

“Women and Men Working Together in Jesuit Institutions of Higher Learning”

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In recent years, an issue with a high profile in Jesuit education has been its Catholic and Jesuit identity in the face of fewer religious vocations and increased participation by laity. Discussion of this issue has inevitably turned to the roles of women in these institutions, especially because their advent on the Jesuit scene has been relatively recent and their presence remains in some respects precarious or at least perplexing. In perusing materials from the 1989 Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities Assembly at Georgetown, I came across a paper by Joseph M. McShane, S.J. (1991), on the subject of secularization. Its opening paragraphs contain a couple of items which wonderfully reflect both the positive ideals which Jesuit education has set before its students historically, and the more problematic relation of those ideals to women. The tension between these two aspects quite eloquently reveals the agenda for the future.

McShane offers three distinctive features of Jesuit education: the pastoral role of the teacher vis-a-vis the student; a specifically religious worldview as the context of education; the education of students not only in intellectual pursuits, but also so that they might "assume an active apostolic role in the world." Today, Jesuits commendably and almost universally recognize that education for the apostolic role can and should include both a social justice initiative toward women and an egalitarian "collaboration" *with* women in the university. The college or university itself should be a model community within which bias and exclusion based on race, class, and gender is already challenged and even overcome at *all* levels.



However, McShane's paper reveals a second item about Jesuit history, following immediately upon his insistence on the religious, pastoral, and apostolic nature of Jesuit education, a gem excavated from a 1939 work of a fellow Jesuit, Allan P. Farrell, on "liberal education." "Jesuit education 'proposed to train men of virtue and of character; Christian gentlemen who will take pride in the heritage of their faith...[who] may contribute through influence, service, and example to the upbuilding of the kingdom'" (p.33). Farrell's statement presents us almost immediately with the ambiguity inherent in trying to y pursue equality for and collaboration with women under the aegis of the Jesuit apostolate. The use of the word "men" would be today an obvious *faux pas*, one for which we may forgive an author half a century past. But this "virtue and character" are implicitly those of "Christian gentlemen," a remark that has not only gender but also class and race overtones which still ring clearly, as does the expectation that virtue will be fulfilled within a certain social code prescribing, no doubt, distinct and even separate spheres for the virtuous man and the virtuous woman.

This is the fundamental problem with which we have to deal in speaking of the "collaboration" of women and men on Jesuit campuses: contemporary Jesuit benevolence toward women seeks expression in historical, institutional, and even residual attitudinal contexts which pose obstacles to inclusion of women in the enterprise on fully equal terms.

In speaking of the equal incorporation of women's roles on university campuses, it is important to avoid the equal but "different" (or "better") paradigm which not only still segregates but also insidiously patronizes. Mary Brabeck has cautioned against seeing in women the embodiment of the "womanly virtues" of relational care, covenant, community, connection, and concern (1992). Unfortunately, these are highlighted even in the work of some feminists like Carol Gilligan, who accent the actual differences in male and female characteristics. The problems in this approach are several. Though appreciative of women, the praise of women's virtues, such as sensitivity, affectivity, compassion, and care, often reinforces stereotypical expectations of both women and men. Consequently, the association of these virtues with women hampers their introduction into institutions where traditionally "masculine" virtues and power relations have been dominant (intellect, leadership, social



justice initiatives). It becomes especially easy to segregate both women and "womanly virtues" in women's professional schools, such as nursing and education, where the care-oriented relational virtues are deemed most appropriate.

Jesuits and other Catholic educators are not more guilty of stereotypes and segregation than their peers in the academic enterprise. My argument is rather that Jesuits have a greater historical commitment to remedy these faults because of their religious mission of *social justice* and *service*, the former mandating social change and the latter challenging any institutional separation of men's and women's virtues. Although it is true that men's and women's socialization encourages the development of different virtues, any real collaboration of women and men in the educational sphere will mean a shared reeducation in the virtues for both, toward what feminist theologian Rosemary Ruether calls the "full humanity" of both women and men (1989). A real challenge is to avoid preconceived limits on the types of leadership we can expect from either sex. This is especially important in our dealings with students, whom we ourselves are educating and socializing, through every aspect of our institutions, both subtle and overt. We need in particular to create institutions which respect and encourage intellect, rationality, and leadership as virtues appropriate for women.

I will develop a perspective on this task by addressing several related issues. The Jesuit commitment to social action, justice, and service for others, is today expressed as the "preferential option for the poor," and is being expanded to include an option for and with women. Obviously, however, this commitment must be implemented in the context of both friendly and less friendly institutional realities, as I will illustrate with reference to Boston College. Moreover, one cannot avoid the fact that the larger context of the Roman Catholic Church fosters exclusion of a feminist interest within the commitment to justice and service, and hinders full collaboration with women in pursuing it. It is not surprising that some view feminism and Catholicism as irreconcilable ideologies. However, I find it credible to see them both as potential expressions of Christian ideals. As Saint Paul wrote to a community of early Christians which he founded, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gals 3:28).



Finally, I will conclude by venturing some practical recommendations for overcoming the various barriers to the collaboration of women and Jesuits on our campuses.

Service and justice are ideals already established among Jesuits (Kolvenbach, 1989). The apostolic mission of the Jesuits in higher education is "[t]he service of faith and promotion of justice." Hence, "preferential love for the poor" must be "operative" in all Jesuit institutions. The "option for the poor" should be the criterion for every significant decision--but this option is not "exclusivist," i.e., not limited only to one economic class. This non-exclusivist option should be extended to groups which are marginalized on the basis of other than purely economic criteria, such as race or sex. Robert J. Daly, S.J., has commented that "the Ignatian criterion for the selection of ministries" is to "take up those important works for church and world which are being neglected and which no one else can or will do."¹ Although this criterion certainly applies to women's equality as an agenda item--for the Roman Catholic Church, it is still the case that, within the Church, especially as a task specifically for the clergy, it is nothing if not "neglected." Certainly few others in positions of power in the Church" can or will do" ¹ the job of recognizing women's full contribution. Both the Jesuit openness to and engagement with the world, and its religiously based option for the marginalized, should and do lead Jesuits and Jesuit institutions to a positive and productive interaction with feminist concerns, i.e., with the experience of unjust constraint and even oppression which stereotypical gender roles imply for both men and women.

Although Jesuits are to be commended for fostering the appropriation of feminist insights in the Church and in higher education, we must still contend with some adverse institutional realities. My own university became fully co-ed only in 1970, thus missing out on the process of integration of women students and their needs that happened on secular campuses in the 1960s and early 1970s, for example, in health and counseling services. Through much of the 1970s, issues such as contraception, abortion, and sexual orientation were not even mentioned in Catholic university counseling departments and health clinics. And it is still the case that we do not know how to deal with and formulate clear policies about such problems, especially how to arrive at a working consensus on how they will be



handled, or to locate our institutional positions within a larger Catholic context. More generally, we still need to be concerned in all the obvious ways about role expectations of women and men students in the classroom and in academic and professional preparation, as well as in the ways both men and women students envision their future integration of sexuality, marriage, parenthood, and vocation in the world.

Among faculty, the retention rates are lower for women than men, for a number of reasons, including family gender roles which impose greater responsibilities for women in childbearing years. It is increasingly true of lay faculty of either sex that family obligations interfere not only with the publishing track record but also with full participation in university and departmental activities arranged outside of the normal work week, e.g., evening and weekend meetings, retreats, and social events. Although campus daycare has helped to alleviate the situation for some at Boston College, faculty with young children, especially women, may feel torn by competing loyalties and responsibilities and may suffer concrete effects in terms of professional advancement. And when women faculty are few, it is obvious they will also be less well represented in other aspects of the Jesuit educational endeavor, for instance, departmental administration and university committees.

Most of the few women administrators in "top" positions are located in the "women's" professional schools (nursing, education, social work). And, at church-related schools, the glass ceiling over advancement is often perceived to be more shatterproof for women than for lay men. Among support staff, clerical positions are still preponderantly filled by women and still offer relatively low pay and low expectation of "vocational" fulfillment. Most women enter these jobs because they typically have less extensive education, need more flexible or shorter hours to accommodate childcare responsibilities, and need to stop and resume work around childbearing--all problems or needs linked to women's traditional gender roles.

I have also observed that many women secretaries and even administrative staff persistently refer to their Jesuit bosses as "Father" (which need not imply that the Jesuits actively encourage the practice). "Father" is not a specifically academic or even Jesuit designation, and tends to make the administrator's role, however unintentionally, a



beneficiary of the clericalism and especially the paternalism which the term explicitly denotes.

The encompassing context for male-female cooperation in Catholic higher education is the institutional Church, which has quite a mixed record on women's equality and collaboration. In practice, it has certainly not been supportive of any very significant changes in women's actual roles. Recent Vatican and papal teaching is familiar. In his "apostolic exhortation," *On the Family (Familiaris Consortia)*, John Paul II "affirmed "the equal dignity and responsibility of men and women" and asserted that this equality "fully justifies women's access to public function." Yet, he continued, "the true advancement of women requires that clear recognition be given to the value of the maternal and family role, by comparison with all other public roles and all other professions." Further, the pope warned, women should not renounce their true femininity or imitate the male role (1980, no. 23; see also John Paul II, 1988, on all women's innate disposition to mothering). Although critical of overt discrimination against women, the pope is slow to perceive that the romanticization of motherhood and of woman as mother reinforces the stereotypical gender expectations which lie at the root of the problem. As Margaret O'Brien Steinfels, editor of *Commonweal*, said in her John Courtney Murray Forum lecture at Fordham: "I submit that this language of women's place is not so much mistaken as strangely implausible. ..separated as by a chasm from the ordinary experience of an increasing number of women and men" (1989).

Although the Catholic emphasis on women as mothers could certainly be used to encourage more institutional support and more flexible roles for women with young families in Jesuit institutions, I believe that "special treatment" should be an agenda very cautiously pursued. While it is true that women *de facto* bear more responsibility for early child care, part of the agenda of feminism is a more balanced sharing of both domestic and public roles by women and men. Especially among professional couples, the "ordinary experience" of parents is moving toward greater cooperation in the family, and this is a trend which I would not want to see undermined. Particularly in the university setting, an increasing number of male faculty have child care responsibilities because of the more flexible schedule which



teaching can afford. This shift helps to erode role stereotypes of women as essentially "different from" men (as maternal, relational nurturers). The increase in child-caring fathers on campuses undermines the notion that childcare is a "women's issue" and that it is only a peripheral institutional concern because women as mothers should not be fulfilling institutional roles in the first place. Hence, institutions should be encouraged to provide child care and even parental leave benefits which both parents can utilize.

It also is ironic but true that as child care becomes a male concern, it has more ready access to the channels of change. At Boston College, one high-level administrator, holding a position traditionally assumed by a Jesuit, has made significant strides in establishing family-oriented policies, especially the opening of an on-campus daycare center and tax benefits for in-home child care. This administrator is the father of two young children and the husband of a faculty member at another institution.

The issue of ambiguous images of women, reflected in papal teaching which affirms women's social contribution while highlighting motherhood, is brought closer to home in the story of Ignatius of Loyola.² In a recent article in a Jesuit scholarly journal, psychoanalyst William Meissner, S.J., explores the psychodynamics of Ignatius's religious conversion in terms of his relationships to women. Ignatius lost his mother early on (as did John Paul II), and was raised by a peasant foster mother until the age of 7, when he was returned to his family. As a youth, he led a privileged and dashing existence as a knight and soldier, fast in pursuit of ideals of courtly love and chivalry. But as a young man, Ignatius was wounded at the siege of Pamplona. A long convalescence at the Loyola family castle followed, including repeated painful and disabling surgeries on his leg. During the prolonged absence at war of Ignatius's brother Martin, master of the castle, Ignatius's sister-in-law Magdalena undertook to nurse Ignatius back to health. During this time, there came to him a vision of the Blessed Mother and Child, which was central to his conversion experience. Sixty years later, Ignatius is reported to have "confessed to one of his novices that a picture of Our Lady in his prayerbook reminded him so much of [Magdalena's] beauty that he had to cover the picture in order that his intense affection and passion for her might not be aroused" (1991, p.29).



Without reducing the authenticity of Ignatius' religious experience to his psychological and libidinal drives, Meissner suggests that the vulnerable soldier might well have substituted the vision of Mary for the desired Magdalena, and comments that "the Blessed Mother was in a unique way the dominant idealized image of chaste feminine perfection in Inigo's culture." Moreover, when Magdalena had come to the castle as a young bride, she had taken over the care of her little brother-in-law from "the loving and motherly nursemaid, Maria de Garin," leading Meissner to conjecture that "the vision of Our Lady was the embodiment of the idealized mother" (1991, pp. 29-30).

In this imagery, taken from Ignatius' own account of his life, womanhood is defined in terms of three intertwined yet conflicting roles, about which Ignatius experiences no small ambivalence: *mother*--idealized nurturer and comforter; *healer*--caring, compassionate, and pious; and *sexual focus*--both bride and temptress. Magdalena, as the real but romanticized lady of the castle, is to Ignatius both mother and healer, but still sexually dangerous. The danger and the ideal are symbolically reconciled in the Virgin Mary of the conversion experience, whose femininity combines both sublimated sexuality and idealized maternity.

Meissner makes it clear that Ignatius had virtually no choice but to deal with women in the markedly stereotypical images provided by his culture. Our task today is to ask in what way those sixteenth century images have or have not changed in our own culture. Do we, like Ignatius, preserve some ambivalence in our institutions, or do we challenge the ambivalence expressed in current papal writings?

Ignatius' confusion about Magdalena is grounded in gratitude and affection. But perhaps there is, for all that, a certain inability to see her in her own right and to accept her care for him for what it was, rather than as a symbol of what he either lacked, hoped for, or feared from women. His history of basic deprivation of solid, ongoing relationships with important female figures may have inhibited his ability to approach women simply as fellow human persons. Not so subtly, I am asking whether Jesuits are in this regard, as in others, living out of an Ignatian legacy. Has Ignatius' "deprivation" been repeated in the history of Jesuit education, and are we now in the throes of an Ignatian recovery?



How can we further better collaboration in Jesuit higher education? It is vitally important to seek out and even create opportunities for the development of real friendships among Jesuits and women colleagues. The residual separation of spheres in our institutions cannot be overcome unless "grass roots" changes in practical relationships permit top-down policies to be backed concretely by corresponding attitudes and expectations on the part of those to whom they are directed. But the friendships which are the seed and the support of more egalitarian working relationships are often inhibited by persistent male and female subcultures on campus.

A general barrier to Jesuit-lay cooperation is created by the privileged association of Jesuits, who, quite properly in terms of their religious community, withdraw together for prayer, meals, recreation, and many other forms of formal and informal contact. Yet the inevitable segregation from lay faculty is exacerbated for women in the case of a men's religious order. For one thing, in comparison to their lay male colleagues (who also participate in male subcultures), the religious order members have less intimate contact with women (and the women's subculture) in other, complementary spheres of their lives. A lay man, for instance, might have access to the daily intimacy of male-female family life, where today on all sorts of levels the traditional role divisions are being gradually diminished. Jesuits by definition will have limited continuing adult experiences with women who are approachable and trustworthy as confidantes. Hence, Jesuits may find it much easier to relate to men, with whom they more often can rely upon a shared male frame of reference, or whom they can even draw into the Jesuit subculture a bit more naturally.

On many Jesuit campuses, sincere attempts to enhance Jesuit-lay collaboration produce "meetings" of one sort or another, often including a social as well as an academic or mission-oriented component. While valuable in their own way, these events are inadequate to establish any integral and ongoing relationships of a personal nature. They still tend to keep laity, and especially women, at "arms length," especially when they depend on Jesuit initiative and Jesuit planning, and lay or women's subsequent introduction into a process which they do not really "own." Priestly formation may instill wariness about establishing



relationships of genuine mutual confidence with women. Yet certainly today many Jesuits are confident enough of their own Jesuit identity to venture interactions in which non-Jesuits, even women, are met in terms of equality, trust, and even the intimacy of friendship. The clerical-lay divide, impermeable to women, will undoubtedly continue to be a source of tensions in all male-female relations in institutions run by clerical orders, especially when top positions are usually filled by the orders' members. However, I am optimistic about the potential of Jesuits and Jesuit institutions to be agents for change in the institutional Church.

Gloria Steinem titled one of her books *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions* (1983). This suggests a modestly revolutionary agenda for our clerical co-workers. Why not include more women at various points on the Jesuit "old boy network"? It is not that lay or female faculty envision Jesuit conspiracies behind closed doors, wherein institutional matters are settled outside of established democratic procedures. More simply, we are all aware, as social and political animals, that familiarity breeds confidentiality and offers opportunities for exchange of attitudes, ideas, and advice. Just as matters of the day are hashed over in the family kitchen of the lay spouses, so certain things may be accomplished in the Jesuit residence TV room, cocktail hour, or corridors. Yet distinguishing the latter zones is the fact that the persons one meets are also likely to share in decision-making prerogatives regarding mutual professional concerns.

Informal consultation and sharing of opinions with women will naturally require "hanging around" where women are to be found. Use your campus's faculty dining room (or its functional equivalent) as a subversive institution. Venture onto neutral territory and encounter lay colleagues where they generally congregate, gossip, relax, and amiably argue, even if only in department halls or at the other end of a telephone line. Happily, it is not unheard of at B.C. for Jesuits to take the initiative and invite congenial non-Jesuit friends and spouses to join them for dinner. Note that similar initiatives and reciprocations should not just be a form of penance-like "community outreach," but a genuine attempt to establish ongoing friendships based on common interests. Many of us are already fortunate to enjoy



good relationships with Jesuits, entered via friendships established in graduate school, committee work in the university, and longevity in our academic departments, which, at the very least, is guaranteed to offer opportunities for camaraderie in the mutual display of battle wounds. Far from being merely a critic of women's experience as educators among Jesuits, I am gratefully a beneficiary of community and friendship with many of them. The task ahead on our campuses is to discover and invent ways to make the experience a few of us have been privileged to share more *inclusive*--to find ways to improve upon it, extend it, and allow it to influence larger institutional structures.

The full accommodation of women and their contributions within Jesuit and other Roman Catholic institutions requires swimming against the tide of an ocean of Christian traditions which have been patriarchal if not misogynist. Catholic priests and men's religious orders will often find it more comfortable to preserve the status quo, especially when under immense pressures, both direct and indirect, from the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Nonetheless, many such institutions have a track record of support for lay faculty, an ability to appropriate Catholic teaching critically, and an attitude of respectful independence toward Vatican bureaucracy. I am counting on a certain Ignatian feistiness to help his sons--and their sisters--to rise to this new cause.

Notes

This essay is based on a keynote address to the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities Conference on Collaboration in Ministry, New Orleans, April 25, 1991.

1. Robert J. Daly, S.J., who preserved this and other remarks in his own copious notes of the St. Louis conference, is Professor of Theology and Director of the Jesuit Institute at Boston College and editor of the scholarly journal, *Theological Studies*.
2. It is remarkable that when a version of this presentation was delivered to a convention of the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities in New Orleans, my implicit criticism of



Ignatius, which I had thought rather gently formulated, met with much more resistance from my Jesuit audience than the foregoing criticisms of John Paul II.

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