

## THE MISSION OF SANTA CLARA AS A CATHOLIC JESUIT UNIVERSITY IN A GLOBALIZING WORLD

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I have been asked to reflect on “the mission of Santa Clara as a Catholic, Jesuit university in a globalizing world.” To begin, let me place SCU in a global context. If our world were proportionately reduced to a village of one hundred people, eighty people would live in poverty; seven would own a computer; only one would have a university degree. Six people would control 59% of the community’s wealth; and all six would be U.S. citizens.<sup>1</sup> If you keep your food in the fridge, your clothes in a closet, have a roof over your head and sleep in a bed, you are wealthier than seventy-five percent of the world’s population.<sup>2</sup> Such reality is sobering. Yet, if we want to reflect accurately on “our mission in a globalizing world,” we must appreciate that, at Santa Clara, we are among the richest and most privileged human beings on the face of the earth.

How should this global reality influence our mission? Before answering too quickly, let us acknowledge another obvious boundary that frames our discussion. The mission of any Catholic, Jesuit university is defined, first and foremost, by the noun – “university.” This gives us the substance of *what* we are to be. The terms “Catholic” and “Jesuit” modify this; they specify something distinctive about *how* we are to be a university. As a “*university*,” our mission must be driven by the pursuit of truth, and directed toward the advancement and diffusion of knowledge through academically excellent research, teaching, and learning. This goal is non-negotiable and we share it with any other university. As a “*Catholic*” and “*Jesuit*” university, however, we are committed to implement this mission in accord with certain values – or as the Jesuit tradition would put it – with a characteristic “way of proceeding.”<sup>3</sup> These Jesuit values should never compromise the integrity of a university’s goals, but they do set these goals higher. To illustrate this, I propose to consider four characteristics of the Catholic, Jesuit tradition and suggest how they give rise to SCU’s distinctive “way of proceeding.”

### **The Glory of God and the Common Good**

In contrast to other religious orders of their time which were established to do a particular type of ministry, the Jesuits were founded to do any good work that promotes “the greater glory of God and the common good.”<sup>4</sup> Using this criterion, Ignatius approved the establishment of Jesuit universities because they promoted a “more universal good” – i.e., the students educated in this way would “spread the good accomplished to many others who are under their influence” and “become laborers for the help of others.”<sup>5</sup> These first Jesuit universities adopted the *studia humanitatis* of the renaissance humanists. A central goal of this curriculum was to educate

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.familycare.org>.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.myworldvision.com.au/index.asp>.

<sup>3</sup> For a fuller discussion of the Jesuit “style,” see Paul Crowley, S.J., “Is There Such a Thing as the ‘Jesuit’ Thing?” *Conversations*, Fall 2004, p. 36-41. See also “Conclusion: Characteristics of Our Way of Proceeding,” *Documents of the Thirty-fourth General Congregation*.

<sup>4</sup> *Formula of the Institute*, #1.

<sup>5</sup> *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, Part VII, #622.

students to be *maxime humanissimi* (“most highly humanized”).<sup>6</sup> Such a goal fit well with the Jesuit focus on “the greater glory of God,” for as the maxim “*gloria dei homo vivens*” suggests the greater glory of God is the human person fully alive. From the very beginning, then, Jesuits insisted that universities do their work in a way that (1) promotes the common good and (2) produces graduates who are *maxime humanissimi*. These two aims are intertwined, for one cannot conceivably become “fully humanized” outside of a rich and abiding connection with community.

This first feature of the Jesuit “way of proceeding” is reflected in much of SCU’s current Strategic Plan. As a *university*, we must engage in the “pursuit of truth and goodness” with “an uncompromising standard of excellence in teaching, learning, and scholarship.”<sup>7</sup> But, as a *Catholic Jesuit* university, we must do this in a way that cares for the whole person, and produces leaders of “competence, conscience and compassion”<sup>8</sup> who are committed to “fashioning a more humane and just world.”<sup>9</sup> If we aim to educate “most highly humanized” students who will promote the common good, then our academic excellence must speak to their hearts, as well as their heads. It is not enough for our graduates to know about the world; they must also develop the conscience and compassion to improve it.

All this perhaps goes without saying, but consider how this traditional Jesuit vision must evolve when it is brought into conversation with our current global reality. What does it mean to promote the common good and be fully human in a world where 1.2 billion people lack access to safe drinking water and earn less than \$1 per day? Are there unique ways that we ought to respond to this global reality given our privileged location amidst the riches, diversity, and technological resources of the Silicon Valley? As members of the 6 North Americans who possess 60% of our global village’s wealth, how should we be influenced by the 75% of the world’s population who lack food in a fridge, a roof over their head, or a bed to sleep on? These disenfranchised members of the global village don’t have a voice in our accreditation or in the rankings of *US News & World Report*, but shouldn’t they count at least as much as these other standards? If we measure excellence and seek national distinction only in terms set by the market and current academic culture, don’t we risk a narrow provincialism that belies our own aspirations to educate fully humanized students who can promote the common good in a globalizing world? The Jesuit scholar Michael Buckley has argued that in the 21st century, Jesuit humanistic education cannot refer only to “the education of the mind, affectivity, and sensibility in the great achievements of the human being. . . . It must also denote the humane development into a deeper sensitivity and understanding of the lot of the wretched within our world and an affective longing and commitment to enter into the healing of human pain.”<sup>10</sup> This idea leads to a second characteristic of our Jesuit way of proceeding.

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<sup>6</sup> Michael J. Buckley develops this point in great detail in “Christian Humanism and Human Misery: A Challenge to the Jesuit University.”

<sup>7</sup> “Fundamental Values,” *Santa Clara University Strategic Plan 2001*

<sup>8</sup> “Strategic Vision,” *Santa Clara University Strategic Plan 2001*

<sup>9</sup> “University Mission,” *Santa Clara University Strategic Plan 2001*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

## **In Solidarity with Those Most in Need**

At a talk celebrating SCU's sesquicentennial year, the superior general of the Society of Jesus, Father Peter Hans Kolvenbach, set forth a new standard for Jesuit higher education: "We must therefore raise our Jesuit educational standard to 'educate the whole person of solidarity for the real world.' Solidarity is learned through 'contact' rather than through 'concepts'. . . Students, in the course of their formation, must let the gritty reality of this world into their lives, so they can learn to feel it, think about it critically, respond to its suffering and engage it constructively. They should learn to perceive, think, judge, choose, and act for the rights of others, especially the disadvantaged and the oppressed."<sup>11</sup>

It is essential to appreciate that this new emphasis on solidarity is not Fr. Kolvenbach's personal whim or a passing fad. It follows directly and inevitably from applying the traditional aims of Jesuit education to the global reality of our contemporary world. We must note, however, that "educating for solidarity" is not as simple as sending students on immersion trips or promoting community service. Direct contact with the "gritty reality of this world" is certainly necessary for fostering a genuine solidarity, but it is hardly sufficient. Experiences of radical poverty and suffering frequently leave students feeling guilty, confused, and disoriented. If they are to move beyond this disequilibrium and the raw impulse to respond with passionate outrage, then we must show them how a Jesuit humanistic education, along with the tools of rigorous scientific inquiry, can enable them to understand and respond intelligently to the complex reality of the human condition. Such an education must inspire their imaginations and hone their critical skills. It must build upon "experiences of direct contact" in a way that stirs them to discover where their best gifts and talents intersect with the world's great needs. Part of this process surely must involve challenging our students to see that notions like "social justice" "and the "common good" are themselves in need of intellectual scrutiny. The best minds have long debated not only the meaning of these concepts, but also the means to secure them, and we should do nothing less. In short, it is not sufficient to give students direct experiences that make them want to work for justice; they also must be engaged with an intellectual tradition that is rich and diverse enough to help them appreciate the complexities and ambiguities of this work.

But here is the key point. As a university, we cannot hope to develop this type of sophisticated solidarity in our students, if we as an institution do not first develop and live it ourselves. We cannot hope to give what we do not have. But what would it mean to become a university that is genuinely in solidarity with those most in need? Seriously engaging this question has far-reaching consequences for our mission, for ultimately, this would require us as a community of scholars to "let the gritty reality of this world into *our* lives" and to root our interests in a place quite distinct from other institutions of higher learning in this country.

Fortunately, SCU is already taking steps in this direction, but to advance further we need to think through a host of questions that potentially take us far beyond our current strategic plan. For example, how can we thoroughly infuse a pedagogy of engagement into our core curriculum and residential learning communities so that students can truly integrate theoretical reflection and

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<sup>11</sup> Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., "The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice in American Jesuit Higher Education."

*sustained* experiences of direct contact with the community? How might this same type of pedagogy be implemented in our graduate programs? How can our Centers of Distinction foster genuine partnerships with the community, ones that stimulate cutting-edge research by bringing together the expertise and resources of the most privileged with the genuine reality of those most in need? How can we promote our solidarity with institutions of higher learning in developing countries by taking advantage of our membership in a worldwide network of Jesuit universities? How can the faculty at Santa Clara shape social awareness through research and teaching that articulates the voices of those routinely ignored by society? How can we encourage the diversity of voices on our own campus and recruit faculty, staff and students of under-represented groups? How can we as a university seeking to be in solidarity with the oppressed respond to pressing social issues like the environment, globalization, and technology? Finally, and perhaps most importantly, how should the answers to all these questions be uniquely shaped by our privileged location amidst the diversity and technological riches of the Silicon Valley?

These are challenging questions. Indeed, some may feel threatened by this vision, and worry that the aim to foster an institutional solidarity will make their work less central to the university's mission. From an Ignatian perspective, nothing could be further from the truth. At its best, the Jesuit tradition seeks not only to be Catholic (i.e., to be faithful to the Catholic Church), it also strives to be "catholic" (i.e., to be universal and inclusive). In part, this universality stems from an analogical imagination which sees *all* of creation as participating in varying degrees in the being that flows from God. When Ignatius contemplated creation, he was impressed by how God is present and at work in each thing in way that is appropriate to its own nature. For example, the life and purpose of a plant will differ importantly from that of a human; yet for Ignatius, it was essential to respect, and indeed love, the diverse ways God is at work in each. Adapting this sense of universality and appreciation of diversity to our own university, we can see how, from an Ignatian perspective, the paleontologist, theoretical mathematician and religious scholar must each embody the mission and contribute to the university in his or her own unique way. In fact, such diversity is essential to our mission. To develop this claim further, let us turn to a third characteristic of the Jesuit way of proceeding.

### **Seeking God in All Things**

The Catholic tradition is shaped by a sacramental imagination that sees all of creation as sacred, as a visible sign of the invisible reality of God. According to this view, there is always more to existence than first meets the eye, and even the most ordinary aspects of existence potentially open us to something holy. When we translate this theological vision into our contemporary university culture, it gives rise to a third feature of the Jesuit tradition which Paul Crowley describes as "a keen sense of the transcendent in everyday life."<sup>12</sup> Crowley points out that this openness is more of "a sensibility than an article of religious faith."<sup>13</sup> People of all faith traditions (and none) can feel confronted by something far greater than themselves when they marvel at the mystery of the universe, hold a new-born child, or struggle with profound human suffering.

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<sup>12</sup> Crowley, p. 39.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

Being faithful to this third feature of the Jesuit tradition means that in our pursuit of truth, we cannot ignore or dismiss difficult issues of meaning and transcendence. On the contrary, Santa Clara must be a place that not only permits, but actively encourages academic inquiry to grapple with ultimate questions of values, morals, and religious significance. Our students hunger for an intelligent faith. In an age when our country and our world are increasingly polarized by religious rhetoric, we need to provide a place where people can talk openly about God, and thoughtfully explore issues of belief. As a Catholic, Jesuit university, we must foster this dialogue with particular care.<sup>14</sup> On the one hand, as a *university*, we must be catholic (i.e., universal) and create a space in which all faith traditions can freely seek truth and knowledge. On the other hand, as a *Catholic, Jesuit* university, we have a special commitment to see that the Catholic faith and the Jesuit tradition decisively inform this pursuit of knowledge. Here a metaphor may prove useful. Imagine the university as a dinner conversation, in which all the voices of our pluralistic community gather to share ideas and seek the truth. We must ensure that the Catholic, Jesuit tradition is invited to the party, and that it plays an active and compelling role in the evening's conversation. At the same time, diverse and divergent views must also be invited and well represented around the table. Without this mix, we cannot create an environment in which the Catholic tradition can engage in an authentic dialogue with the very best that contemporary scholarship has to offer. In short, we seek a "centered pluralism" in which the Catholic, Jesuit tradition can fully engage contemporary culture to the benefit of all.

Some may worry that this inclusive understanding of our mission will dilute Santa Clara's identity as a Catholic university by encouraging speakers, artistic productions, student groups, etc. who are at odds with the teachings of the Catholic Church. In contrast, others may argue that the special commitment to the Catholic, Jesuit tradition will preferentially allocate resources within the university, thereby creating a community of "haves" and "have-nots." Speaking more broadly, others might worry that these contrasting objections are themselves emblematic of a deeper problem that runs throughout this reflection on SCU's mission, namely that it commits the university to conflicting goals. For example, we want to be academically excellent and, at the same time, in solidarity with those who often have no education; we strive to be catholic and universal, and yet faithful to our Catholic tradition; we want to put students in contact with the gritty reality of the world and still have them excel in the classroom; and so on. To address this set of concerns, let us turn to a fourth and final characteristic of the Jesuit way of proceeding.

### **Embracing a Creative Tension**

The Jesuit tradition has often been characterized as one based on a "spirituality of tensions."<sup>15</sup> The ideal of being a "contemplative in action" is perhaps the most famous example of this, but others abound. Jesuits want to be responsive to individual discernment, yet obedient to the Church; united in mind and heart, yet dispersed on mission; free from worldly attachments, yet passionately engaged in changing the world; and so on. Far from seeing the pairing of such polarities as confused or contradictory, the Jesuit tradition embraces an inclusive, "both-and" approach that refuses to purchase consistency at the price of oversimplifying reality. Instead of

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<sup>14</sup> For more on the nature of this dialogue, see "Servants on Christ's Mission," *Documents of the Thirty-fourth General Congregation*, esp. #47.

<sup>15</sup> See William A. Barry, S.J. and Robert G. Doherty, S.J., *Contemplatives in Action: The Jesuit Way* (New York: Paulist Press, 2002).

being paralyzed by competing goals, the Jesuits have used them to elicit a creative tension that seeks a delicate balance in navigating a complex and ambiguous world.

This same type of creative tension needs to inform our thinking about SCU's mission. How to reconcile such tensions will not, of course, always be clear. And for this reason, the Jesuit tradition has long stressed the importance of daily reflection and discernment. In a similar way, perhaps we as a university community need to develop analogous patterns of reflection to ensure that we appropriately balance the competing goals of our mission. The "Thought Papers" that follow this paper represent an important first step in this direction. They seek to begin a conversation wherein the SCU community can collectively reflect on our strategic focus and educational programs. Toward this end, these papers examine both Academic Areas (Humanities, Arts, etc.) and Thematic Areas (Environment and Ecological Sustainability; Technology; International Education/Educating for a Globalizing World; Civic Learning and Educating for Democracy, Diversity/Cultural Competence/Understanding; Student Life; Theology and Culture; and Ethics and Justice).

By remaining true to the creative tension of our mission, Santa Clara can become a truly distinctive university. This distinctiveness will flow, in part, from our Ignatian commitments (1) to be in solidarity with those most in need, and (2) to foster a centered pluralism that brings the Catholic, Jesuit tradition into dialogue with other faith traditions and contemporary culture. The challenge, of course, will be to develop concrete steps to live out these commitments in a way that is appropriate to our fundamental identity as a *university*. (The Thought Papers that follow begin to address this practical challenge.) In the end, our success must be measured by how we let our distinctive Jesuit values shape the way that we educate students to promote the common good in a globalizing world. We can hope to succeed at this task, only if we follow our essential call to be an academically excellent university.

#### Reflectors

Kirk Hanson, Cynthia Mertens, Catherine Murphy, Charles Nolan, Tom Plante, Suan Shea, Hersh Shefrin