

The Pursuit of Justice in Public Life
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Leon E. Panetta
Former U.S. Congressman from California
and White House Chief of Staff for President Clinton

I am honored to have the opportunity to reflect on the issue of justice in Jesuit higher education. I do not approach this issue as an academic or as a teacher. Rather I try to define it by my own experience, with a prayer that it may help you in your quest to try to ultimately provide students with that commitment to justice that is so important.

Justice is a vital component of our faith and of our nation in the commitment to liberty and justice for all. Surely it is an integral part of the tradition of Jesuit higher education—educating good citizens who would contribute to the common good of civil societies. But justice, like the proverbial elephant that was examined by the blindfolded explorers, can be defined very differently based on which part you touch. It ranges from John Stewart Mill and the utilitarian definition that justice is the right thing to do, where the right thing to do is what produces the most good. Locke and Rousseau talked of justice as fairness in the social contract. The teachings of the Church relate justice to the dignity of the individual created in God’s image. There is also the justice of the Wild West, defined by a smoking gun, in the hands of a Wyatt Earp or a Judge Roy Bean, as well as the case law definitions of justice by Oliver Wendell Holmes and Hugo Black and others. Again, consider the justice that the people of Serbia exercised in the streets of Belgrade against Milosevic. Justice is one of those paradoxes. It can be argued to support every person’s issue, every candidate’s platform, every cause, every country’s policy, every act of war, every closing argument by a prosecutor or a defendant regardless of guilt.

The advantage of Jesuit education is that it can create a central focus for students on what justice is all about. It promotes service *ad majorem Dei gloriam* (“for the greater glory of God”) and acknowledges the dimensions of justice—dimensions of justice to that very cause in the work for peace, equity, human rights, a healthy environment, and global economies. Nothing can be exempted from the call to justice. That focus is what Jesuit education is all about.

Justice is a matter of education, of learning, of values passed on from others—by parents, by faith, by friends, by teachers, by experience. My Italian immigrant parents brought their old-country values to this nation—the importance of family, of faith, of loyalty, of hard work, of caring for one another, of common sense. The nuns at my grammar school taught me about faith built on hope and love and charity. My friends gave me the ability to understand others and the special uniqueness of each human being that makes them all special. My teachers, particularly the Jesuits at Santa Clara University, reinforced the fundamental concepts of fairness, of right and wrong, and the importance of achieving the common good. And my wife and children taught me what love and giving is all about. Like the mariners of old, experience in life gives us a compass, provides us the stars, tells us about the wind and the currents of life, may even provide us with a sturdy sail. But justice can only be achieved if it is a destination for all of us.

At the core of Jesuit education lies the relationship of education to justice. Jesuits taught me that it isn't just enough to have a compass and to have the stars; it isn't enough to just know about the currents in life. To really achieve justice, you have to set sail, and you've got to move forward. Yes, you have the values of right and wrong, but you have a greater responsibility, and the greater responsibility is to be an advocate, to be an apostle, to be a force for good. The fulfillment of Jesuit education is not just learning about justice; it is doing justice.

For me, following law school and two years in the Army, my course was set in public life, where justice can sometimes be very subliminal. Often, justice is lost in the day-to-day confrontations that you face. But I had help from many.

My first job was as a legislative assistant to a U.S. senator from California, Thomas Kuechel. When I arrived in Washington, the senator brought all legislative assistants into the office, and he said to us, "Look, you're here in Washington. And let me tell you that you will be subject to a lot of temptations. There will be those who will try to take you out to lunch to give you gifts in order to try to get to me. But understand why you're here. You are here—we are all here—to serve the interests of the people of California and the people of this nation." And he said, "Remember one other thing. When you get up each morning, you have to look at yourself in the mirror." And I never forgot that because he was right.

The first test that I really faced was when I became director of the Office for Civil Rights. It was a challenging responsibility. It was a responsibility to try to complete the desegregation of the South and try to get rid of the last vestiges of the dual-school system that had, by law, established a division, a segregation, of the races black and white. I had had the opportunity when I was on Capitol Hill to work on civil rights legislation and labor legislation, so I understood the meaning of those laws. Unfortunately, when I became director of the Office for Civil Rights, the Nixon administration had made a compact with Southern party leaders, that in exchange for their support, civil rights laws would not be vigorously enforced. When officials at the White House urged me to back off enforcement in some key districts, both in Georgia and Mississippi, then justice for me became more than just a word or a cliché. Justice became a very terrible dilemma. If I enforced the law, then the chances were pretty good that I would be fired. If I resigned, then clearly the law would not be enforced. If I backed off, I could protect a promising career and a job for myself and my family. I decided to sail into the storm, not because I was brave or courageous, but because I couldn't betray everything that others had given me and because I knew I would have to look at myself in the mirror the next morning. That experience braced me for what I would face, not only then, but throughout my public life: the constant challenge of trying to set a strong course for what you believe is right and just for your constituents and for those you represent, and yet confronting challenges of every kind—from interests that would offer political contributions in the hope that they could get your help, to party leaders who would withhold the bill in order to force your vote on a pay raise, to members trading their votes for what they want. Through these experiences, I really understood that, in their minds, justice indeed does depend on what part of the elephant you touch.

Later in my career I was director of the Office of Management and Budget. One of the things that we were working on was the economic plan, the first economic plan of President Clinton, which passed by one vote in both the House and the Senate. But we were obviously lobbying members to try to get their votes. This was a close vote; it was a major vote. It was

an important vote, not only for the administration, but more importantly, for the country as shown by the course subsequently taken by the economy. However you define justice, you can see how it impacts on particular decisions at particularly crucial times in our history.

Very frankly, if you're really going to implement justice, you have to be willing to take risks. During the winter of 1995-96 the government was being shut down because the Republicans, led by Speaker of the House Gingrich, had won control of the Congress. They were pushing the contract for America, and the centerpiece of the contract was their budget, which had proposed significant cuts in education and healthcare and in other areas. President Clinton, of course, had refused to go along with those proposals. In response, they had decided that it would be better to shut the government down in order to try to force the president to support their position. Now, the president, as is his nature, never really felt that this was a dead end. He is an individual who thinks he can cut a deal with anybody, anytime, anywhere, anyhow. He certainly thought that he could resolve this issue with Speaker Gingrich. And he kept feeling there was a way to compromise. As chief of staff, having known Capitol Hill, I said, "The problem is the Speaker's in a box. He got a lot of people elected who deeply believed in this contract. They are not going to give him the room to compromise. You're going to have to hang tough, Mr. President." And he kept saying, "Yeah, but we ought to try to offer one more compromise, one more offer." We were sitting in the Oval Office, just the leadership of the Republican Party, Bob Dole, Newt Gingrich, the president, the vice president, and me. And the president offered one more proposal, one more compromise. Bob Dole thought it was a great idea and was prepared to accept it in a second, but Newt Gingrich said, "I can't do it." And finally the president said, "Newt, I know what you want, and I understand what you're fighting for in your budget, but I think it's wrong for the country. I think it's going to hurt people. And it may cost me the election, but I cannot go along with what you want to do." Now, I think for the first time, Speaker Gingrich finally understood that the president was not going to move. It was a discussion, frankly, they should have had weeks before. But at that point in time, the president got it. He understood that at that point, you draw the line on what you can and can't do, even if it means that ultimately you may lose an election. I have to credit Georgetown for giving him strength at that moment; he could have used it, obviously, in other moments.

Edmund Burke said that a representative is elected by the people to exercise his conscience, and he violates that trust when he fails to do that. In public life—and for that matter, in life itself—it is not enough to have a conscience. You must have the compassion and leadership to exercise that conscience on behalf of what you believe is right. That is justice. That, I think, is the vital linkage that Jesuit education must be about, so that the students who go to these schools can be not just good citizens, but good apostles, individuals who learn to believe in themselves, and individuals who contribute to the strength of our democracy. Democracy, as we know, is a beacon to the world, for showing how a free people can govern themselves to truly provide liberty and justice for all. It is a beacon to those in former Yugoslavia today. Yet, at the very moment when we are, without question, one of the strongest democracies in the world, we live in a time when there is a weakening in our own system. In the last election, sixty-four percent of the adults who were eligible to vote failed to vote in that election in this country, a beacon of democracy. Adam Clymer of *The New York Times* said that we have a broken body politic in which fewer people are participating and involved in our democracy. Of greater concern is how it's impacting a younger generation of

Americans.

At the Panetta Institute, we polled college students throughout the country to get their attitudes on public service and lives in public life. We got some disturbing news. Seventy percent of the students who were interviewed said they would never choose a career in public life. Sixty-six percent who were eligible to vote did not vote in the last election. Eighty percent said they had never had a conversation with an adult about getting involved in public service or public life. There are a lot of reasons for that, reasons that impact the adult population—concern about attack politics, sound bytes, consultants, focus groups, too much money in politics. Ultimately, students felt that whatever is happening in Washington, or, for that matter, in state capitols, is just not relevant to their lives or what they care about. The good news in this poll is that 75 percent said they would volunteer for service at the community level, because they found that relevant. They could look into the eyes of those they were helping—in education, in health care, conservation, and so on—and they could see the results of their work.

Therein lies the greatest hope: to inspire young people to advocate for justice. You have the challenge to make that happen. It begins with the language of faith, basic beliefs about the nature of humanity, the source of our good, and our role in the whole of reality. It begins with the discipline and a reinforcement of the conscience about what is right and what is wrong.

Secondly, you must establish a bridge between what happens in the classroom and what is happening out there in society so that they see the relevance of what is right and wrong and what it means to people. How can students, many of whom get student aid, not believe that it's relevant what kind of decisions are made in Washington? Or if they care about the safety of their food, the quality of their environment, that somehow that is not impacted by the decisions that are made elsewhere? They have to be a part of that. They have to see the linkage between what they learn in the classroom and what's happening out there, and their responsibility to be part of that.

I believe that you have to promote, as a result, service learning in the community. At California State University at Monterey Bay, where the Panetta Institute is located, it is a requirement for students to engage in service learning in order to graduate. But you need that tie between what they are learning and its relevance to the society of which they are a part.

I would take it even a step further. I believe that we probably should establish a national service system in this country, where every young person can spend one or two years in some kind of service to this nation—in education, in health care, in conservation, in the Peace Corps—and to provide a GI Bill of Rights that provides for their education. Young people need to understand what it means to work with others. They need to learn that sense of discipline, that sense of teamwork that becomes a foundation for the rest of their life in our society.

We live in a very crucial period in history. There are tremendous opportunities. We are, as a nation, the world's leader in this post-Cold War era. We can advance good throughout the country. The paradox is that at the same time that we are strong leaders in that area, we still cannot find peace in the Middle East and in other parts of the world, and there is still tremendous poverty and hunger and discrimination. We have the strongest economy in our history, and yet the gap between rich and poor grows even wider.

We have tremendous technological skills and innovation available to us, particularly in

the Silicon Valley. Yet at the same time that there are these tremendous advances in technology, we still do a poor job of teaching third graders how to read and how to truly understand one another. You don't get that from a computer; you get it from one another.

So, the paradox is that for all of the great opportunities that we have, we truly cannot succeed unless there is a commitment to justice, to making it happen.

In his book, *Citizen Soldiers*, Stephen E. Ambrose describes how citizens were pulled out of their communities and suddenly thrown into World War II. They fought in these horrible battles from Normandy to the Battle of the Bulge, all the way through that part of Europe, until they came to the Rhine River. At the Rhine River, he describes how there was almost a sense of exhaustion. Because there were no easy bridges across the Rhine the soldiers began to say, "Why do we need to continue to fight? The next bullet could be meant for us. We've seen our friends get killed. We're going to win this war. What's the reason for continuing to fight?" A young lieutenant found the Bridge at Remagen and dragged his platoon across, saying "Get going." They didn't want to go, but he forced them to go across. "Get going" became the battle cry of our forces till the end of the war.

To some extent, I think that's where our nation is today. We have won some tremendous victories. We've won the Cold War. We've come through recessions. We've improved the quality of life in many ways. Yet, at the same time, there's a sense of exhaustion about whether we have the capacity as a nation to move on and to fight the final battles of poverty and discrimination and hunger, environmental degradation, and the other challenges that confront the people of this nation and the world. Justice is about "get going," fighting on, as an apostle, as a citizen, for a nation of liberty and justice for all.