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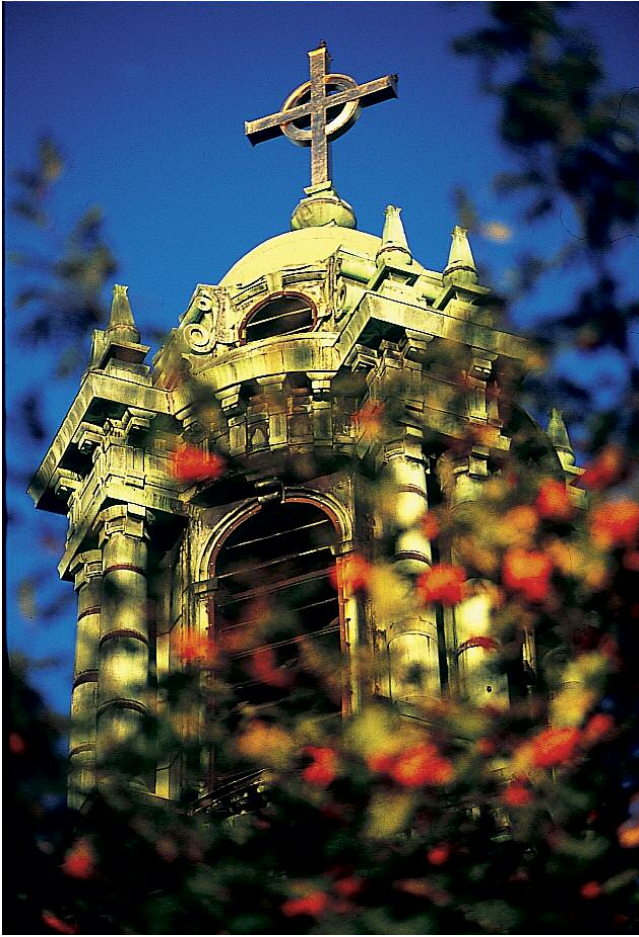
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A Spirituality of Citizenship

Cultivating the Ignatian Charism of Dialogue

By Michael P. Murphy

Let's face it: the world has never been so complex. From navigating the physical and emotional fatigue caused by global terror, ecological crisis, and domestic gun violence to addressing the vast social and economic inequalities that disrupt any sense of justice, life in the 21st century is in variable states of disrepair. Add to that disagreements about the meaning and mystery of life and about what is owed to one another, and the problems quickly compound.

Our already heated debates about relationships among rights and responsibilities, justice and fairness, privilege and access – about the common good – are amplified by the unprecedented ability to transmit our feelings, immediately and globally, via various cyber venues. Given the fact that these commitments sprout from deeply held values freighted with

emotional energy, our passions have become particularly flammable. We are quickly moved to outrage by most anything that disturbs our world view. Can it be any surprise that social tensions – uniquely aggravated online – spill over into our physical spaces? Is it any wonder that newer phenomena like trigger warnings and safe spaces have sprouted up in institutional settings to become good-faith responses to mounting social conflict and perceived aggression?

The juggernaut of the safe space movement most likely began its life online. Cyberspace has become the newest frontier to reveal a perpetual need: constant care in citizenship education in order to cultivate a more just and humane world. American colleges and universities have always occupied an important historical role for both diagnosis and remedy

in the realm of such dynamics and are in a special position to address these crises in community and communication. But lately turns to corporatism and managerialism, to cite two prevalent trends, coupled with provocative experiments in new utopianism, too often obscure the educational mission of institutions of higher learning. And they disaggregate both pedagogical focus and the *esprit de corps* of their communities. Precisely in this brokenness – in this confusion about what colleges and universities can teach people about communication, civility, and polity – Jesuit colleges and universities are in a unique position to lead.

Expertise in the art and craft of dialogue is a pillar upon which Ignatian spirituality and the Jesuit “way of proceeding” is built. The art of conversation was so dear to St. Ignatius that reference to its mystery, complexity, and charismatic quality appear in many of his personal correspondences and undergird his Spiritual Exercises.

What We’ve Got Here Is a Failure to Communicate

We are living through the most all-encompassing historical sea change since Gutenberg’s printing press came on the scene in 1439; and the implications for cultivating healthy pedagogies, spirituality, and citizenship in this new reality are legion. Never before has communication been so easy and open; never before has technological innovation been so rampant and lush. But emerging alongside these marvels are also toxic forces. Baser visions of citizenship emerge and increased injuries to the common good impede our ability to communicate peacefully and fruitfully. So numerous are these impediments that our notions of social and spiritual progress and our theories about human purpose are rightly called into question.

Lest we forget, cultural fracture has essentially theological implications and therefore requires theologically astute responses. The dynamics of digital culture unfold in a kind of binary system – an “as above, so below” mentality and an “on earth as it is... *in the cloud*” kind of algebra. In this way, digital life uniquely demonstrates theological mysteries of transcendence. The trouble is, most people do not interconnect life in this way, a blindness which causes subtle and serious prob-

lems, especially in human communities. In this sense, it is no small detail to reiterate the profound theological qualities attached to dialogue, specifically as a central attribute of God. So instrumental is dialogue in the disclosure of trinitarian unity that it becomes the very means of God’s boundless, self-donating love for creation. So singular too is its power that, when dialogue is botched or abused, it is also uniquely capable of exploding such beauty and reveals itself as a linguistic precursor to physical violence and social disintegration.

To resurrect some older language, these failures in communication are essentially rooted in sin – the specific nature of which piqued St. Ignatius’s imagination and fired the “Presupposition” that orients all Ignatian communication. As Georgetown’s John Borelli, who convened last year’s national seminar on Ignatian dialogue, notes, Ignatian character “is not something to be grasped arrogantly; rather, it is an ongoing accommodation to humility, acknowledging one’s own sinfulness and giving way to liberty to think and feel with the mind of another, namely that of the master, Jesus,” so that we can think and feel in goodness and edification with all others. When we presume the best in people – when we practice the Ignatian Presupposition (“to put a good interpretation on another’s statement rather than to condemn it”), we begin to engage the world in the ways that the Gospel counsels. We begin to love others better, even the ones who persecute us, and seek to live in mercy and forgiveness. Why? Because, like us, they are fighting a great battle for which they are too often ill-equipped. Like us, they have been created in the *Imago Dei* – in the image of God whose simple command is to love and for whom, as the theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar concludes, “Love alone is credible.”

University as Womb for Civic Life: Incubating Ignatian, Catholic Citizenship

In this sense, the rich tradition of Ignatian spirituality and the practical wisdom of Ignatian pedagogy create a solid space for engagement for Jesuit colleges and universities. But we must tread carefully. Since hateful speech patterns flood and pollute the air, the reflex action is to create safe physical spaces that might be free

from hostility. However, this may be ill-advised. As Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt observed in “Coddling of the American Mind,” (*The Atlantic*, Sept. 2015), “Attempts to shield students from words, ideas, and people that might cause them emotional discomfort are bad for the students. They are bad for the workplace, which will be mired in unending litigation if student expectations of safety are carried forward. And they are bad for American democracy.” What is needed instead is the integral view so central in the charism of Ignatian dialogue. What is needed is a pilgrimage in pedagogy – from *cura personalis* to *cura universitatis* to *cura civitatis* – a journey in education that fosters a spirituality of citizenship by cultivating the integrity of the whole.

This integral view is not easy, and the tenets of dialogue demand that we listen better. Students who call for trigger warnings are to be applauded for caring for others who might harbor memories of trauma that could be reactivated, but the too sweeping response needs to be carefully midwived. As well-intentioned as they are, requests for trigger warnings and

the evasions from micro-aggressions, almost always sourced in racism, sexism, and trauma, do too little to assuage the conflict they so justly indict. They nobly seek to create protected dialogue about historically sensitive issues but too often confine the project to protracted and sanitized settings. My view is that, as nuanced and controversial as all of this is, our obligation is to confront nefarious hegemonies and expose their errors in the light of day. Let us not make new hegemonies in the process of prosecuting the old. Instead of circumscribing conversation in our classrooms, we should be cultivating the Jesuit art of *eloquentia perfecta* – the practice of good people speaking well in search of truth and justice. Instead of creating inauthentic zones of purity, let us teach to the problem. Let us utilize Ignatius’s own letters – so many of which include practical counsel about how to creatively deal with others in a spirit of peace and reconciliation. As Ignatius knew, to curtail any dialogue is almost always antithetical not only to most any idea of a college or university but to any human community whatsoever.

A Closer Look...

Classrooms are places to learn the art of dialogue. We have solid resources, such as Ignatius Loyola’s advice to the Jesuits at the Council of Trent in 1546, which includes this pedagogical gold: Spirituality of Citizenship 101

- learn the surpassing worth of conversation; be slow of speech;
- be considerate and kind;
- pay attention to the whole person;
- understand the meaning,

learnings, and wishes of those who speak;

- be free of prejudice; argue from authority cautiously;
- quote important persons only if arranged beforehand;
- consider the reasons on both sides without showing attachment to your own opinion;
- be modest when you are certain;
- choose to speak at the other’s convenience even when certain;
- give conversation the time that it needs.

“Finally, if some point of human or divine science is under discus-

sion and I have something to say, it will be of great help to forget about my own leisure or lack of time – that is, my own convenience. I should rather accommodate myself to the convenience of him with whom I am to deal so that I may influence him to God’s greater glory.”

Ignatius’s Letter to Fathers Attending Council of Trent, 1546.
“Dealing with Others”

The full text is available at:
<http://www.library.georgetown.edu/woodstock/ignatius-letters/letter8>

I know that I make such prescriptions from a position of relative privilege. And when I think more deeply, I see that the safe space movement, still in its infancy, is a kind of canary in the coal mine, a prophetic response to a world of broken dialogue. In this sense, it participates precisely in the Ignatian spirit in that it exposes past divisions caused by conflict and polemics. After all, it is no small point to note that the Jesuit order was born in the midst of a ruptured church and culture of the mid 16th century, and the young order quickly became known for its conciliatory spirit, its creativity, and its ethic of respect. Of course, these positive traits have taken an all-too-worldly form from time to time in the course of Jesuit history, but their virtues remain intact. These virtues, articulated beautifully over 20 years ago in General Congregation 34, always seek to unite rather than divide, to understand rather than confront, and “to love others as they wish to be known and understood” – with full respect for their distinctiveness and God-given dignity.

The Quality of Mercy: A Dearest Freshness Deep Down Thing

The Ignatian tradition engages Jesus precisely as incarnated dialogue, precisely as the very expression of divine speech. Jesus is the eternal Word who engenders mutuality and authenticity, the *Imago Dei* in which we are all made. This incarnational sense is what stands between binaries, digital or otherwise, and holds them together. The living Word calls us to constant account for our words and invites us to practice a comprehensive relationality in all of our encounters. While other traditions might encourage the idea of Jesus as worthy of emulation (specifically as an idea *out there*), the Catholic/Jesuit tradition sees Jesus as physically inscribed in all persons and things. It sees in Jesus, as the poet Denise Levertov gleaned,



A statue of Saint Ignatius outside Alter Hall, Xavier University.

a living “abode of mercy,” so that we ourselves might be a mercy for others.

And mercy is the safest space. As the Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins so famously laid bare in “God’s Grandeur,” every fracture also reveals the mystery of hope and that “for all this, nature is never spent.” It is grace of dialogue that becomes one of the “dearest freshness deep down things” and sustains us as a living sign of mercy. Bishop Edward Braxton wrote recently in *America*: “For the lover of truth, dialogue is always possible.” We all must have desire to rid our world of bias, prejudice, and discrimination and commit ourselves to the intellectual, ethical, and dialogical work needed to engender peace and justice. But Bishop Braxton also notes soberly that “we have a long way to go” and connects dialogue to mercy precisely as a practical theology. Pope Francis would not have called us to a year of mercy or “asked us to envision the church as a hospital on the field of battle tending the spiritual wounds of the injured, including those injured by prejudice in the church” unless the stakes were high. Jesuit colleges and universities have usually understood this; and they would do well today to listen again and “lean in” further to the charism for which they are so widely known.

For his part, Pope Francis has made the Ignatian approach to dialogue in all of its pastoral simplicity priority one. When the pope declares, as he did in 2014, that “diversity is a harmony of the Holy Spirit” and that “division is from the devil,” he is not only

shedding light on the magnificent beauty of God’s creation, he is also amplifying the charism of dialogue needed to inhabit this fundamental mystery and to dwell in its complication. Even against those who see in Francis’ cultivation of dialogue a too heterodox capitulation to contemporary culture (and a material cause for retreat into the “Benedict option,” feckless #Notmypope tweets, and the like), Francis is fulfilling the ideal of pope precisely as *pontifex* – as bridge for persons trapped in the sclerosis of their own egos. For many, Francis’ unregulated love for dialogue is just too shocking. He recognizes the power of tribalism and

xenophobia, and he demonstrates that the only response is mercy, a mercy that travels on the rails of dialogue towards fuller expressions of humanity and compassion.

Teaching the Charism

When we take words seriously – as God in Jesus takes the Word seriously – things truly open up. When a good word is abroad in the world, language is laid bare and discloses its nourishing power for those prepared to hear. As Lukianoff and Haidt observed, rather than

Jesuits Elect a Venezuelan as the New General

By Patrick J. Howell, S.J.

The 36th Jesuit General Congregation in October elected Fr. Arturo Sosa, S.J., of Venezuela to succeed Fr. Adolfo Nicolás as Superior General of the Society of Jesus. Earlier Fr. Nicolás, who recently turned 80, submitted his resignation to the General Congregation.

Born in 1948 in Caracas, Venezuela, into an open-minded Catholic family, Fr. Arturo Sosa was educated from an early age to cultivate an attitude of curiosity that goes beyond ordinary appearances. He entered the Society on September 14, 1966, and during his regency he was sent to Gumilla, one of the first centers of research and social action for peasant cooperatives. He then studied in Rome, where he experienced the international character of the Society. After this he pursued studies in political science at the Uni-

versidad Central of Venezuela and became editor the review *Sic* at the Centro Gumilla.

He has attended four general congregations, the first was G.C. 33 in 1983 when he was only 34, the youngest delegate in attendance. After serving as provincial of Venezuela and later as rector of the Catholic University of Táchiar, Father Sosa was called to Rome by Father Nicolás in 2014 to take charge of the international houses, which include the Pontifical Gregorian University, the Pontifical Biblical Institute, and the Pontifical Oriental Institute, as well as the Jesuit residences. As a visiting professor at Georgetown in 2004, he taught in the Latin American Studies program. He is fluent in Spanish, Italian, and English and understands French.

In a remarkable visit to the congregation just after the election of Father Sosa, Pope Francis visited all of the Jesuit delegates at the Jesuit curia – a first for any pope. The tradition had been that the delegates all trooped over to see and hear the pope after the election of a new general. The Holy Father warmly embraced the new Father General and thanked the Jesuits for their fidelity and devotion to the church and to all humankind. He detailed three areas for the Society’s path into the future:

- The first is to “ask insistently for consolation.” The Society must know how to bring consolation and real joy to others; the Jesuits must put themselves at the service of joy, for the Good News cannot be announced in sadness.

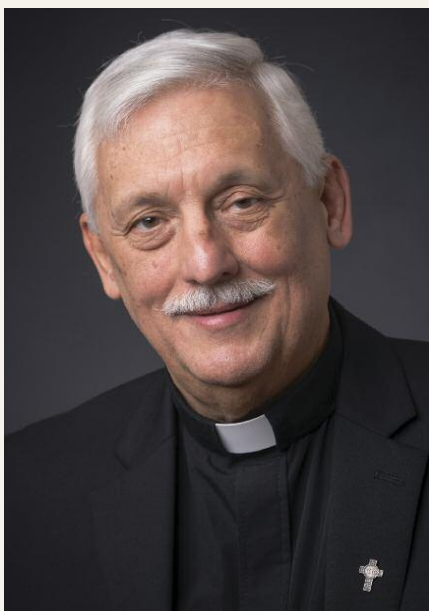
“trying to protect students from words and ideas that they will inevitably encounter, colleges should do all they can to equip students to thrive in a world full of words and ideas that they cannot control.” One of the great truths taught by philosophy, they add, “is that one can never achieve happiness by making the world conform to one’s desires.” The Ignatian reply is that it is precisely through dialogue that we begin to understand the need to surrender our desires to God so that, transformed by grace and ordered to the good, we better understand the mystery of happiness and enter into its vast complexity. To teach the art of honest dialogue

then is where hope for peace and justice thrives, whether in the classroom, the public square, the margins, or online. This tradition is one of the greatest gifts we can provide for our students and for the world.

Michael P. Murphy is director of the Catholic Studies and associate director at Loyola University Chicago’s Hank Center. His research interests are in theology and literature, sacramental theology, and the socio-political cultures of Catholicism. His most recent academic piece is the theological introduction to Robert Hugh Benson’s 1907 dystopian classic Lord of the World (Ave Maria, 2016).

- “Allow yourselves to be moved by the Lord on the cross.” The Jesuits must get close to the vast majority of men and women who suffer and offer mercy in various forms.
- Go forward under the influence of the “good spirit.” Discerning is more than simply reflecting. The Jesuits must not be “clerical” but “ecclesial.” They are “men for others” who live in the midst of all peoples, touch the heart of each person, and contribute in this way to establishing a church in which all have their place, in which the Gospel is inculturated, and in which each culture is evangelized.

Following the election of the General, the 215 delegates got down to the business of the governance of the Society and whatever else needed to be addressed. They decided not to construct multiple major documents. But they did discuss, discern, and decided upon many other items but then left them to the general for the new day-to-day governance.



Though this congregation did not produce many documents, it did make these points:

- In a time of a loss of the sense of God, Jesuits want to participate in the great ministry of reconciliation based on justice, faith, and solidarity with the poor.
- To achieve this, Jesuits need to have discerning local communities where simplicity of life and openness of heart allow them

to reach out and to share with others.

- The Jesuits seek to be “men on fire with the Gospel passion.” Imbuing themselves with the Spiritual Exercises will enable a constant spiritual renewal and enflame them to meet others with a discerning compassion and a compassionate discernment.
- Jesuits are reminded especially of their role in fighting against inequalities and seeking the common good. In our time, *Laudato Si’* inspires the Jesuits to care for our common home and the poor who are most affected by environmental degradation.

It seems fitting to close with the pope’s three words, which are graces for each Jesuit, for the whole Society, and for all of the lay collaborators: consolation, compassion, and discernment.

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