome of operations undertaken under the impulses of that spirituality. As some Jesuit fathers so concisely expressed it, the hinge of the (Society's) Constitutions swings *entirely* upon the principles of the burning desire of devotion (*ardens pietatis studium*) and the surpassing knowledge of reality (*praestans rerum scientia*).¹⁰

The foundational intentionality is indicated in the first rule for provincials as stated in the *Ratio studiorum* of 1599:

The final goal of Jesuit education. Since one of the leading ministries of our Society is teaching our neighbors all the disciplines in keeping with our Institute in such a way that they are thereby aroused to a knowledge and love of our Maker and Redeemer, the provincial should consider himself obliged to do his utmost to ensure that our diverse and many-sided educational labor meets with the abundant results that the grace of our calling demands of us.¹¹

The *rousing of the soul*, not advanced research, is what is foregrounded here. From this latter perspective, a Jesuit institution of higher learning has a particular responsibility to cultivate a Christian, Catholic, and Jesuit liberal arts program and to ensure that the students are not deprived of this good, an education based on faith, reason, and the appropriation of edifying culture. Teachers in the *collegia* are to be hired and evaluated *not* so much for advanced professional expertise or publications as for *effective consonance with and potential contribution to the program one should expect to find in such a school*. Their mission is *personal education* more than *career-preparation*.

For Father George Ganss, Jesuit education properly understood aims at giving rise to “the cultured [person] possessing an adult Catholic outlook on life.”¹² Of course not everyone need be Catholic, but the institution *as Jesuit* is invested, unashamedly invested, in enabling *all* students to understand that particular outlook, its sources and details and implications.

10 MHSI 129:2 (MHSI = Monumenta Historica Societatis Iesu. 157 volumes. Madrid; Rome: 1894–). See the afterword in Pavur, *In the School of Ignatius*, “Recovering the Fullness of Ignatian and Jesuit Spirituality,” 129–36.

11 *The Ratio Studiorum: The Official Plan of Jesuit Education*, trans. Claude Pavur, S.J. (St. Louis, MO: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2005).

12 George Ganss, S.J., *Saint Ignatius' Idea of a Jesuit University* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1956 [2nd ed.]), Appendix 3: 271–80, here 272.

Such a project requires *specific content in the curriculum, taught with specific intentionality*. At minimum, a Jesuit college program should include for all students *a mature encounter with the Christ of the Gospels*. There must be some kind of administrative mechanism that will help to ensure that the whole curriculum is being delivered in the right way, to the right effects. The Society (representing the interests of the founding Catholic community) does not have the same kind of obligation to represent every other major tradition, text, system, or point of view to the same extent.

Some may claim, with much good reason and historical warrant, that university work is hybrid or composite in its mission, with multiple inheritances; it does many different things; these two approaches of research and formation are not contradictory; they can and must co-exist.¹³ But in fact the general cultural drift is so strong in the secular and professionalizing direction that the Jesuit program needs much more focused, dedicated institutional support at the formational collegiate level to thrive—or even to exist. The point is to stand *over and against* the prejudices of our age, which include being all too pragmatic, materialistic, religion-avoidant or -simplistic, secular-progressive, relativistic, pre-professionally career-oriented, individualistic, and fragmented.¹⁴

Without the right attention, support, and protection that comes directly from the mission-invested administrating offices, the power and potential of the Jesuit tradition will be obscured and ultimately lost. And with that loss there will also eventually come damage to the common good, for a society does not live well by advanced research alone, but by every spiritual, ethical, and religious good that comes forth from the Spirit of Wisdom regarding human fulfillment under God.

The conclusion: Though research is a good organically connected with the Jesuit educational tradition, the prior and primary investment of Jesuit *collegia* should always be the formational program, which is a foundational and more universal good (affecting all souls, not merely those seeking specialized expertise).

III. Left or Right?

And yet, the Jesuit formational investment will come to nothing or turn out to be destructively counterproductive if it is established in a direction

13 See Arthur Madigan, S.J., “On the Roots of Boston College and Similar Institutions,” a short but incisive paper originally composed in 2009 and forthcoming in the newly renovated *Jesuit Educational Quarterly*.

14 Claude Pavur, S.J., *The Grand Agere Contra for Jesuit Education* (Academia.edu, 2022), available at https://www.academia.edu/91003714/The_Grand_Agere_Contra_for_Jesuit_Education.

that is not especially coherent with (or that is even oppositional to) the Jesuit point of view, and if it is delivered by people employing inadequate anthropologies (and therefore truncated ideas of human fulfillment), or political philosophies, or interpretations of what is most appropriate for the formation of the young.¹⁵ That is why it is important to address the larger understandings influencing this moment in Jesuit educational history in America. People will stress how we must “read the signs of the times.” But those signs must often be opposed rather than followed. Accommodation is not always desirable or even possible.

Today there is a threat of a general misalignment of the university, both from a Jesuit point of view and from a commonsense traditional understanding of cultural dynamics. Academia has made a choice for the leftward interests of “the party of change,” over and against rightward ones of “the party of stability and continuity.” In brief: higher education is widely recognized as having made a strong “progressive” turn.¹⁶ Now the very word “conservative” itself suffers opprobrium in the academy, even though nothing good comes of demeaning all the benefits and insights that we have inherited from the past and still need to learn to appreciate. Proper assimilation and appreciation should precede explicit classroom critique. So there seems to be a bias towards research into what is new rather than towards a deeper recovery of what is old (or “ever-living”). Again, a conscientious *examen* is in order for the Society in this situation. Are we to use the universities as places where we put our energies into social critique, the exposing of guilt, the righting of historical wrongs, and the transformations of society? There are serious dangers in such an approach, especially if it is “front-loaded” in order to obtain a particular political allegiance.¹⁷ Should we not rather attend to that which inspires and elevates and gives the kind of positive vision that leads students to sense their own significance and

15 By “anthropologies,” I mean understandings of human existence in all its knowable aspects and dynamics.

16 For example, see Chris Sweeney, “How Liberal Professors Are Ruining College,” *Boston Magazine*, December 20, 2016, available at <https://www.bostonmagazine.com/news/2016/12/20/liberal-professors/>. This article ran with the tag: “In New England, they [i.e., liberal professors] outnumber conservatives 28 to 1. Why that’s bad for everyone.” For a fuller and deeper exposition, see John M. Ellis, *The Breakdown of Higher Education: How It Happened, the Damage It Does, and What Can Be Done* (New York: Encounter Books, 2020).

17 See Claude Pavur, S.J., *Some Preliminary Reactions to Ellacuría’s Idea of a New Kind of University* (Academia.edu, 2021), available at https://www.academia.edu/47727679/Some_Preliminary_Reactions_to_Ellacuriaa_Idea_of_a_New_Kind_of_University.

which prepares them to take on serious responsibilities as participants in a worthy project that must not be naively or tendentiously rejected?

College should establish in the young those broad and deep, well-informed, foundational understandings that provoke, from the sponsoring tradition's point of view, insights into "what is going on," and that will help them to discern what their part might be in the story in which they are already playing a part; it will offer a way for them to evaluate other approaches, invest in the common good, and learn to perceive what is needed and how to make the right changes for the right reasons.¹⁸ To establish in students a vision of the good, an admiration for virtue, and an appreciation for positive achievements is far more productive than having them dwell upon the dark (and universal) injustices of history and the human soul. This is not to paint only pretty pictures, or to avoid arousing in students a sense of human sinfulness (especially our own personal sinfulness) and of our need for mercy and redemption. Those aspects of the our condition are in fact already vividly written into the great works of our cultural heritage; and indeed such an awareness of them is a fundamental moral and religious insight that should be expected to be a standard element in a Jesuit college education. But gratitude for the good is more foundational than the shock and chagrin at the discovery of evil.

The function of the university as a whole significantly includes progress towards perennial wisdom, both individual and collective. That progress requires consulting the fund of recorded human experience and reflection (first of all in one's own cultural traditions), and interpreting it honestly. The university is not just aiming for some ahistorical "truth of reason"; it seeks to recover and imbibe the sapiential sources that promote human flourishing—the deepest truth of the heart (not of momentary whim or compulsive desire). What good is it if you can make every kind of profitable technical device providing every manner of convenience and pleasure if in so doing you lose the direction and meaning of the your spiritual life in a companionship based on virtue?

The Society of Jesus was misled from the full scope of its mission by the rhetorical and conceptual missteps of its thirty-second General Congregation (1975). These led to a radicalization of "justice" as a constitutive dimension of the Society's mission—but with justice tending to be understood primarily as "social justice." If it had been interpreted as something first of all rooted in God's justice, and if there had been a turn toward the evangelization of culture rather than towards a particular type of so-

18 See Joseph Tussman, "Why Should We Study the Greeks?," in *The Beleaguered College: Essays on Educational Reform* (University of California: Institute of Governmental Studies Press, 1997), 125–37.

cial-political-economic reform, then the apostolic scope proper to Jesuit schooling might have been preserved.

Indeed, the Society could have emphasized the idea of *educational and cultural justice* to give the students what they most need in a healthy education, as it indeed had been doing with greater or lesser success for centuries. The Society could also have supported *traditional family life* as an essential and foundational part of a just society. It could have promoted religion and morality along the same lines. But treating justice primarily as *social justice* in its common understandings introduced the politicized and antagonizing rhetoric of class and race, oppressor and oppressed. Particular leftward political alignments therefore colored the educational ethos. Many in Jesuit schools followed the secularizing, politically invested crowd, and the Society consequently lost an opportunity for countercultural stance that drew its life from a deeper and more comprehensive kind of justice. In the polarization of the country, the Society, along with most of Academe, in effect threw its weight to one side, the one that tended to be notably more sympathetic with strands of thought ultimately incompatible with the deepest Jesuit values (e.g., anti-traditional and materialistic cultural Marxism). The thirty-fourth General Congregation (1995) to a large degree countered the excesses of the thirty-second. But most American Jesuits and their close colleagues remain to this day overly influenced by the thirty-second congregation's faulty formulations. Thus Jesuit schools have been all too ready to careen leftward with most American universities, losing a great opportunity for a distinctive witness.¹⁹

The conclusion: Jesuit universities, following a fundamental option for the evangelization of culture and the City of God rather than for the secularized social engineering of the Left and the City of Man, should take a more conservative, tradition-friendly, sapiential approach in its formation of souls. To deprecate the past with little or no sensitivity to its essential and perennial graces, particularly by a simplistic and tendentious use of categories such as “oppressor” and “oppressed,” will result in self-erasure and ultimately the spread of a cynical disengagement among the young. Critique in abundance might not just temper but possibly overwhelm affiliation—and college should be substantially more about affiliation than about critique. Far better to be allied with viewpoints that have a healthy

19 Most of the contents of these last two paragraphs are incisively treated by Martin R. Tripole, S.J., in his *Faith Beyond Justice: Widening the Perspective*, revised edition (Chestnut Hill, MA: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2024). The pith of this book was available in 1994, but its impact fell far short of its prescience. The recent expanded thirtieth anniversary edition (2024) allows the Society and its allies another opportunity to consider the weight of the argument.

respect for family, faith, virtue-based friendship, and the wisdom available in well-tested traditional sources.²⁰

IV. Conclusions and One Possible Solution

It is apostolically helpful, even though profoundly humbling, to admit that Jesuit higher education has in certain important respects gone astray and fallen short—despite its many well-intentioned efforts and successes. A conversion is needed, one that

- puts the Society of Jesus directly “in” rather than “out,”
- refocuses core infrastructural efforts on formation rather than research, and
- stays closer to the believing, sapiential Right than to the secularizing progressive Left.

If the Jesuit order faithfully reforms its approach along these lines, it will be better able to realize its own Institute.²¹ It will help to raise up souls who will be able and more likely to contribute substantially to a saner, healthier, and happier society, even in the domains of social justice (without the ideological deformations). All positive civic values constituting the common good will be reciprocally reinforced by ethical and religious ones.²²

20 Note that I am not speaking for a *politicization*—and certainly not for a *partisanization*—of the colleges but for the deepening of students’ *political understanding*, enabling them to make solid critiques of ideologies from a higher viewpoint and on the basis of (1) an accurate and substantial knowledge of sources and issues, and (2) a full anthropology, one that respects the religious, ethical, and familial dimensions of human existence.

21 The core purposes of the Society’s idea are expressed in its “Formula of the Institute” (1540, 1550) as (1) defense and propagation of the faith; and (2) the progress of souls in Christian life and learning. For the full documents, see Claude Pavur, S.J., *Formulae for the Society of Jesus: English Translations and the Latin Original Texts in Parallel Columns* (Academia.edu, 2023), available at https://www.academia.edu/95992234/Jesuit_Formulae_tricolumnar_English_Latin. See also Pavur, *The Original Charter of the Jesuit Order: Formula Instituti 1540* (Academia.edu, 2022), available at https://www.academia.edu/87939715/The_Original_Charter_of_the_Jesuit_Order_Formula_Instituti_1540.

22 The virtue of *pietas* (devotion) typically referenced a loyal bondedness with God, country, and family (with the Church easily added as a fourth), all of these being benefactors to whom one’s debt can never really be fully repaid. The civic connections were quite clear to the American founders: George Washington wrote that political prosperity requires religion and morality as “indispensable supports” and John Adams asserted that “Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.” See Jared Gould, “Get Off Facebook: America Was Not Founded on Separation.”

The Society of Jesus will then (and possibly *only* then) find new life in its old idea, as it allows the young to better hear the voice of Jesus and as it strives to show the appeal of the Gospel path to a whole and holy life. If the Society learns how to do this well, then the order's steady decline in numbers and reputation since 1965 may begin to be reversed. The Jesuit order, by God's help, will be providing heavenly bread for those who hunger for it. New generations will naturally be drawn to participate in such an undertaking.

For those who say that things cannot be changed now, I will reprise here in a nutshell a sketch of one quite feasible way forward, something that certainly *can* be done, or at least started, even now, given the will and the resolve to do it. This strategy is the best one that I can imagine at the moment. I welcome other proposals. Of course, any plan will be feasible only to the extent that the individuals involved accept the basic positions presented here, stay zealously committed to their own unity in the project, and patiently persevere until the desired end is satisfactorily achieved. It is an undertaking not of a few years, but of generations.

The Plan in Brief

The Board of Trustees and the Society of Jesus will renegotiate the Jesuit role in key mission-related features of the whole institution, giving the Society of Jesus a systemic “anchor” for its presence and a focused domain for purveying its unique educational tradition.²³ That anchor might optimally be a distinct Jesuit college of two or four years, structurally parallel to the institution's College of Arts and Sciences, run by the Society of Jesus entirely on its own standards (for hiring, teaching, service, rank, tenure, and so on), subject to accreditation only by properly credentialed authorities who understand the Jesuit educational mission and charism in depth. This kind of structure will protect the Society of Jesus's formational task, over and against the different drifts of professionalizing departments. Fr. Charles Donovan, S.J., illuminated the issue and foreshadowed the present suggestion in 1969:

[Departments] are notoriously inward in viewpoint, inflexible, imperious, and indifferent to the global concept of the college's role and operation. For these reasons, but mostly because of their professionalization, departments as

tion Between Church and State,” *Minding the Campus*, October 17, 2024, <https://www.mindingthecampus.org/2024/10/17/get-off-facebook-america-was-not-founded-on-separation-between-church-and-state/>.

23 See the bulleted points at the end of Section I above for specific examples of various ways the Society might be given a permanent voice in the decisional flowchart of the institution.

presently operating *can no longer be entrusted with that part of the college experience that offers liberal arts courses to the non-specialist*. This is sometimes called general education or the core of common curriculum. This important segment of undergraduate education *needs protection from departmental tyranny or unconcern. It needs governance and management of its own, separate from the departments.*²⁴

The core of the program in these Jesuit colleges will be derived from an updated restructuring of the traditional Jesuit emphases on Letters, philosophy, and theology, expanded to include more recently developed areas of study (including scientific and social-scientific ones). Introductions to the additional domains can be encapsulated in discrete, humanistically-fashioned encyclopedic overviews. There will be a curricular correlative to the institution's mission and identity: students will certainly learn *about* all the leading modern thinkers without being *marinated* in the late-modern ones who tend to be at odds with educational vision. The emphasis will be on well-tested, long-approved, and mission-relevant works rather than on more recent, adversarial, and controversial ones. Thus, Augustine and Dante and Pascal and Christopher Dawson will outrank Machiavelli and Marx and Freud and Sartre. The proposed Jesuit college will require the Society's generation of competent faculty members and administrators. For centuries, such personnel were provided by the Jesuit formation program itself. With God's help and the Society's conversion, the same thing can happen again.

Show me thy ways, O Lord; teach me thy paths.
Lead me in thy truth and teach me:
For thou art the God of my salvation;
On thee do I wait all the day.

*vias tuas Domine ostende mihi; semitas tuas doce me.
deduc me in veritate tua et doce me:
quia tu Deus salvator meus;
te expectavi tota die.*

—Psalm 25:3–4

24 Charles F. Donovan, S.J., "The Liberal Aims of Jesuit Higher Education," *Jesuit Educational Quarterly* 32, no. 2 (1969): 81–98, here 92, emphasis added. Having a separate core-curricular faculty may not in itself be a sufficient solution if the teachers have to pass through the specialized disciplinary sieves that are in place. A distinct college seems necessary.

Further Reading:

Donovan, Charles F., S.J. "The Liberal Aims of Jesuit Higher Education."
Jesuit Educational Quarterly 32, no. 2 (1969): 81–98.

Ganss, George, S.J. *Saint Ignatius' Idea of a Jesuit University*. Milwaukee,
WI: Marquette University Press, 1956.

Tripole, Martin R., S.J. *Faith Beyond Justice: Widening the Perspective*.
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