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ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND THE IDENTITY OF JESUIT INSTITUTIONS

Howard J. Gray, S.J.

Recently a competent Jesuit scholar spoke to a group of health-care personnel about AIDS. In the course of his exposition he carefully enunciated a position which would favor condom education for teenagers, not as a foundation for ethics but quite simply as resort for those who chose to ignore the Church's teaching on sexual abstinence for the unmarried. The next morning a local newspaper distorted his remarks, running a headline something like this: *Jesuit Urges Condom Use for Teenagers*. The local bishop fired off a stern memo to the university president and to the Jesuit provincial of the area. The bishop urged not only reprimand but withdrawal from his diocese. Provincial and bishop are still negotiating. This vignette catches kind of practical issues surrounding academic freedom. The Jesuit psychologist knew his business, knew the AIDS scene, understood much better than the bishop that people were dying and causing others to die. But the approach he carefully constructed, his effort to work out a policy based on proportionalism, was rejected without discussion.

Such misunderstandings are not new for Jesuit universities. You will recall the discussion during Assembly '89, held at Georgetown University, entitled "Fidelity and Freedom." This evening I am going to talk about the ways a Jesuit university might locate the discussion on academic freedom. My remarks are divided under three headings: the shape of the conversation today, what the Ignatian charism adds to the conversation, and some reflections about future directions for the conversation.

The Shape of the Conversation. By "conversation" I mean, as the etymology of the word suggests, a conversation in which through mutual effort to discover truth or a higher viewpoint partners in a dialogue turn from their limited perceptions to the fullness of truth¹. The aim of such exchange is "not to convert others but understanding and listening, and in this sense allowing ourselves to be converted and drawn to the truth." ² Conversation is a mutual search, originating in humility, accepting that one does not have all truth but is willing to be part of a search, to be in the give-and-take of shared opinions, arguments, doubts, to let the talk "happen."

I want to propose two participants in a conversation about academic freedom, allowing ourselves to hear their related but different emphases. The participants are Derek Bok, outgoing president of Harvard University, and Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, superior-general of the Society of Jesus.

President Bok lays out the principles and ramifications of academic freedom from the viewpoint of a secular university³. For Bok there are four foundational principles which govern academic freedom:

1. Freedom of expression, in all its forms, is dependent on two presumptions: **the right of the individual** to speak and to write as she or he chooses and **the welfare of society**. If individuals are denied the right of self-expression, then they are deprived of important ways to achieve a rich and stimulating life, of developing their own values, of exploring their own abilities. If society is to progress, then major discoveries and advances in knowledge, which frequently at first appear to be challenges to established order or to be outside the conventions of the controlling authorities, have to be protected, have to be given time and space to be expressed, clarified, tried out - - not to be prematurely killed.⁴
2. In a free society it is free discussion, debate, argument which corrects ideas, challenges errors, and clarifies significances - - not censorship.⁵
3. The proper function of a university is to choose for its faculty those persons who are best qualified to perform the educational and scholarly tasks for which they are hired, provided that they are capable of observing the elementary standards of conduct essential to the welfare and safety of the academic community.⁶
4. In the last analysis, the function of a university is not to define and to enforce proper moral and political standards for society. The proper function of the university is to engage in teaching and research of the highest available quality.⁷

As I read President Bok, these are his major principles touching on academic freedom. As he develops some of the ramifications of these four principles, he also argues against absolute university neutrality. Universities, he insists, "have an important responsibility to address social needs but through their normal academic functions," i.e., teaching, research, and technical assistance.⁸

To exercise this social responsibility, Bok argues, the university administration must be proactive in identifying emerging ethical issues, must encourage the teaching of moral reasoning and applied ethics both at the collegiate and professional level, must encourage programs which enable students to address directly problems in their society, e.g., racism, sexism.

Academic freedom for President Bok is, then, a condition or an environment which allows qualified personnel to teach and to do research without interference or censorship because that is, ultimately, the mission of the university: teaching and research. However, this does not mean a university without values. Values emerge from the need society has to respond to those who cannot secure the means to a full, human life.

Now allow me to turn to Father Kolvenbach and specifically to his Assembly '89 address to all those engaged in higher education at Jesuit universities.⁹

Like President Bok, Father Kolvenbach founds his reflections on a set of principles, six in number.

1. Higher education is part of a more universal apostolic commitment of the Society of Jesus. Today the more universal apostolic commitment centers on the service of faith through the promotion of justice.¹⁰

2. The apostolate of Jesuit higher education should see this commitment not as alien to its academic character but rather as a mission which calls the university to be "a leaven for the transformation of attitudes, humanizing the social climate."¹¹
3. Jesuit education is essentially value-centered, challenging in these values much that contemporary society offers as its values.¹²
4. To be true to its contemporary mission, Jesuit education must also serve the Church in its mission of evangelization of the world.¹³
5. While a university has its own way of being and acting, it cannot be Catholic and at the same time completely without accountability.¹⁴
6. At the same time as a university the institution must have exacting standards of teaching and research and of governance.¹⁵

These six principles also have ramifications. Because Jesuit higher education shares in the mission of all other Jesuit apostolates [i.e., the service of faith and the promotion of justice], there are characteristic ways of proceeding which are distinctive to the Jesuit character of the university. What are some of these characteristics?

First, a commitment to academic rigor which prompts critical analysis, interdisciplinary cooperation, and an emerging "wholistic inquiry,"¹⁶ which forms students and faculty alike into a concerned community. Second, academic rigor presumes "a culture that emphasizes the values of human dignity and the good life in its fullest sense by fostering academic freedom, by demanding excellence of schools and students which must include moral responsibility and sensitivity, and by treating religious experience and questions as central to human culture and life."¹⁷ Third, none of these can be achieved unless there is a multi-dimensional collaboration within the university and internationally.

For Father Kolvenbach, then, academic freedom is a means to an end, i.e., to a culture which emphasizes human dignity and the ethically good life. It is a freedom not just from intrusion but for service, specifically the service of faith and the promotion of justice.

President Bok and Father Kolvenbach touch on the same issues: the right of individuals to develop, the need for society to be enriched, the unique role of the university in facilitating both individual and societal growth. However, they differ on the mission or identity of a university. For President Bok that mission is to teach and to do research. For Father Kolvenbach that mission is to participate in larger mission of the service of faith and the promotion of justice. As the Jesuit general insists, "It is urgent that this mission ... be operative in our lives and in our institutions. It must be up front, on the table."¹⁸

These two approaches shape the discussion on academic freedom in the U.S. Jesuit university. For Bok academic freedom is central to the life of a university. For Kolvenbach academic freedom is never absolute; it is a condition for service.

To understand what Father Kolvenbach is saying it is helpful, even necessary, to turn to the Ignatian tradition and how it has influenced Father Kolvenbach's argument.

Ignatian Contexts. It is appropriate to look at Jesuit origins for a number of reasons. First,

Ignatius and the early Jesuits form a pattern of reference within Father Kolvenbach's presentation [e.g., ## 3, 4, 14, 15, 73, 81, 116]. Second, the identity of a Jesuit university relies, in part, on its continuity with its inspiration not only as a source of spiritual vitality but also as a criterion for authenticity. Every Jesuit work has to consider how it relates to the charism of the early Jesuits. Third, as Father Kolvenbach suggests, the specifically religious character of Jesuit education invites consideration of Ignatian spirituality. I want to focus on three Ignatian realities: the relationship between freedom, generosity, and service, the kind of educational system Ignatius and the early Jesuits favored, and the Ignatian approach to what we today call pluralism.

Michael Buckley has shown that the finality of the Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises* was to help a person make a Christian choice. Within the process of the *Exercises*, Ignatius demanded a spiritual freedom both on the part of the one making the *Exercises* and on the part of the one guiding the experience.¹⁹

The offering of one's freedom stands at the beginning and at the end of the Ignatian *Exercises*. Freedom is not the goal of the Exercises but their condition, their presupposition, not their product. The environment of freedom enables one to exercise generous free donation of him/herself. The climactic gesture of the *Exercises* is, as Buckley phrases it, "interpersonal liberality," the embodiment of that interchange which "concretizes and constitutes mutual love."²⁰ The presupposition placed just before the Contemplation to attain Divine Love, which closes the *Exercises*, dramatizes this embodiment of mutual love: Love ought to be put more in deeds than in words and that love consists in an interchange between the two parties.²¹ The actual dynamics of the contemplation to attain divine love is a synthesis of the four weeks, or psycho-religious movements, of the *Exercises* and an introduction to how, after the intensity of the retreat, one can learn to find God in everyday life. The *Exercises*, then are about a freedom that leads to magnanimous service. The focus of service is the kingdom preached by Christ, whose life and labor become the enduring paradigm of a life committed to loving God and the neighbor.

How much did Ignatius link service to the defense of the faith, i.e., to apologetic purposes? While the Formula of the Institute of 1550 states one of the purposes of the Jesuit order is "the defense of the faith," that aspect of Church service seems not to have been a major preoccupation. The idea is scarcely mentioned in the *Autobiography*, completed in 1555, and in effect appears nowhere in the *Constitutions* which Ignatius composed for the Society. Rather for Ignatius, the historian John O'Malley has argued, the apostolic goal was *Christianitas*:

What was the teaching of *Christianitas*? Nadal tells us in an impassioned passage from his *Apologia* for *Exercises* against their detractors: 'What did Christ and what did the Apostles, what have the saints and Church ever taught except that mortals should love God above all things, with their whole heart, their whole mind, their whole soul, and their whole being. According to him [Nadal] that was the essential meaning of the *Exercises*. It was a message written in every human heart.'²²

Thus a Christ-like service of God was the first action a human being could perform. Consequently, when Father Kolvenbach begins his discussion on the apostolate of higher education with an assumption that university work is oriented to an apostolic mission, he is coming out of this Ignatian heritage, presuming freedom not as an end but as a means.

Second, the Jesuit commitment to education emerged out of apostolic not academic concerns. Once the schools emerged, they became a central apostolic force for the early Jesuits, modifying their lives and their works.²³ Briefly put, the kind of education Ignatius and his companions knew, admired, and imitated was that based on and developed from Renaissance Humanism, a literary movement that yoked classical style to good morals. By Ignatius' time oratory, as the proper training for statesmen, governors, bishops, was central to the system. Out of oratory came the commitment to influence society. The early Jesuits adapted this system to form capable leaders who would ethically renew society.

In broad strokes, this was the kind of educational system Ignatius knew, admired, and encouraged: formation for an ethically responsible role in society. Thus when Father Kolvenbach emphasizes the centrality of value-centered education, he speaks out of this Ignatian tradition.

Finally, how did Ignatius respond to a Society of Jesus increasingly international, multi-cultural, and in contact with a variety of religious convictions and traditions? Some have tried to answer this by appealing to a minor section of the *Exercises*, the so-called "Rules for Thinking with the Church", and especially to Rule 13 among these, with its call to see black as white if the Church so teaches. These rules show, it is too frequently argued, that Ignatius was intent on ortho-doxy. Recent scholarship has tended to put these rules in their cultural perspective²⁴. What Ignatius writes here is really not much different from what Catholics in his day believed. It is not the expression of some exaggerated special orthodoxy. Second, these Rules are more pastoral statements than doctrinal pronouncements. Third, the Rules were simply not much commented on by the early Jesuits and in no way used as a kind of hermeneutical device to interpret the *Exercises*. What Ignatius and the early Jesuits reflected was a conviction that Roman Catholicism was Christ's Church. Given that conviction, they were comparatively non-polemical, more inclined to work for reconciliation than condemnations, and sensitive to adapting the Christian message to the conditions of people than to some norm of orthodoxy. This was an instinct to adapt, an important principle in the *Exercises*. Again, it is principle Father Kolvenbach employs throughout his address.

These three Ignatian principles, then, have informed the argument used by Father Kolvenbach in his Assembly '89 address: freedom is oriented towards service; education is a value-centered process which invites responsible public commitment; and, while a commitment to Roman Catholicism founds Jesuit service, it is a commitment adaptable to times, circumstances, and people.

Thus academic freedom within a Jesuit context is an issue but not the central issue. Still if Jesuit education is to be in conversation within this culture, it cannot ignore the need scholars have to pursue truth without fear of intrusions. Similarly, if Jesuit education is to be an occasion for young adults to develop their minds and hearts, then they must ask questions, test authority, even distance themselves from conventions in order to find their own hearts' values. But if Jesuit education is to be authentic to its specific heritage and to its contemporary mission, it has to stand for a body of belief, a code of ethics, and a style of life which is unrelentingly Christian

Some Directions for Future Conversations. In preparation for this session, I polled a number of lay faculty who teach in various Jesuit universities, asking their feedback on the topic of academic freedom. The vast majority of these lay faculty said that at present they experienced no issue of academic freedom. They felt free to teach and to pursue research as

professionals. Similarly, if you extend the scope of academic freedom to how one lives his or her private life, again most had no problem. Nonetheless, there were two areas in which people expressed concern. One veteran lay faculty put it this way: "There is need for us to go beyond slogans in our internal discussions about the university as an institution with a religious mission." He felt that too many lay faculty were uncomfortable about such discussions, as if they were intruding into someone else's business. Jesuits, on the other hand, frequently appeared protective about the school's mission, as if lay faculty were, indeed, intruding. He concluded his observation with his comment, "It is regrettable that there is not the same sense of freedom in this area as in the areas of teaching, research, and how one lives his or her private life, especially since this is central to our identity as an institution."

The second area of concern centered on the present ecclesiastical climate. There was apprehension about episcopal oversight becoming a narrowly conceived preoccupation with orthodoxy.

While this survey was modest, it struck me as an honest and typical assessment of the situation today. We enjoy a reasonable sense of academic security in teaching and research. We are not too sure what restrictions could be proposed. We do not find it easy to talk to one another about the deeper professional-vocational movements which drew us into the university and help us there. In this regard, I recall part of Helen Vendler's 1980 MIA Presidential Address:

Nothing is more lonely than to go through life unaccompanied by a sense that others have also gone through it, and have left a record of their experience. Every adult needs to be able to think of Job, or Orpheus, or Circe, or Ruth, or Lear, of Jesus, or the Golden Calf, or the Holy Grail, or Antigone in order to refer private experience to some identifying frame or solacing reflection.. It is not within our power to reform the primary and secondary schools, even if we have a sense of how that reform might begin. We do have it within our power, I believe, to reform ourselves make it our own first task to give, especially to beginning students, that rich web of associations, lodged in the tales of majority and minority culture alike, by which they could begin to understand them-selves as individuals and as social beings... We owe it to ourselves to teach what we love on our first, decisive encounter with our students and to insist that the freedom to write is based on a freedom of reading. Otherwise we misrepresent ourselves, and we deprive our students... We owe it to ourselves to show our students, when they first meet us, what we are; we owe their dormant appetites... that deep sustenance that will make them realize that they, too, having been taught, love what we love.²⁵

If good teachers owe their students some self-revelation, all the more do they owe this to one another. Academic freedom is not about the right to make my own way in the profession; it is about the right to exchange all ideas so that the community might be more faithful to its pursuit of truth and more just in its pursuit of living in truth. For that all of us, Jesuit and lay, need that deeper freedom to be companions in the vocation of making a Jesuit university authentic.

¹ Schineller, J. Peter, "Conversation in Christian Life and Ministry," *Ministerial Spirituality and Re/igious Life*, edited by John M. Lozano, et al [Philippines: Claret Center, 1988], pp. 91-116.

² *Ibid.*, p. 95.

³ Bok, Derek, *Beyond the Ivory Tower, Social Responsibilities of the Modern University*. [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982], pp. 17-36.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 302.

⁹ Kolvenbach, Peter-Hans, S.J., *Address at Assembly 1989: Jesuit Ministry in Higher Education* (Washington: Jesuit Conference, 1990).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁹ Buckley, Michael, J., S.J., "Freedom, Election, and Self-Transcendence: Some Reflections upon the Ignatian Development of a life of Ministry," *Ignatian Spirituality in a Secular Age* edited by George P. Schner, S.J. [Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Lauer Press, 1984], pp. 65-90.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 67..

²¹ *Exx.*, ## 230-231.

²² O'Malley, John W., S.J., "Attitudes of the Early Jesuits toward Misbelievers," *The Way Supplement* 68 [Summer, 1990], 66.

²³ O'Malley, John W., S.J., "Renaissance Humanism and the Religious Culture of the First Jesuits," *Heythrop Journal* XXXI (1990), 4 71-487.

²⁴ Boyle, Marjorie O'Rourke, "Angels Black and White: Loyola's Spiritual Discernment in Historical Perspective," *Theological Studies* 44 (1983), 241-257.

²⁵ Vendler, Helen, MLA Presidential Address, 1980 in *MLA Proceedings*.



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