



REFLECTION ON THE LIVING TRADITION

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Serving Beyond Ourselves: Building a Just Community through Jesuit Education

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As a child, I had a front-row seat to the pursuits of my father and his colleagues in the civil rights movement. Their goals were to right key wrongs in American society, and they chose to become lawyers not for power or personal enrichment but as a means to open our country's eyes to injustice. The law provided a tool to uplift others and improve the living conditions of their neighbors. More than a profession, I saw being a lawyer as a calling to help others.

My family's origin story in jurisprudence began with my father. I followed his example by devoting my journey in the law to planting a passion for justice in future lawyers. The story continues with my son, Alex, who represents immigrants and migrants. Our path resembles the beginnings of Jesuit law schools in America, a history embedded in exclusion.

Many Catholic immigrants sought refuge in the United States, only to find injustice. The College of the Holy Cross, where I am now president, fought for decades to be licensed by the state of Massachusetts during a time of severe anti-Catholic sentiment. Governors of the commonwealth refused until finally granting approval in 1865, more than two decades after the college was founded.

Catholic colleges and universities were founded in the United States to facilitate immigrants' assimilation into society, popping up in areas with high concentrations of historically marginalized Catholic populations. The fresh start across the Atlantic Ocean mirrored the Jesuits' entry point into education nearly 500 years earlier, in sixteenth-century Messina, Sicily,

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when community leaders asked Society of Jesus founder Ignatius to send Jesuits to educate the sons of the town's elite. Ignatius had no pre-existing plans in place to create an order of educators, but agreed on one condition—that the poor sons of Messina could also attend.

In the United States, Jesuit Catholic law schools provided graduates with ammunition to return to their communities, build practices, and empower those whose rights had been overlooked. Students of all backgrounds grew into the best versions of themselves through a humanistic approach. They entered the world with the knowledge that their education could do more than help themselves. More than a century later, we still base our pedagogical ideals at the College of the Holy Cross in the Jesuit tradition of serving others.

As I finished my fifth year as Holy Cross president, I witnessed first-hand our students' growth from moving onto campus to walking across the stage to receive their diplomas. I remembered welcoming some of them to their residence halls, hearing their personal stories, and I saw my family's journey in many of them. Through discovery and discernment, they found their ambitions aligned closely with Jesuit values. Their time on campus involved more than intellect, but compassion, and a responsibility to serve others.

The values inherent in a Jesuit education are similar to the characteristics that, in my opinion, make a strong lawyer. When we examine how Jesuit law schools provide a different perspective than traditional private or public peers, we can point to the Jesuits' Universal Apostolic Preferences. Jesuit institutions remind graduates that their education is not just an avenue for amassing power or wealth. As a legal educator, I spent hours with my students thinking about the profession. We discussed all arenas of law, how it could change the world we live in and protect the values our country was founded upon. What we didn't discuss was how the law could enrich a person.

I'm not insinuating that making money through one's profession or excelling at their craft is wrong or selfish. But targeting wealth as the primary motivator of pursuing a career in law ventures beyond the foundation of what the profession calls people to perform. A Jesuit education reminds us that the law is a powerful tool. It levels the playing field. It amplifies the voices of those who are often silenced. It unites us as a nation under a set of principles that people, regardless of the power a person wields or the money they possess, are all equal before the law. Lawyers are the first line of defense in upholding this.

As a Jesuit-educated lawyer, it's essential that you believe that each person is born with dignity and the law then provides them with certain

rights and protections. Recently, our country has demonstrated just how important those rights are and the essential roles lawyers play in the preservation of our democracy.

Immigrants, many no different than those who sought refuge a century earlier, including college students, have been removed from their families, neighbors and communities without any system of checks and balances. This strips a person of more than their rights, it ignores their humanity. A Jesuit education calls a lawyer to act in these moments. We hold these truths not just as citizens of the United States, but through the belief that each person, regardless of the flag they pledge allegiance to, is born with inalienable rights because they are human beings. To grab someone off the street, remove them from their home without any due process, is an ethical question as much as a legal one. When my father challenged the Jim Crow laws of the South, his objective was dignity more than money. Our objective today should be the same.

Whether it's kidnapping an immigrant or refusing to serve a person due to the color of their skin, we should never take lightly stripping away another person's freedom. Jesuit institutions can center this ideal more explicitly. Graduates hold their diplomas with a deep understanding and appreciation for ethics and their responsibility to serve. Some may argue that the role of higher education is simply to prepare students for professional and monetary accomplishment. But each can coexist. As educators, we prepare our students for several levels of success, allowing them to serve others while supporting themselves.

We live in a highly legalized society. A legal education opens doors in almost any field, all while introducing skills and values sharpened through Jesuit pedagogy: Observe, Judge, Act.

This idea feels more pertinent now than ever. Jesuit institutions are uniquely positioned to squeeze ethics into a culture that tips the scales toward narcissism. They create space for discernment in a world where a decade can evaporate in what feels like the blink of an eye. They equip graduates with compassion to bridge differences in a moment dominated by algorithms designed to divide.

I gravitated toward a career in law after I witnessed how the law could be a vehicle to uplift the voiceless. I saw my father and his colleagues fighting for a world where everyone lived with dignity and justice. I think my son absorbed that hope for a better future.

Hope can be contagious. Extending a hand to someone in need can inspire others to follow. It can motivate another to pay it forward. At a formative time in our nation's history, Jesuit colleges and universities offered hope to communities by welcoming populations who often lived on the

peripheries of the American Dream. Jesuit institutions allowed graduates to use their degrees to plant seeds of hope for future generations. They carried more than degrees. They entered the world with an education focused on walking with and supporting others.

This is the legacy Jesuit values bring to the legal profession. The quest to care for all people and to battle injustice is measured in lifetimes rather than years or decades. My father fought against injustice, not necessarily for himself, but so I could grow up in a more equitable world than he did. I do the same for my children as they do for others. The work is bigger than one's lifetime, with the finish line located outside of one's time on earth. So why continue? We understand that our life gains value by serving others—some we may never meet. The 500-year tradition of Jesuit education underscores this idea to each person who steps foot on campus today. The true value in life, or in the case of a profession such as the law, is not simply to benefit oneself, but to uplift others.

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