

Jesuit Universities: Tradition, Renewal and New Goals

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In this paper I would like to share with you some insights and reflections on Jesuit universities. A reflection on the goals and mission of Jesuit universities is very relevant and pertinent nowadays. What we want, where we come from, what we are doing here, where we are going to, what we are looking for, what our real possibilities are, etc. are questions that we have to ask ourselves from time to time.

Jesuit Universities have a long history. I will begin this analysis with the first part of its story: the foundational times. Even before that, I will draw on Greece as the origin of many ideas of intellectual life in the Western world. Then I shall comment on parts of the history of Jesuit education in these past five centuries. And I will finish with the current times, with the questions and goals that we have today.

1. THE ORIGINS OF WESTERN HIGHER EDUCATION

The debate on the aims of institutions of higher education is not new. John O'Malley (2015) distinguishes two main traditions in Western higher education. One may be called "scientific/professional" and the second "humanistic school".

The first one was created in the thirteenth century and is more focused on scientific and professional aims: pursuing knowledge for its own sake and promoting successful professional lives, with no room for the aims and values of the other tradition, formed in the fifteenth century, the humanistic one, which centres on training people in social responsibility and in effective communication skills.

Those two models operate with distinct aims and sets of values. They are often both rivals and partners. The discussion about core curriculum in today's academic programs is related to this variety of principles and aims.

1.1. Greece

The remote origins of both models may be found in ancient Athens. Aristotle (384-322 BC, a philosopher and scientist) and Isocrates (436-338 BC, a rhetorician) would be the emblematic figures of these two traditions. Isocrates is less known than Aristotle or Plato.

The aim of Aristotle was the knowledge and understanding of the physical world. Aristotle created an organized system of knowledge, with its internal coherence justifiable on rational grounds. The knowledge of the physical world or the operations of human intelligence has to be codified. The aim of Aristotle was the understanding of what he studied.

The aim of Isocrates, on the other hand, was training young people with the ability to move effectively in the *polis*, for active life in Athenian democracy. The common good needed people capable of public speaking and to persuade their fellows of the correct course of action. The works of literature embodied effective use of language, so education was based on them to cultivate the art of the word.

These Greek traditions migrated into western regions of the Roman Empire and later into the medieval world. The Isocrates model seemed to predominate until the thirteenth century.

1.2. The University

During this century the university, as we have known it for the last eight centuries, was founded. It embodied and promoted some of the values that underpin today's universities: "the value and supreme importance of dispassionate analysis and critical thinking, of restless questioning of received wisdom, and of the necessity of exploring every aspect of the physical world" (O'Malley, p. 5, 2015).

Those new institutions were organized as four faculties: Arts, Law, Medicine and Theology. The last three were clearly professional. The first one was a preparation for the last three, although it also took the character of a fully professional faculty. Those degrees gave greater prestige and higher fees to the new professionals.

Although some universities hold an ecclesiastical charter as their foundation, their activity was secular. They did not explicitly deal with issues like eternal salvation or the students' personal religious development or its role in the church. Their aim centred on professional skills in different areas, and fostered upward socio-economic mobility. They also had the goal of

intellectual problem-solving. Those aims are related to what we now associate with getting a good job or, on the other hand, the production of knowledge.

1.3. The Humanistic School

The study of humanity and the great questions of human life (passions, ideals, pain, frailty, life and death, virtue and vice...) are part of the aim of these other schools. Rhetoric, the art of saying things in an intelligible, understandable, persuasive and convincing mode, was more important than logic or mathematics.

The humanistic schools had a philosophy of education organised as seven principles (O'Malley, pp. 11-14, 2015):

- the first aim of education is further personal development, not the acquisition of technical and professional skills.
- instead of abstract principles (e.g. philosophers), they chose literature. That is why history and literature texts (poetry, drama, stories, plays...) were helpful to inspire, illuminate and make clear moral alternatives.
- they used the “best” non-Christian authors (ancient Greek and Roman), the “good pagans”, who provided models of virtue, worthy of admiration.
- students’ development had a public dimension: responsibility in the community, sacrifices for the common good, the assumption of a leadership role, etc.
- rhetoric had a special relevance (the art of winning consensus, the art of persuasion, effective communication...)
- the use of language and the cultivation of correct expression through writing was seen as part of the thinking process.
- “Mens sana in corpore sano”: the humanists were concerned with the body, the mind, and the soul.

These have remained constant from ancient times to the present. Another summary of the characteristics of Renaissance Humanism can be found in a text coming from Asia (Adi, 2014): “classicism; educating the whole person; an active life of civic virtue; individualism within

community; human dignity and freedom; the unity and universality of truth”

In contrast, “getting ahead” seemed to be the main value of the university, which had no interest in the emotional development of students. The university model can be seen as implicitly self-referential, encouraging the students’ worst instincts rather than the best. Professional education can be seen as a means to climb the corporate ladder or selfish advancement in your profession, instead of fostering civic values and worthy ideals and goals.

2. THE CREATION OF JESUIT UNIVERSITIES

2.1. *The Jesuit College*

The Jesuits were not the creators of humanistic education. Some of the first Jesuits had their education when they were young in those humanistic schools already mentioned. Later, they favored the humanistic tradition they had inherited.

The Jesuit spirituality agreed with many of the humanistic insights: the development of the inner-person, non superficiality, active involvement in society, good decision-making and prudence, pursuit of the common good, a concern for society and its betterment. Their schools professed a humanistic article of faith: they had a civic purpose; they were a good instrument for cities.

However, the Jesuits also added something to the ancient humanistic tradition they received. On the one hand, there was a religious development program for students. It was inspired in the Spiritual Exercises, which involves looking for deep commitment and growth rather than merely external behavior modifications.

They also cultivated the greatest respect and familiarity with students. Their example and the importance of loving their students were as important as their words. They used active engagement techniques in their teaching, following some of the pedagogical insights of the *modus parisiensis*. They trained “the whole person”. Therefore, outside the classrooms they held activities such as drama, theater, sports, music, dance, etc. (in theaters, playing fields, chapels...).

2.2. *The Jesuit University*

The first Jesuits created a link between humanistic training and professional training. The first companions, the ten founders of the order, also had a university background and held

prestigious degrees from the University of Paris.

Some of the larger Jesuit colleges began to teach university subjects (e.g. natural philosophy). And the order began to run some universities. The first was the Roman College. It was initially a humanistic school, but was soon transformed into a university, with two faculties: philosophy (Arts) and theology. They did not include medicine or law, mainly because they had no training in those disciplines.

Most of the colleges only had a Faculty of Arts: they did not teach theology which analyzes faith as an intellectual problem. However, they provided an “extra curricula” religious and moral formation.

The studies of philosophy included some subjects that we now consider basic science (mathematics, astronomy...). The Jesuits contributed to the scientific developments of their time.

Later, the Society of Jesus created a formal document on their educational strategy: the *Ratio Studiorum* (the plan of studies) (Society of Jesus, 1599). It explains a lot of issues related to philosophy and theology. However, it was not easy to apply everywhere as the reality of each school tends to be very different in the varied number of places where Jesuit schools and universities were established.

2.3. The suppression and restoration

In a few years, the Jesuits, founded in 1540, took education (formal schooling) as their main apostolate. They ran schools in different parts of the world, creating the biggest network ever known. There came to be more than 700 by 1773, the year in which the Society of Jesus was suppressed by a papal edict. The network of schools was dismantled.

Another papal decree restored the Society of Jesus in 1814. The humanistic schools and the universities evolved radically. The latter began to accept vernacular authors, not only Greek and Roman classics. The universities abandoned Aristotle as a normative author and began to experiment with the sciences and philosophies. However, they continued with their two basic purposes (professional skills, and knowledge).

In the nineteenth century, the Jesuits rebuilt their network of schools and also created universities. However, the task was more difficult than in the foundation years. The world had undergone major development and it was increasingly complicated to keep pace with the changes

in secondary and tertiary education in different areas of the planet. The *Ratio Studiorum* became outdated. However, new institutions were founded. The universities included professional schools. Not only law and medicine, but other subjects such as business, engineering, education, and so on.

3. NEW CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR JESUIT UNIVERSITIES

After this synoptic review of the origin, history and goals of Jesuit universities, it is time to formulate what these institutions' aims and opportunities are today. We shall do so in an historical framework because a good part of them have their origin in the past, and now we just rethink old problems and reformulate them with new vocabulary.

In the first paragraph of this text I formulated some questions about our identity and missions (what we want, etc.). The salvation of souls, the number of baptisms, was a chief aim of education during part of the 19th and 20th centuries. Later the aim of education was altered to include other human and social goals. Those changes pose questions on what tertiary education means for a Catholic (Kawamura, 2014). The number of dilemmas may increase if we take into account our different stakeholders: what do students want?, and their families?, the governments who establish educational policies?, research agencies? other social agents?, employers and firm owners?, our staff (be they professors, researchers, administrators or other professionals)? church authorities? How are performance and good practice measured? What do rankings and accreditations measure and assess?

In the remaining paragraphs of this paper I shall deal with some problems and aims concerning universities nowadays. They are our opportunities of serving our students and our society. They stimulate our thinking and action. They have been renewed in the last decades and they shape our strategies and internal policies.

3.1. Professional success and social promotion of persons

This goal was linked to ancient universities and is now also part of the aims of universities. It is sometimes called “utilitas” in the list of aims of the Ledesma-Kolvenbach model. The other three are “humanitas”, “iustitia” and “fides”.

However, we want something more. Not only professional success for our people. That is something good in itself. We certainly have nothing against that. Specially in the cases of the

underprivileged populations.

Social promotion of persons is one of the good social effects of education, also universities. The poorer the social sector or persons are, the more it is needed. The question is: do we really serve the underserved, or the poor, in their social promotion? Are we of any help to the underprivileged? Or do we help the well-off to maintain and make more progress?

Isocrates (436-338 BC), in the Western world, began an education tradition of a strong moral imperative that required directing one's talents to be a benefit for others. The problems of your country and your fellow citizens, the common good, attention to the dilemmas of social justice or ecological challenges are points in common between the humanistic tradition and the Jesuit mission. Fr. Pedro Arrupe (1907-1991) worded this insight in this manner: "men and women for others". Fr. Kolvenbach (1928-2016) added "...and *with* others".

3.2.Social progress to the region

A university also plays a service role for the region where it is located. There is a positive impact in the countries and regions where we serve. However, there are more and more resources for education in different parts of the world. Jesuit resources are limited. We do not need to do only what others do. We need to justify what makes us different in our service, not for the sake of being different. The difference is a broader model of education and a particular institutional identity, which intends to embody values like social justice, cultural dialogue, reconciliation, and so on.

An example of what may be the specific input of our institutions to our context can be seen in the content of the strategy of the International Association of Jesuit Universities. This is an official network that is going to be established in July 2018 (in Bilbao-Loyola, Spain). It has defined six priorities, and has created six international task forces to work on these topics: Environmental Justice/Economic Justice; Reconciliation and Peace; Interfaith Dialogue and Understanding; Preparation of Civic leaders; Educating Migrants, Marginalized, etc.; Leadership development in the Ignatian Tradition.

3.3.Science and knowledge linked with mission

The promotion of science was also linked with the aim of ancient universities. Our tradition was not so closely connected with this, but we did take part in the advancement of knowledge. It

is also true that we are increasingly introducing the culture of research in our institutions. There are Jesuit institutions that are research universities. We have research institutes at most universities.

However, we do not teach science and knowledge only for the sake of knowledge or to attain more publications, references or a better reputation to scale positions in rankings or to assure good accreditations. Are there some areas on which research at Jesuit universities should be focused? Fr. Adolfo Nicolás wrote a letter in 2014 in which he included some ideas on this: “We must recognize that our societies face radical challenges: "what does it mean today to be human?", "How can we live the different religious, spiritual and confessional references today in cultures often marked by secularism and fundamentalism?", "How to lay the foundations for the peoples of the earth to live together in justice and mutual respect?", "How to live in a land whose natural resources are limited?”.

The European Jesuit universities, in agreement with the Provincials, have defined some common areas of research: Interreligious dialogue (especially with Islam); Ecology and environmental challenges; Migrations and refugees; Ignatian Studies; Secularization, Christian identity and evangelization in a secular culture. Dialogue between Religion and Science; Economy, Poverty and Ethics; and Anthropology.

3.4. An Ignatian model of education

Fr. Diego Ledesma (1524-1575) wrote on the final goals of Jesuit education. One of them was “for the embellishment, splendor and perfection of rational beauty” (Ledesma, p. 99). This is now named “*humanitas*” in the Ledesma-Kolvenbach model. This baroque expression is a classic ancient formulation of Ignatian Pedagogy and represents part of our ideal of *cura personalis*. We can relate it with “*Bildung*”, the German word associated with Wilhem von Humboldt (1767-1835), which means the self-cultivation of an intellectual culture.

Education should be more about critical and creative thinking than memorization for exams. Tertiary education needs a change in some areas of the world where it is not competitive because of the old fashioned teaching and learning models. There is a strong creative tradition of education in Jesuit history. It is “an inspiration, not a burden” (Sosa, 2017). Jesuit institutions lead innovation in education in many places. Ignatian pedagogy is an inspiration for the different challenges of innovation in education. The goal of our education is “to train individuals so they can give meaning to their lives and contribute to the common good within their context, their

society and their planet” (Sosa, 2017). Our ideals and education model should be designed to reach all our students, not only a minority.

Wisdom and maturity should be characteristics of our graduates. Prudence and the capacity to make wise human decisions, too: “the polar opposite of the nerd, the technocrat, the bureaucrat, and the zealot” (O’Malley, p. 31, 2015).

Training should be a means of exposure to different ways of thinking. Imagination, inventiveness and innovation should help to examine assumptions and prejudices. Not only about areas of your specific profession but about life itself.

Service to community and extracurricular activities should be part of a well-rounded program that trains persons as a whole.

How can we go to our frontiers like Pope Francis asked us to in his speech at the 36th General Congregation, to generate transformation processes? What frontiers should our schools reach, and what educational processes should take place? (Pope Francis, 2016).

The art of the word should be mastered. Eloquence is an art. It is the power of expressing feelings or thoughts in words, with precision, clarity and conviction, to impress or move other people. It requires a vocabulary and a style and implies the study of many authors. Effective communication is linked to precise thinking.

3.5. Institutions with a clear apostolic nature and scope

Universities are very complex institutions and are not easy to run. They need a large amount of resources. We depend on students, on legal regulations, in collaboration with other institutions, on fund-raising or donors. We must not only follow the majority or the main social trends. Real evangelization begins from the very bottom of society. We also need a clear strategy and the capacity to change the institution if needed (AJCU, 2012). One example of university leadership is Fr. Ignacio Ellacuría SJ (1930-1989) who, as rector of the Universidad Centroamericana (UCA) in El Salvador, transformed the institution to give an intellectual response to the country’s social problems.

The task is not easy. Many protestant universities in the USA have lost their Christian identity, as has been described in a quite pessimistic study (Burtchaell, 1998). Regarding Asia, we may read about these experiences coming from Japan and the Philippines: “How do we define a

Catholic university? Is it a university for nurturing Catholic followers? Is it a university with a lot of Christians? Or is a Catholic university which informs the general public about the universe of Catholicism? I think Sophia University is the last one. In other words, we are targeted toward non-Christians” (Kawamura, p. 247, 2014). “In the case of the Philippines I hope I am not too much of an alarmist, but the challenge is not so much the variety of religious traditions, Christianity and Islam for instance, but the matter of belief and unbelief” (Cruz, p. 245, 2104). That reflection is not only applicable to Asia, but also to Europe. Catholic students are a minority, and the main “religious” tradition is unbelief.

There are two challenges facing Jesuit universities: one from their structure, the second from the mission: “Jesuits must continue to work hard to maintain and even to strengthen the specific character of each of our institutions both as *Jesuit* and as a *university* (Society of Jesus, 1995).

The main type of resource needed is human. If there are not enough collaborators personally called or engaged in following and promoting the mission of the institution, it is impossible to have a Jesuit identity. Different training plans have been created to invite people to join such an option. In our case, our plans are not only cognitive but include other aspects of people (affective, etc.). These are the aims: “Adhering people to a shared mission and a common spirit; to promote a common commitment for the cause of Jesus of the construction of the Kingdom; to develop their own personal potential for its implementation in solidary service” (University of Deusto, 2018). To do so, we not only need “distant experts” in social issues, but also people “personally engaged” in them.

3.6. Collaboration within the Church and with other institutions

Intellectual apostolate is a means of dialogue between the Gospel and cultures, including science. Intellectual depth is a must in a world that does not want to link faith with reason. If we do this properly, it becomes a service to the mission of the Church.

In order to be more efficient in our task, because the problems and dilemmas are so complex, we need to learn from one another and to cooperate. The collaboration has to be among universities, but also among other types of institutions such as schools, social centers, pastoral centers and so on, because they approach reality from a different perspective and can enrich our approaches. As Fr. Sosa puts it: “We need to be aware that schools are apostolic platforms in dialogue and collaboration with society’s other apostolic institutions: universities, social projects, spirituality centers, parishes and other apostolic presences. In this manner, we will all grow and

be able to provide greater and better apostolic service” (Sosa, 2017).

Catholic laymen and women also raise questions regarding our mission. I will conclude this paper with an example. In Africa, the Jesuits are discerning about creating academic institutions. It is laypeople who are encouraging the Jesuits: “if our church is going to be all it should, we need well-educated church people and laity and that means quality Catholic university education. This is your charisma: forming leaders, professionals, and scholars who will be agents of change for a more just society” (Charlton).

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