

Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education

Volume 27

Article 3

4-1-2005

Letters to the Editors

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Recommended Citation

Bellah, Robert Neelly 1927-; Hollwitz, John; Foldvary, Fred; and Morin, Jill J. (2005) "Letters to the Editors," *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education*: Vol. 27, Article 3.

Available at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/conversations/vol27/iss1/3>

Letters to the Editor

Response to "Talking Back,"
Conversations, 26, Fall, 2004, pp.
42-47 September, 2004

Robert Bellah Replies to Kelly, Danforth, and Freie

I am honored that three professors have felt it worthwhile to comment on my article in the Spring 2004 issue of *Conversations*, "Education for Justice and the Common Good." They deserve a brief response from me.

I very much like James Kelly's point that we as professors remain students, often beginners as we tackle new problems and new fields. Letting students know that might help prepare them for the reality that their four undergraduate years are only the beginning of their education, which will go on the rest of their lives.

Since Kelly mentioned some events in my early life, I might just fill in a few points that could be relevant to the readers of *Conversations*. It was Paul Tillich's *The Courage to Be* that convinced me in graduate school that I was still a Christian and not an atheist as I had imagined in my Marxist phase. But it took me a long time to realize that an individual Christian is a contradiction in terms and that I needed to become part of the Body of Christ. I ended up in the Episcopal Church, where I am active and, on occasion, preach. But especially since coming to Berkeley in 1967 I have been close to the Catholic community, and the Jesuits in particular.

From the beginning of my appointment at Berkeley I served as an adjunct professor at the Graduate Theological Union and developed a close working relation with several of the schools there, but particularly the Jesuit School. I

directed John Coleman's dissertation and long served as a close colleague of his before I retired and he went to Loyola Marymount, but John was only one of the many Jesuit teachers and students with whom I worked over the years. I did indeed come to learn a lot about Catholic "substance" and Catholic social teachings in particular.

I am largely in sympathy with the comments of John Freie. I do believe there is a "hidden curriculum" from grade school through higher education that subverts the ends of education of which I spoke. And I do believe that the university itself participates in the problems of the larger society. For example, increasing income polarization and exploitation of the most vulnerable workers occurs not only in industry but in the university. I have written about these issues elsewhere, particularly in several articles published in *Academe*, the journal of the American Association of University Professors.

With the limited time that an academic lecture affords, I couldn't deal with everything in the talk published in *Conversations*. But I can recommend to readers interested in the issues that Freie has raised a new book for which I have recently given a jacket comment that covers these issues in great and illuminating detail: James Engell and Anthony Dangerfield, *Saving Higher Education in the Age of Money*, which the University of Virginia Press will bring out early in 2005.

I am happy that John Danford approved of most of my paper, but his objections to my concluding pages do require some answer. Again, my remarks on America in the world were very condensed in the piece published in *Conversations* so perhaps it is not surprising that Professor Danford misinterpreted some of them. For a

fuller view the reader might consult such essays of mine as "Seventy-five Years," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, Special Issue, Dissent from the Homeland: Essays after September 11, 102, 2, Spring, 2002, pp. 253-265, and "The New American Empire," *Commonweal*, 129, 18, October 25, 2002, pp. 12-14, among others.

I certainly do not believe that the American Empire began with the administration of George W. Bush. It goes back at least to Theodore Roosevelt and the Spanish-American War of 1898, and in some respects all the way back to the initial colonization of what was, after all, not an "empty continent." But fervid claims for American global superiority have indeed reached a new pitch under George W. Bush.

When Professor Danford writes that "Neither President Bush nor his advisors have ever...claimed that the U.S. [is] all-powerful, Professor Bellah's feverish imaginings to the contrary notwithstanding," he has apparently not read Bush's *National Security Strategy of the United States* of September 2002. In that document Bush claims absolute military superiority over all other nations, none of which will be allowed to equal, much less surpass, us in military power. He also claims the right to strike any power at any time or any place that the United States deems necessary with or without the approval of any other power.

He further reiterates a pledge that he made at the "National Cathedral" days after 9/11, namely that the United States will "rid the world of evil." While in the emotional days right after 9/11 such a breath-taking claim might be understandable, to repeat it in cold print in September of 2002 suggests a kind of political apocalypticism that ought to frighten anyone, certainly



A student peruses the library at Wheeling Jesuit University.

any Christian who would know that ridding the world of evil is not within the power of any nation.

As to Professor Danford's self-righteous picture of the decadence of contemporary Europe, I'm afraid it really does indicate just the provincialism of which I warned. Western Europe does have many problems—there is no ideal society in the world that I know of—but in many ways its societies really are better than our own. The degree of income polarization, the percentage of the population in poverty, the lack of a national health care system are among the many indices that place the United States at the bottom of advanced industrial societies, just on issues central to Catholic social teachings. A nation that looks at the

rest of the world with contempt and believes it already has all the answers is surely headed in the wrong direction, as the majority of Americans currently believe. As to collapse, indeed not yet, but over-extension is pretty well admitted by everyone. I cannot imagine even President Bush repeating today the triumphalism of the National Security document of 2002.

I want to thank all the commentators for taking the time to respond to my article and to the editors of *Conversations* for giving me the opportunity to reply.

Robert M. Bellah
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and Comparative Studies
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Hollwitz Answers His Critics

The responses to my 'branding' essay reinforce my point. Fr. Nero identifies 'marketing' and 'branding;' I differentiated them. Mr. Conostas suggests that 'branding' is acceptable because it's commonplace or 'vernacular,' challenging my understanding of Aristotle and Cicero, not to mention Emily Post and Miss Manners. Dean Daley thinks 'branding' is o.k. if it's not used to 'sell' Jesuit schools, precisely what 'branding' proponents claim as their intention. Julia McSherry, an Advancement officer, finds my reasoning disheartening. Me too. I expected better of Jesuit Advancement leadership. Dr. Buckholdt brings to the debate an important new perspective concerning Ignatian pragmatics of serving souls. I would love to hear more; 'soul' has too long been absent from our educational conversations.

Each of these writers offered a thoughtful response, distinguishing them from the 'branding' proposal's authors. I recently joined a 'branding' panel at the annual Jesuit Advancement officers' meetings. Just before the session the convenor, an author of the 'branding' proposal, said that he would prohibit discussion except for questions which he screened in advance. Well, I thought, that's an interesting approach. Despite his objections, I asked participants three unapproved questions. First: Should our Catholic identity be 'branded'? Second: what's the difference between a 'Jesuit' and a 'Catholic' brand? Third: 'branding' guru Kevin Roberts defines "appeal to 'sensuality'" as a necessary feature of 'branding'. How will Advancement officers "appeal to 'sensuality'" on

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our campuses? I received no answers (then or since), but the Advancement 'branding' consultant suggested that I am disingenuous because my own 'brand' was hanging right there on the wall in front of us. Two things hung on that wall, an Exit sign and a Crucifix. Hence a fourth question to Jesuit Advancement leadership: How dare you?

Enough. To the leadership of the Jesuit Advancement Association: Let's go public before our faculties. Address my questions for the record, perhaps in these pages. If I'm wrong, step out of the shadows and prove it. Until then, academics at Jesuit universities must demand accountability for what you're trying to do to our schools. To those faculties, a request: if you can get an honest answer from the Jesuit Advancement leadership, please let me know. You'll have done much better than I.

John Hollwitz
Academic Vice President
Fordham University

What free market?

To the Editor:

In his book review, "Economic Spirituality vs. Mindless Consumption," Denis R. Janz writes of those who "ought to be critical of the free market because of the massive poverty and suffering that accompanies it." Evidently he is referring to today's economies. But does he really think and wish to say we have today a truly free society and a purely free market economy?

The market in its purity consists of voluntary human action for all in production, exchange, and consumption. The U.S.A. has never been close to having such a free

market - starting with slavery, the violation of the human and property rights of the Indians, and inequality for women. Today's economies have massive interventions by government. Education is dominated by government, money is a government issue, and military spending exerts a major influence. There is heavy taxation and regulation of the nominally private sector. There are immense subsidies to agriculture and other industries.

All this skews prices and profits and creates economic distortions, poverty, and economic insecurity. We can get a glimpse of whether interventions or markets cause poverty by comparing the economic freedom of the countries of the world; the evidence is that greater economic freedom is correlated with greater wealth and less poverty. This evidence is consistent with economic theory, which tells us that taxes and restrictions that add to net costs create a deadweight loss to the economy, lowering wages.

Those who blame markets for poverty need to confront and rebut

this theory and evidence. I commend the reviewer for an otherwise excellent review, and hope that perhaps some reflection will reveal that our society and economy have yet to achieve the level of true liberty that deserves the appellation "free market."

Fred Foldvary
Economics Department
Santa Clara University

A Disappointing Tour

To the Editor:

The article, "Branding and Jesuit Higher Education" in the Spring, 2004 edition of *Conversations* magazine was personally intriguing on a number of levels. First, as a graduate of Marquette University (Class of '83), I know first-hand the value of a Jesuit education. I completely agree with the author that this value is a well-kept secret, which, if properly articulated, could serve to pos-



The William D. Walsh Family Library, Fordham University, Rose Hill Campus.

itively differentiate Jesuit colleges and universities from your competition. Second, as the mother of a high school junior who has begun the process of selecting a college, I have recent and firsthand experience in how institutes of higher education, including Jesuit institutions, are positioning themselves in the market these days. I'd like to share with you my most recent experience to illustrate the factors that I believe contribute to a strong, lasting, and differentiated brand.

Last April, my husband, 17-year-old daughter, Kelsey, and 14-year-old son and I spent three days visiting four college and university campuses. The last school we visited was a Jesuit institution. My daughter initially had suggested touring this campus based upon her desire to attend a school with a strong liberal arts emphasis, a rigorous academic curriculum, and a good soccer program!

This Jesuit institution did a marvelous job of communicating with Kelsey prior to the trip. The marketing materials they sent to us were in keeping with the brand of a high-quality academic institution, with the added value and emphasis on personal growth, morality and ethics as a part of the collegiate experience. The personal contacts that were made with Kelsey prior to our visit were welcoming and warm, in keeping with the brand. Upon arrival, and as we walked to the admissions office, we were impressed with the physical environment as well – the campus was beautiful, with high-quality buildings and grounds. The fact that the school is located in an urban environment and serves as a catalyst for economic development in an area that has seen better days also was in keeping with the Jesuit “brand” of caring and concern for one’s neighbors. Truly, the university could



Students exercise outside Sobrato Hall, Santa Clara University.

have simply built a wall around the campus to keep out “the riff-raff,” but this would not have been in keeping with what Kelsey’s father and I know to be the Jesuit brand, and what Kelsey was beginning to discover for herself.

As we arrived at the admissions office, we noticed a sign with our daughter’s name and high school listed, welcoming her to the university. So far, everything we experienced was in keeping with “the brand.” Unfortunately, the most important part of the brand – the people who deliver it – left something to be desired, as we were soon to find out.

Fifty of us were placed in a room that held seats for 25 and were told that our tour wouldn’t begin for a half-hour. Then, groups of us were marched across the street for a PowerPoint presentation, and marched back again to the admissions office, where we waited for another 45 minutes. Finally, we were assigned a tour guide, and assembled into groups that were, in our opinion, too large for all of us to hear most of what the tour guide had to say. We were marched back to the same building where we had seen the presentation, so we toured

that building a second time. Our tour guide seemed tired and uninspired – certainly not the enthusiastic cheerleader we had expected. The tour was perfunctory, at best.

This experience points out that a brand is so much more than marketing materials, a website, a tag line or a logo. Where this particular Jesuit institution failed was in the people who are supposed to personify, operationalize, and, indeed, live the brand. Being made to wait without explanation, being herded from one area to another, participating in a tour that was impersonal and uninformative – these were all disconnects having to do with personnel that easily could be addressed, if someone were only paying attention to the total (and fully integrated) experience of the brand in the first place.

I didn’t attend Marquette because it was a Jesuit institution. But knowing now the value of that “brand,” I am encouraging my daughter to consider a Jesuit education. Fully integrated and properly communicated, the Jesuit brand has the power to convey and deliver on the “well-kept secret” that is a Jesuit education.

Jill J. Morin