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Forum: The Challenge to Engage and Collaborate

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THE CHALLENGE TO ENGAGE AND COLLABORATE

Being reasonable takes more than pure reason.

Dean Brackley, S.J.

Adolfo Nicolás concluded his address last year in Mexico by wondering whether Jesuits ought to be sponsoring higher education at all today. At a minimum, he said, Jesuits and colleagues have to re-invent that mission. I am not up to that challenge, but let me make a modest start by addressing the three issues the Jesuit general cited in structuring his remarks. He said that our global context requires (1) depth of thought and imagination in the face of a spreading superficiality, (2) networking our institutions in a global social project to address “frontier challenges” and (3) sharing resources in a “ministry” of research to help transform people and societies.

In El Salvador we receive a steady stream of visiting U.S. students who are subject to that globalizing superficiality. The gospel of triviality also bombards our own mostly middle-class students at the UCA. The advantage of the latter is that the surrounding suffering and injustice helps to center them, if they let the life-and-death issues move them as they should. When they or our visitors engage their undernourished, underemployed neighbors here, cognitive clouds disperse; they see more clearly what is important in life and what is right and wrong, true and false. We remind visiting students that Central America is an “average” place by global quality-of-life standards, a good sample of how the world fares today. They return to the U.S. with powerful

questions, which can focus their future study. The big answers only stick, after all, when you have the questions. Even while here, many find themselves asking that biggest question: If this is how the world is, how do I want to spend my life?

Ignacio Ellacuría understood how the “poor with spirit” point the way forward in confusing times like these. Engaging those he called the crucified peoples broadens our horizons, erodes bias, fills in blind spots. This is indispensable for educational excellence, integrally understood. We cannot pursue that with our backs to the crucified peoples.

That other Ignatius, from Loyola, understood this. He attracts today, because, more than doctrines, he offers us a path for searching for the truth, one that humanizes, as people of different faiths and of no faith discover. He saw clearly that being reasonable takes more than pure reason. We can reason, rigorously, on a foundation of biased assumptions, rooted in commitments we scarcely acknowledge. Reason integrally considered is rooted in



Left: Former Casa students talk with the UCA president Michael Engh, S.J., about the impact of the program.

Below: Dean Brackley, S.J., shares the story of the Martyrs.



practical commitment, nourished by contemplation and imagination, guided by well-ordered passion.

Like few others Ignatius recognized the role of affectivity in personal liberation, including cognitive liberation. However, he was more savvy than most of the

naïve romantics who have shaped the dominant culture now spreading around the globe. He knew that affect and imagination can

Central America is a good example of how the world fares today.

turn, not just superficial, but demonic and nihilistic. It is well-ordered commitment and well-ordered passion that give rise to the liberating symbols that dispel bias and expand our horizon. (Scripture is a privileged locus of liberating stories and symbols, the first of which, for Ignatius, is Christ.) Responsible practical commitment propels the authentic search for truth. As individuals and as Jesuit-sponsored institutions, we pursue truth by responding to the life-and-death issues of our world. Adolfo Nicolás's final two points invite us to collaborate in that pursuit. Let me close with two observations.

First, in general, while the poor understand the rich world pretty well, the rich do not understand the world of the poor. To network and collaborate, it is more important that northerners go south than that they bring southerners to the U.S.

Second, sharing resources and joining in a global "social project," as the Jesuit general proposes, will push U.S. colleges and universities to undertake bold action. For a financially strapped university to set up a semester-abroad program in, say, Nairobi, or share library resources with an institute in India entails risk. Jesuit colleges and universities can offset the risk by undertaking these ventures jointly, stretching to collaborate more with peer universities normally viewed as friendly competitors. Imagination and bold action are also required to address the fears of lawyers and insurance companies who are inclined to veto programs in regions with high crime rates and political instability. Experience shows that both types of concerns can be successfully addressed if the will is there.

Adolfo Nicolás calls us to a leap of faith beyond concern for the immediate good of each institution, in pursuit of the more universal good. ■

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WILL WE TEACH THE COSTS OF WAR?

Peace and Justice Studies at Jesuit Universities

Anna J. Brown

In response to Father Adolfo Nicolás's talk, "Depth, Universality, and Learned Ministry," I imagine and hope that our students will study social justice so that they have the intellectual capacity and courage of heart both to be critical of unjust political and economic policies and systems and to re-create such policies and systems on the basis of love, justice, and inclusivity. I imagine and hope that Jesuit universities will be known for their advancement of the thought and practices of nonviolence and peacemaking and they refuse, in the spirit of the prophet Isaiah, to study war anymore.

Father General, throughout his talk, speaks often of the realities of political and social injustice, violence and warfare, impoverishment and environmental degradation. To be Jesuit-educated means that the university and its graduates are critically aware of these realities and devote a substantive degree of their intellectual energies to the creation of a just and loving world. In the "Re-Discovering Universality" section of his