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A Contribution to the Dialogue in *Conversations* #40 on Father General's Letter.

Networking Research through Jesuit Institutions: Loyola University Chicago's Democracy, Culture, and Catholicism International Research Project

By Michael J. Schuck

In Lithuania's former Soviet-era Museum of Atheism, Catholic students from Vilnius University now enjoy Sunday mass in the regained and repaired Jesuit church of St. Casimir, sometimes adding their beautiful, freedom-inspired gospel choir to their celebration. At the Ganjuran farming village in Java, Indonesia, students from the Jesuit *Universitatis Sanata Dharma* in Yogyakarta help local rice growers construct a common building for fertilizer processing—a project agreed upon in open, democratic village discussion. The Peruvian community of El Agustino sits on the outskirts of Lima. There, a former member of the revolutionary Shining Path now uses methods of participatory democracy to assist residents in developing social projects for community growth and development—methods tutored in his contact with Jesuit leaders in social justice.

We humans share a desire to express our faiths through works of justice that resonate with our cultural sensibilities. This yearning breaks out in ways large and small in places like Lithuania, Indonesia, and Peru—or, Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya. Jesuit Father

General Adolfo Nicolás spoke to that yearning—and its connection to Jesuit universities—in his address to the Networking Jesuit Higher Education conference in Mexico City on April 23, 2010. The Jesuit university must, said Father General “insert itself into a society . . . to become a cultural force advocating and promoting truth, virtue, development, and peace in that society.” But he also spoke a hard truth: “We have *not* fully made use of this ‘extraordinary potential’ for ‘universal’ service as institutions of higher education.” “The challenge,” he said, is to “build more universal, more effective international networks of Jesuit higher education.”

The current Democracy, Culture, and Catholicism International Research Project (DCCIRP) conducted by Loyola University Chicago's Joan and Bill Hank Center for the Catholic Intellectual Heritage (CCIH) takes up Father

General's challenge. A combined initiative by CCIH and Loyola University Chicago's Offices of the President and the Associate Provost for International Initiatives, the DCCIRP is a three-year research project engaging thirty-two scholars from four continents. The scholars include eleven from Loyola University Chicago, three from partnering North American Jesuit universities (Fordham University, Seattle University, and the Jesuit School of Theology at Santa Clara University), and six from each of the international partnering universities: Vilnius University in Vilnius, Lithuania; *Universitas Sanata Dharma* in Yogyakarta, Indonesia; *Universidad Antonio Ruiz de Montoya* in Lima, Peru.

The DCCIP scholars' task is to analyze and explore the relationship between democracy and Roman Catholicism from the standpoint of their respective cultures and their specific

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fields of scholarly expertise. Because the DCCIRP seeks both multicultural and interdisciplinary dialogue, project scholars have been drawn from as many as fourteen different academic fields, including communications, economics, education, fine arts, gender studies, history, law, modern languages and literatures, pastoral studies, psychology, philosophy, political science, social work, and theology.

Developing a truly multicultural and interdisciplinary research dialogue takes time. For this reason, the DCCIRP is a three-year project. In year one (2010), CCIH hosted a three-day DCCIRP Workshop at Loyola University Chicago. Here, the eleven LUC scholars, the three scholars from participating North American Jesuit universities, and two representative scholars from each of the three international locations presented and discussed their approved research proposals. The Workshop provided participants with the opportunity to meet many of the other DCCIRP scholars and receive feedback on their individual project designs.

The second year (2011) of the DCCIRP involved three Regional Colloquia hosted by each of the three participating Jesuit communities and institutions in Lithuania, Indonesia, and Peru. The main purpose of these seven-day Regional Colloquia was to allow the DCCIRP scholars to present and discuss first drafts of their research. The colloquia also met other important goals: enabling new connections and collaborations between researchers, immersing visiting researchers in a new culture by a variety of site visits, and hearing leaders of the local Jesuit communities speak to their respective missions of higher education and social justice.



A student from John Carroll University participates in an outreach program in El Salvador.

The DCCIRP will culminate in a six-day Rome conference at the Pontificia Università Gregoriana in June, 2012. Here, the entire group of DCCIRP scholars will present and discuss their final research papers. Paralleling the regional colloquia, the Rome conference proceedings will include presentations by leaders in the global missions of Jesuit higher education and social justice. Subsequent to the Rome conference, the DCCIRP research papers will be published along with a variety of supporting instructional tools. In this way, new scholarly understandings of the multifaceted and multifarious role Catholicism has played in worldwide democratization will be advanced for further research and teaching.

While enhancing scholarship and university instruction is a key goal of the DCCIRP, three broader purposes inspired by Fr. Nicholas's Mexico City speech are also important. Through the DCCIRP process, CCIH hopes to foster further experiments in collaborative research by multicultural and interdisciplinary groups of scholars in Jesuit-affiliated universities—helping to create, as Father General imagined, an “opera-

tional consortium among our universities.” Secondly, the DCCIRP aims to incubate a new cohort of scholars within the global network of Jesuit universities who are awakened to the value of studies in Catholic life and thought.

As Fr. Nicholas remarked, “secularism blocks the Church from offering to the world the wisdom and resources that the rich theological, historical, cultural heritage of Catholicism can offer to the world.”

Finally, the DCCIRP aspires to build not only horizontal links between scholars in Jesuit universities worldwide, but also vertical links between scholars and activists working ‘on the ground’ in Jesuit social justice programs. In this way, a contribution can be made toward Father General’s interest in “research aimed at making a difference in people’s lives,” research that is an “instrument of progress” for individuals and society.

With generous support from the office of the president of Loyola University Chicago, Fr. Michael Garanzini, S.J., and the Helen V. Brach Foundation, CCIH seeks to network research through Jesuit universities worldwide. If this effort further encourages one more freedom-inspired gospel choir, one more structure of democratic decision in a farming village, or one more social project for community improvement in a barrio, the DCCIRP will have made a modest contribution to what Fr. Nicholas says St. Ignatius desired through the Jesuit mission of education: that people “be transformed”. ■