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RCC300H: Tradition and Innovation
Dr. Kloos

How can we both learn about justice in a Jesuit university and live those ideas effectively?

Jesuit institutions are unique in that their education is centered on developing a commitment to justice in its students. Pedro Arrupe in his *Men for Others* speech addresses that "the promotion of justice and the liberation of the oppressed is a constitutive element" and is key to their church's mission, and therefore must be central to the education that is connected to the church. Jesuit institutions do have an obligation to address global justice issues, but how that notion of justice is relayed to students and how students act on it can vary.

One thing that a Jesuit institution must do in order to prepare students to face issues of justice in the world is to develop students' critical thinking skills. In a commencement address given to Regis University students in 1990, Jon Sobrino voices some of the things that he believes that a Jesuit university should enable its students to do, including being able to "look at the crucified peoples today and ask ourselves 'What have we done, so that they are on the cross? What are we doing? And what are we going to do to bring them down from the cross?'" Susan Behuniak in *On "Where and with Whom is My Heart?"* encourages places of education to ask this question of students because the question is "a thoroughly academic" (359) question because it pursues "the whole truth, the whole story, by including voices usually ignored" (360). Answering these types of questions require a lot of reflective thinking on the listener's part. While I do believe that everyone has the basic ability to reflect on themselves, I think it is the university's job to help foster and enhance those reflective and critical thinking skills. This job

is particularly crucial for Jesuit universities. Without any critical thinking skills, students are unprepared to examine the world around them and come up with creative and effective solutions to local or global issues of justice that they become aware of.

Teaching students how to think critically is only one step in a Jesuit university's process of teaching for justice. There are difficulties that Jesuit institutions must face when dealing with presenting ideas of justice to its students. How can we engage students? How can we present the facts, without including our own personal bias? Dean Brackley, S.J. sees this idea of freeing universities from bias as a higher standard for Catholic higher education (190). He recognizes that debates about political issues can "drone on and achieve little because they are based on unexamined assumptions" (190), and propaganda only makes the problem worse. The only solution is to put the focus on seeking the truth. Seeking truth, according to Brackley, "includes uncovering hidden interests inside us and outside us" (191). In my mind, this can only be achieved when information is imparted without any biases so that the hidden interest can be uncovered. To put it in other words, if an educator is talking about an issue of justice out in the community, such as women's rights, but presenting it in a manner that blames the victim rather than the oppressor, it isn't going to stand as much of a chance to ignite a student's passion for women's rights just because of the way that it was presented.

There is a fine line that has to be walked when teaching about issues of justice that falls somewhere between strictly presenting the facts and making the issue so extremely personal that students that haven't seen the issue cannot relate. In *On "Where and with Whom is My Heart?",* Susan Behuniak offers what I believe is the best way to relay issues of justice to students, and it is something that (maybe not coincidentally) we have done in class. Behuniak explains that when she teaches on poverty in her American politics class, she is often shocked by the amount

of students that are "dismissive of human suffering" and aren't budged by the facts that show the "millions of children who are poor and the mere sliver of the budgetary pie allotted to social welfare" (360). She comes to the conclusion that the best way to get students to listen is by having them listen to the story of someone that has suffered. It is then, upon reflecting, that students can truly empathize with someone that has suffered and then use the facts and their knowledge to "struggle with the data, with the people, with values, with political ideologies, [and] with rights and responsibilities" (360) to come up with a solution that they believe is fitting to the situation.

It is making the transition from learning and being educated about justice to practicing it out in the community that I believe is the most difficult to do. One incredible example of this is Pedro Arrupe's actions in Hiroshima after the United States dropped the atomic bomb in World War II. In college, Arrupe studied anatomy and physiology, ranking first in his class in both subjects (Modras, 246), and he was intent on becoming a doctor. It wasn't until after the death of his father that he felt moved to become a priest, and specifically a Jesuit. He set out to do missionary work in Japan, and when the atomic bomb dropped, it was a scene of horror. The first thing Arrupe saw was a group of young women dragging themselves along the road, one with a blister that almost covered her chest, burns covering her face, and "great quantities of blood [were] coursing freely down her face" (Arrupe), followed by a steady procession of people suffering very similar injuries. Using his medical knowledge as well as guidance from God, he was able to make a makeshift hospital and treat 150 people, with only one person dying from meningitis. I see this as a prime example of taking education and utilizing it to face real problems. In this example, the suffering and the need that Father Arrupe saw quite obviously needed to be addressed. What I believe a Jesuit university should do is enable students to

recognize those obvious problems like Father Arrupe, but to also recognize the subtler problems out in the community that move their hearts to action. When that point is reached, I think that the answer to the question that he posed in *Men for Others*, "Have we Jesuits educated you for justice?", will be yes.

In Dean Brackley's *Higher Standards*, he recounts what Ita Ford, a Maryknoll sister wrote to her niece. In her letter, she wrote, "I hope you come to find that which gives life a deep meaning for you. Something worth living for—maybe even worth dying for—something that energizes you, enthuses you, enables you to keep moving ahead. I can't tell you what it might be. That's for you to find, to choose, to love." (192) While I do agree with what she said, I would argue that it should be taken a step further. I would say that I hope a Jesuit education would help someone find a deep meaning for their life, and once it's found, chosen, and loved, that it would also serve as a call to action out in the world.

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