

A Brief History of Jesuit Education

1. Welcome. I am Tim Clancy S.J. I teach at the intersection of the philosophy of religion and the philosophy of technology at Gonzaga University. By way of a contemplation of place for Gonzaga, this video lecture offers a brief history of Jesuit education and the potential its worldwide network of colleges and universities offer as a resource for Gonzaga today as we all embark into the virtual age.
2. Ignatius was born in 1491, 40 years after the invention of the printing press. He founded a new religious order in 1540, just over 20 years after the greatest disruption in Christianity catalyzed by the printing press, (1) the Protestant Reformation.
3. Ignatius was literate. He apprenticed as a courtier for the Duke of Navarre in Basque country. In that capacity he was trained in finance and accounting, as well as in military training. While he was not officially a knight, he was an occasional soldier from a storied family of soldiers, deeply imbued in the ethos of chivalry. Some of Ignatius brothers died in the Crusade against the Moors for the reconquest of the Spanish peninsula for Christianity. Ignatius converted from court to church (1) through reading books, newly available to people of his station, thanks to the printing press, on the life of Jesus and another on the lives of the saints, especially Francis and Dominic, while convalescing from a battlefield injury.
4. Thus, like Luther and Calvin, Ignatius was a literate product of the printing press. And when his new religious way of life got him in trouble with the Inquisition, he came up with a literate solution—he needed to go to university and get a theological education. He chose to go to the leading university of his day, the University of Paris, located in the very capitol of his erstwhile enemies. While at Paris he attracted a small band of fellow students and created a new religious order, the Society of Jesus. At its inception all ten of its members were graduates from the leading university for theology in Christendom—an extra-ordinary, indeed unprecedented distinction. Higher education was part of Jesuit identity from the first.
5. Not surprisingly then, within 8 years of its founding, the Jesuits had started founding colleges in cities large and small all across Europe to educate the rising urban class into the modern world.

(1) By the death of Ignatius, the Jesuits had already founded 35 colleges. (2) By the late eighteenth century (1773 is a red letter date for Jesuits as I will discuss shortly) , Jesuits ran 800 colleges and seminaries across not only Europe but also throughout Asia and the Americas. While few were doctoral granting universities, Jesuits did govern or otherwise dominated the theological faculties at most Catholic universities and Jesuit academics in an array of disciplines, notably mathematics and astronomy, did hold faculty research positions in universities across the continent and beyond. In short, Jesuits would come to be referred to as “the schoolmasters of Europe.”

6. Why were the Jesuits so successful in higher education? Well to begin with, like Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, and Jeff Bezos, I suspect that a big factor was that they were the “first movers” in a new market. They did not outcompete the market, they built the market for lay urban education. For it was only with the printing press that literacy, and, with literacy, capitalism, became fundamental to modern urban life. The Jesuits founded many of the first schools for lay youth in these cities at the invitation and with the financial sponsorship of municipal officials and the local nobility. Modern education in Catholic Europe just was Jesuit education.
7. Their focus on higher education was motivated apostolically by what Jesuits referred to as “the multiplier effect” (1) Like any good capitalist, they were concerned with optimizing their effectiveness. (2) They reasoned that they could do so by educating those who would themselves be most effecting in changing society—the people the world needs most, so to speak. (3) For also, like good entrepreneurs, they were not concerned with simply maintaining things as they were but with disrupting the status quo, seeking not just to serve the glory of God, as with fellow contemporary University of Paris alumni, John Calvin, but to promote the “magis” that is, the *greater* glory of God
8. Jesuits exploited the new printing press to scale up what would be the largest educational network the world had ever seen. The “Ratio Studiorum Societatis Iesu” or “The Jesuit Method of Studies,” promulgated and published in 1600, legislated a systematic and standardized curriculum across the globe. Drawing on the experience of their first fifty years teaching and running schools, the “Ratio” created a rigorous, ambitious pedagogy with tight horizontal and vertical integration across grades. In accord with the humanist tradition, instruction focused on classical texts in Latin and Greek. But while a universal

template it also called for local adaptation to culture and vernacular languages as judged appropriate by Jesuits on the ground and in the classroom.

- a. (1) Jesuit colleges educated boys from puberty to adulthood over a seven year course of study. As remains true to this day in Europe, “college” education corresponds in the United States to middle school through the undergraduate core curriculum at university. For most students that would be the end of their formal education. (2) Others would proceed to advanced study whether at research universities or schools of medicine or law.
 - b. (3) Now Jesuits would only found schools that were fully endowed by their municipal and aristocratic sponsors. But while Jesuit education was free, admission was competitive. This strategy was in part due to the Jesuit ethos which banned charging for ministry, in line with the Pauline mandate, that what one has freely received, one should freely give. In part it was also due to the fact that the entire faculty were Jesuits, who having taken vows of poverty, were never paid salaries *per se*. Economically, one could say that Jesuit colleges were non-profits in the most literal sense of the word. But, as designed, the Jesuits did indeed profit socially and politically from their effectiveness in educating the urban movers and shakers of their times. This would later come back to bite them.
9. Jesuit education was distinctive in other ways as well.
- a. The curriculum integrated two kinds of training: a humanistic education in the arts, particularly in the arts of rhetoric, composition and reasoning—Gonzaga’s old “thought and expression” block.—and an analytical education in the new modern math and sciences. In other words, Jesuit schools were colleges of the arts and sciences.
 - b. Focus on the lower levels tended to be scribal memorization and recitation. “*Repetitio est mater studiorum,*” repetition is the mother of learning” was a common Jesuit maxim. However the emphasis in the upper grades turned increasingly to systematic analytical study of the “arts and sciences” and learning to think for oneself. (1) The ideal was not just to know facts, but to understand how and why those *were* the facts. And to not just learn theory but to learn how to put theory into practice. Jesuit pedagogy involved a recursive cycle of seeing,

judging, and doing; which doings were then tracked, assessed and improved upon in their turn. The optimizing logic of the magis meant that Jesuit education was the very embodiment of “continuous improvement”

10. Now one might wonder, particularly in our current educational climate, why a goal of maximizing educational effectiveness (or in today’s language, “optimizing outcomes”) would not lead to a narrower, more specialized, immediately applicable training in technical skills. How could the liberal arts, let alone Greek and Latin, survive such optimization?
 - a. Such a question overlooks that, for Jesuits, education is essentially apostolic. It is not just training people for good jobs, it is even more importantly forming people of good character. Jesuits see education as formation, intellectual yes, but also moral and spiritual. After all, Jesuit educators were all Catholic priests. They approached their work in the classroom as a religious calling and they sought to instill in their students a similar ethos. That, like Luther, students’ future work in the world should also be approached religiously as their calling. In teaching the rising urban middle classes, the Jesuits saw themselves as engaged in what was the “principle and foundation” of their order-- that of saving souls—their own, their students and through them, society at large.
11. Now all this came to a crashing halt in 1773 when the Jesuit order was suppressed by the Pope under pressure from the Catholic monarchs of Europe. Jesuits were expelled from many of the kingdoms of Europe whose leading subjects they had themselves educated. Thousands became landless and penniless refugees. Now we Jesuits like to think that our suppression was a result of our success. We had gotten too big, and too powerful for our market. I like to compare our suppression to the break-up of Standard Oil and ATT in the twentieth century. Except that we were not required to spin off diverse parts of the organization, we were forced to liquidate. However in 40 years the Papacy had seen the error of its ways, and restored us after the defeat of Napoleon in 1814. But the institutional damage had been done. A few of our schools were returned to us, notably the Roman College, today’s Gregorian University, but most had been taken over by the municipalities, even the kingdoms they had served. We Jesuits had to start over.

12. It is at this point that the history of Jesuit education in the United States began. The first Bishop in the United States, John Carroll was himself a Jesuit until the suppression. And like a good Jesuit, he took it upon himself to organize the founding in the new capital of the new United States, (1) a new college: Georgetown in 1789. After the restoration of the Jesuit order it became the first Jesuit college in the United States.
13. To be followed by St. Louis University in 1818, just four years after the restoration of the order, and then on the edge of the Western frontier. Indeed it was founded only 13 years after Lewis and Clark had returned to St Louis from their expedition mapping and cataloguing the Louisiana Purchase. American Jesuits would ultimately found 28 Universities along with 62 college prep schools. The goal of these schools were to educate Catholic immigrants. For Catholics had flooded to this country throughout the nineteenth century, often arriving without resources or education. American Jesuits saw education as the most effective means to care for these souls, enabling them to move up into the mainstream of American society. Given the separation of church and state, Jesuit schools could no longer be totally free, but with an unpaid Jesuit faculty as a “living endowment” costs were able to be kept to a minimum, enabling access for many ambitious immigrants, aspiring to move up and out into the mainstream of American society.
14. The formation approach to American Jesuit education remained. While they wanted their students to succeed in their new country, their Jesuit teachers were still primarily concerned with forming moral and spiritual character. (1) Participation in student clubs especially those devoted to team sports, theater, music, oratory, as well as devotional sodalities, and service organizations were as important as earning good grades in the classroom.
15. American Jesuit colleges were also the first among Jesuit schools worldwide (1) to add professional schools to the traditional college education in the liberal arts. They established programs in fields necessary for immigrants to master, if they were to enter into the mainstream of society and the economy-- schools of law and medicine, but also schools of business and engineering, even schools of education itself.
16. For the first hundred years, the multiplier effect still governed apostolic strategy in American Jesuit education. admittedly they could not target the movers and the shakers,

but rather smart, ambitious children of migrant families who aspired to *become* the future movers and shakers in their communities. (1) In fact, far from being elite, wealthy institutions they were too often hardscrabble operations that ran on a shoe-string. Their governance was what today we would call “entrepreneurial”-- operating more from personal than procedural governance, often opportunistic, indeed frequently enough ad hoc, (2) dependent upon the ingenuity and the charisma of particular Jesuits.

17. After the second world war, with the G.I. Bill, American higher education benefitted from a tsunami of motivated students with the funding to pay for a college education. American Jesuit higher ed took full advantage of this bonanza to enter into the mainstream themselves. (1) With more students who could afford higher tuition, Jesuit colleges now had both a need and the financial resources to hire (2) doctorally qualified lay faculty. The first full time lay faculty at Gonzaga were hired in the late fifties. In the early seventies Jesuit schools also decided to “separately incorporate” (4) from their Jesuit communities and establish lay boards of trustees to raise and manage a financial endowment and oversee an increasingly large and complex institution.
18. A third pedagogical revolution occurred shortly after Vatican II. The apostolic strategy for Jesuit education shifted from the multiplier principle of educating the best and the brightest, those future movers and shakers, to a “preferential option for the poor.” This movement had its roots in Latin America where many of the opponents to Jesuit disruption of social and economic inequalities were too often themselves alumni of Jesuit institutions. Latin American Jesuits, lobbied the 32nd General Congregation of the Jesuit order in 1974. They asked their assembled brother Jesuits in effect: “What good is a Jesuit education if its alumni become authoritarian plutocrats and ruthless capitalists-- alumni who more resemble Pharaoh than the Hebrew slaves God sent Moses to liberate?”
19. This emphasis on educating for justice became the flip side of faith formation. It resonated with the cultural disruptions of the sixties in the United States and Europe as well. However it created a virtual civil war among Jesuits in higher education. Having entered the mainstream, and with a professionalized faculty hired for their academic and scholarly prowess more than their spiritual, apostolic zeal or any thirst for justice; with Jesuits themselves now receiving doctorates from the very elite secular universities they aspired to emulate, the preferential option for the poor seemed like an abandonment of

academic excellence. It sounded to many older Jesuit faculty that intellectual rigor was to be replaced by good intentions and warm feelings.

20. However by the nineties social justice had become so integrated into the curriculum of Jesuit higher education that the Jesuit mission itself had come to be virtually identified with “faith and justice”. And indeed, many lay faculty could identify more with the promotion of justice than with the spiritual formation of their students. However the preferential option for the poor could be in tension with American Jesuit education’s traditional mission to immigrant Catholics, as Catholicism itself had succeeded in entering the mainstream and many of the children of those earlier immigrants seeking entrance into these same Jesuit schools, were no longer poor or oppressed.
21. I believe we are now entering yet a fourth era in Jesuit Higher Education, where the focus is shifting once more, this time from economic issues of social justice to DEI, diversity, equity and inclusion--an ethic and politics of recognition in a pluralistic society.

(1) However recognition cuts in different often conflicting ways. Which identities are Jesuit schools called to recognize? Has the mainstreaming of Jesuit higher education come at the cost of its Catholic, even Jesuit, identity? (2)

Furthermore, while educational excellence and student enrollment in Jesuit high schools and universities has boomed, Jesuit vocations have crashed and American education, especially at the university level, has itself become one of the most secular if not anti-religious sectors in American society. Has hiring for academic excellence and administrative prowess come at the cost of our religious mission? Neither faculty nor students, administrators nor trustees need be, or even can be, all Catholic. What does it mean to hire for mission?

22. With the new stress in the academy on “diversity, equity and inclusion,” (1) Jesuit higher education needs to embrace a preferential option not only to the poor but to all marginal groups in our society. (2) And our school’s faculty and staff, administrators, even trustees, should mirror its student body. But with much of American Catholicism squarely in the American mainstream, diversity and inclusion as the mission of Jesuit higher education can seem to be in even greater tension with a professedly Catholic identity. (3) And should diversity extend to religious diversity? (4) 40% of today’s college age population are “nones” professing no institutional religious affiliation. Could

a student body mirroring such a demographic taught by a faculty mirroring such students be consonant with a Catholic identity?

23. And finally, what about the shrinking percentage of Jesuit faculty? Does a Jesuit university need have any Jesuits working in it at all for it to remain truly Jesuit? In the fifties, the challenge had been how to accommodate job expectations designed for Jesuit priests to doctorally trained lay faculty raising a family. While a religious apostolate, lay faculty could not be treated as if they were second best substitutes for Jesuit priests. But today with only a handful of Jesuits among a faculty of hundreds, how accommodate job expectations designed for lay faculty to Jesuit priests with pastoral as well as strictly academic passions? Jesuit faculty ought not be treated as if they were lay faculty, with any pastoral responsibilities treated off to the side, irrelevant to matters of retention and promotion. Today diversity, equity and inclusion concerns also apply to Jesuit hires.
24. Having now reached our present moment, let me turn from history to advocacy, to argue how the Jesuit mission of higher education can be understood under the new emphasis in the American academy to the ideals of diversity and inclusion. With regards to our religious mission and inclusion, it depends on how you understand religion. (1) Religion comes from the Latin word “re-ligio--” to rebind or reconnect. If you take religion to be experiences, beliefs and practices that reconnect one with what one holds sacred, and one takes what one holds sacred to be that which grounds the meaning and purpose of one’s life, than everyone is religious. Whether or not one uses explicitly religious language to describe those revelatory, life-defining moments, or to understand what one does when one seeks to step back, reconnect to one’s ideals and restore one’s perspective, everyone is religious in this broadest of senses. And Jesuit formation is precisely in the service of cultivating such discriminating discernment in one’s life. Finding God in all things includes finding the religious in all people. Evangelization need not be proselytism, but ought to always be ultimately interreligious dialogue, and the core of a Jesuit curriculum ought to be the critical cultivation in its students of lives of meaning as well as service.
25. So the religious mission need exclude no one. But what of diversity? How can a Catholic university be diverse? Well, today the network of Jesuit colleges and universities is even larger and more globally diverse than it ever was. There are now not 800 but twice that, fully 1613 Jesuit schools and educational projects across the globe: including 195

universities and over a thousand secondary schools. Over the past thirty years, the Jesuit conference in the United States has established or helped to sponsor 26 Cristo Rey high schools that include time at work as well as in the classroom and 19 Nativity middle schools, for recent at risk students on the margins.

26. In terms of gender and sexual orientation, Jesuit universities can offer a prophetic voice to the Catholic church itself. Jesuit schools need to work with, not against, the institutional church, whose leadership up to now has remained overwhelmingly male and overtly heterosexual. But Jesuit universities provide the laity, Catholic and other, a voice and an institutional platform to prophetically contribute to the Church's own doctrinal evolution towards broader inclusivity.
27. Indeed the most recent General Congregation, taking its cue from the first Jesuit Pope has broadened concerns of diversity, equity and inclusion to even beyond the human species itself to "our common home". Laudato Si calls for adding to faith and justice, what it calls "integral ecology" whose essence is to move humanity's relationship to its surrounding world from an instrumental optimization of domination and exploitation to one of companionship with other species. The encyclical effectively calls for the two-sided coin of faith and justice to become a three-legged stool of faith, justice and ecology. We are called to care not only for humanity but for all God's creation. To put it in dramatic terms, the values we optimize need to extend beyond those of our own species.
28. Finally, also from the perspective of the planet as a whole, Jesuit higher education is only beginning to explore the potential for global cross-fertilization and cooperation opened up by the internet. (1) As I mentioned at the outset, Ignatius was born 40 years after the invention of the printing press. Today we live 75 years after the invention of the computer, only 25 years after the public launch of the internet, only 14 years after the release of the smart phone. At its origin, Jesuits enlisted print media to create a standardized curriculum across Catholic Europe and its colonies worldwide. Today the Jesuit system of education needs to be approached as a vibrant world-wide network of educational institutions, offering unprecedented opportunities for global synergies.
29. Covid has proven both an accelerant and a caution to the power of such online networking. (2) Just as the mission of Jesuit education in the past has been to leaven

literate modernity with the oral Gospel of Jesus, so its mission today is to evangelize this new globally diverse and religiously pluralistic virtual age.

30. Well, that brings the history of Jesuit Higher Education up to the day before yesterday.

The hope is that this narrative will help provide context moving forward as we explore the resources Gonzaga can draw upon and enlist as it seeks to educate the kind of people this brave new world will need most in the years and generations ahead.