



**Revised  
Edition**

JESUIT SATURDAYS

# SHARING THE IGNATIAN SPIRIT

with Friends and Colleagues

William J. Byron, SJ

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## The Enduring Evidence of a Jesuit Education

There is a not-widely known Jesuit Association of Student Personnel Administrators (JASPA) that meets every five years on a Jesuit campus and convenes less formally at the annual meeting of the professional association that includes student-life administrators from across the board in higher education—institutions large and small, private and public, church-related and nondenominational. It is important for the Jesuit group to meet alone and apart from time to time because they know that they are different. They have a shared commitment and a common bond that relates to the Jesuit character of their schools. I've met with them several times; they helped me to shape the ideas I offer in this chapter.

Once when I was invited to share some thoughts with them, I attached this title to the presentation: “Seven Habits of Alumni We'd Be Proud to Call Our Own.” Several years earlier, I had enjoyed reading Stephen R. Covey's longtime best-seller *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*.<sup>1</sup> That title kept circling in my mind as I thought about a workable structure for a conversation with student-life administrators from Jesuit institutions. The task I set for myself was to stimulate their thinking about the lifelong “proof” of the higher education “pudding” that is prepared in our Jesuit campus kitchens. Members of JASPA are not, I know, responsible for the entire pudding, but they have a critically important place in the total preparation of men and women for others,

as we like to call our graduates. So I thought I'd like to invite them to think about the qualities they, and all of us who are involved in Jesuit education, would expect to find in alumni we would be proud to call our own.

I began by wondering whether I could identify seven or more habits of highly effective Jesuit college graduates. These alumni would be judged to be effective, I presumed, if they had something inside that was acquired during the collegiate experience and remained within to function as both compass and guide for principled, productive living in the postcollegiate years. There has to be more to it than pasting the higher education equivalent of an "Intel Inside" label on our graduates. Whatever the appropriate trademark might be, it will not be immediately noticeable. But those in careers for which they prepared in a Jesuit collegiate setting will, this theory goes, be in fact noticeably different.

In assembling this structure, sketching this outline, shaping this paradigm, I realized that I was proposing an ideal rather than documenting a verifiable experience. I have the imagination to do the former—propose the ideal—but lack the data to verify patterns of observable, after-graduation experiences of Jesuit alumni. Perhaps some institutions keep statistical tabs on their graduates and have interesting data. But most of us are not very good at outcomes measurement or, if we attempt it, do not track it consistently and coherently over the years. So we tend to discuss this at the level of theory rather than in terms of measurable results.

Habits, as philosophically aware Jesuit college graduates would know, are acquired by acting; you have to do—now and repeatedly—that which you want eventually to be able to do easily and habitually. The noun *habit* is derived from the Latin verb that means "to have." A habit is something you possess. Philosophically speaking, it is a quality, a principle of action, a modification of a substance. The seven habits I would expect to find driving the lives of Jesuit college alumni are habits (understood in the sense of principles of action) of

- reasoning
- reading
- writing
- reflecting
- praying
- helping
- giving thanks

Let me elaborate.

## 1. Reasoning

All successive stages of education depend on the basic skills of reading, writing, and reasoning. There is reasoning associated with the familiar third *R*—rithmetic. This quantity-based, number-coded reasoning begins with arithmetic and gets abstract when the developing student meets algebra in middle or secondary school. Along the way, a habit of reasoning is taking shape, which, for most Jesuit college students, is shaped further by philosophy and other disciplines that are in the curriculum to encourage a well-rounded, “general” education. If it works the way it should, this kind of education produces a thinker, a person who can reason well, analyze clearly, and think things through along a logical path.

Now, as all student-life administrators know from observing the leisure habits of their charges, residence halls and student unions are typically not filled with avid, leisure-time readers. The image has more appeal than the printed word; high-volume sounds are more engaging than printed sentences. If anyone took the time to construct a financial ratio that would compare the dollar value of electronic audio and video hardware plus the matching software, CDs, DVDs, and downloads, on the one hand, against the value of the printed material in a typical resident student’s room, on the other, the resulting ratio would, I suspect, be on the order of several hundred to one.

I don't think there is a whole lot that can be done to lower that ratio (which, by the way, will continue to grow with the multiplication of portable, out-of-the-room hardware like cell phones, iPods, and laptops), but creative extracurricular programming by campus professionals can do a lot to encourage better reasoning and productive reading in the out-of-class, out-of-library leisure hours of students. That leads me to the second habit I would hope to find well cultivated in the typical Jesuit college graduate—reading.

## 2. Reading

At the level of principle, the reading habit is driven by a conviction that the mind is a wonderful gift intended by God for our lifelong use. The lifelong quest for knowledge and truth is virtually impossible to pursue without reading good books. So a genuine Jesuit education will never, in my view, be achieved if reading stops when postcollegiate life begins.

Campus administrators can do a lot to promote authors—faculty authors by prominent display in the campus bookstore, other authors by invitation to campus for lectures and workshops. I've never seen it done, but I wonder why the student-affairs side of our shops could not initiate creative, high-profile cooperative programs with the campus library. There are, of course, outreach efforts from the libraries to help students gain familiarity with the new technologies. Our libraries now have their own addresses on the information highway and think of themselves as “learning resource centers.” Student-personnel officers can do the students a great favor by using programming ingenuity and counseling opportunities to encourage their love of reading.

## 3. Writing

Similarly, the writing habit is evidence of a Jesuit collegiate experience that went according to plan. Several principles underlie the

writing habit. One is the principle of self-realization: writing (not only creative writing) gives the writer a great sense of fulfillment. Another is the principle of participation: the writer interacts with the minds of his or her readers and participates in forming new ideas, changing cultures, and developing policies. And there is the principle of association with others in the cultivation and communication of ideas.

We are individuals in society. For personal development and societal enrichment, unique individuals must communicate. Moreover, this world of ours moves on words and numbers and communicates mainly by written and spoken words. Without mastery of both words and numbers, an individual will have little impact on the direction or pace of that movement and will thus make no significant contribution to human progress. Hence the Jesuit educational enterprise, dedicated as it is to human progress, will always emphasize communication and will systematically promote the ability to communicate in more than one language. The absence of communication skills is a sign of shortfall in Jesuit educational ideals. The absence of communication skills as a by-product of extracurricular activity on campus is a sign that the purely academic and the student-personnel sides of the house are not as closely linked as we would like to have them. On Jesuit campuses, at least, there is no argument about the desirability of connecting those two spheres of influence.

The well-reasoned argument (product of the well-trained mind) will find expression, according to the Jesuit educational expectation, in well-written and well-spoken form. A great deal is done on Jesuit campuses to promote writing skills by encouraging student publications. Student-affairs administrators sometimes regret that; they tend to get caught in the middle of publication-related controversies and freedom-of-expression issues. But they recognize that it would be good for students and universities if there were more encouragement and concern with creativity in these areas and less anxiety about censorship.

Habits of reasoning, reading, and writing are the infrastructure for principled behavior in four other areas of the postcollegiate life that we want our Jesuit alumni to enjoy: reflecting, praying, helping, and giving thanks.

#### 4. Reflecting

Reflective persons are not impulsive; they are not necessarily indecisive (the opposite is almost always the case), but they are measured and deliberate in their approach to decision making. Reflection is the environment, the atmosphere, of ethical deliberation. And ethical reflection emerges from the “inner house,” from the character of the one who deliberates and must decide. That character is shaped by the Jesuit educational experience. Not surprisingly, those who provide the educational experience—the Jesuits and their associates or partners in the enterprise—entertain the theoretical expectation of finding evidence of ethical decision making emerging over time from the characters of those in whose formation they have had a hand.

Whenever my thoughts turn to this issue, I find myself recalling the words of playwright Robert Bolt in the preface to his classic *A Man for All Seasons*. The play is a testimonial to the integrity and character of Thomas More. In the preface, written in 1960, Bolt explains his mood and his social perceptions as he wrote the play. He was troubled by the thin fabric of contemporary human character, by the tendency of the typical modern man and woman to think of himself or herself in the third person, to describe the self “in terms more appropriate to somebody seen through a window.” Bolt then provides a penetrating insight amounting to a one-sentence summary of the cultural ills that beset us today: “Both socially and individually it is with us as it is with our cities—an accelerating flight to the periphery, leaving a center which is empty when the hours of business are over.”<sup>2</sup>

The playwright goes on to ask, “Why do I take as my hero a man who brings about his own death because he can’t put his hand on an old black book and tell an ordinary lie?” He answers:

For this reason: A man takes an oath only when he wants to commit himself quite exceptionally to the statement, when he wants to make an identity between the truth of it and his own virtue; he offers himself as a guarantee. And it works. There is a special kind of shrug for a perjurer; we feel that the man has no self to commit, no guarantee to offer.<sup>3</sup>

Bolt describes Thomas More as “a man with an adamant sense of his own self. He knew where he began and left off, what area of himself he could yield to the encroachments of his enemies, and what to the encroachments of those he loved.” Jesuit higher education helps students gain a sense of self; they learn where they begin and where they leave off. We are concerned with filling up those empty centers when the hours of classroom and library business are over. We help students locate the presence or absence of principles in themselves. We encourage the cultivation of character, the exercise of principled judgment. We let our students know that we expect them to stand for something. This is not simply because we are faith-committed educators in Church-related institutions; it is because we think that standing for something is essential to experiencing full human life, to being human, to having character. Religious faith is, of course, important in our view, and it is religious faith that opens the door to the next habit in the set of seven that I put before the student-life administrators.

## 5. Praying

Prayer is part of the life of any believer; prayer is the periodic flame that rises from the continuous bed of embers we call faith. Reflection on faith and its implications for daily life is the work of theology, and theology is part of the Jesuit higher education

experience. After graduation, theological reflection should continue. The relevance of religious faith to an earthbound career is a question that can be answered only by living one's faith in the world of work, family, citizenship, success, failure, illness, and death. The Jesuit collegiate experience—in class and in the broader campus context that includes liturgy and retreats—is designed to foster faith-based reflection for a lifetime.

Campus ministers normally enjoy a cooperative, even a collegial, relationship with student-personnel officials on Jesuit campuses. Those who minister pastorally to the faith needs of the campus community usually relate well to the academic side of Jesuit campuses. Many students will tell you of the impact a weekend retreat had on them during their undergraduate years. The senior retreat is often remembered as a positive rite of passage of far greater value than the commencement exercises.

Although interest of the young in formal religion may appear to be on the decline in many quarters, it is clear that an interest in spirituality is, for many, on the rise. I like to think of spirituality as prayer elevated to a lifestyle. It is not formal, devotional prayer; it is an awareness of the Spirit of God alive and active within my soul, wherever I—soul and body—may be. It is a sense of God present to me here and now, at my side, in these circumstances. Faith is the act by which I entrust myself to God; spirituality is the breathe-in, breathe-out environment in which that trust plays itself out in daily living.

No one, however, goes to God alone. Spirituality is not solipsism. Ignatian spirituality, the driving force behind retreat and ministry programs on Jesuit campuses, opens the eyes of the believer to the needs of others and thus impels the believer to become a man or woman for others.

It should be noted here that although not all beneficiaries of Jesuit education are Christian, the centrality of the person and gospel of Christ to the Jesuit spirit will be known to all and influential to many.

## 6. Helping

The habit of helping others—a habitual, principled openness to serving others in the human community—is expected of all Christians. Service, prompted by our love for one another, is a Christian characteristic; it is also a principle for action. The trademark is “This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). After washing the feet of his disciples on the night before he died, Jesus provided for all Christians a principle of action: “I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do” (John 13:15). If this ethic is not caught by participants in the Jesuit higher education process, that process has failed to deliver the product the enterprise is intended to produce.

This is why service learning is important in a Jesuit educational environment—important but, in my judgment, still generally underappreciated. Service learning is not just good pedagogy at work as, for instance, when lecture-hall instruction in a physical science is followed by laboratory opportunities for both application and assimilation of the principles. Those classrooms without laboratories—the ones used for theology and all the humanities—need community-service “labs” in settings of human need. There a student’s hand, impelled by faith-based Christian love, extends the hand of Christ to reach a person in need of help. Again, it is the theoretical expectation of educators in the Jesuit and Catholic tradition that this faith-based, love-inspired readiness to serve will be evident in all stages of a graduate’s life.

## 7. Giving Thanks

The habit of gratitude, of giving thanks, is a principle that must necessarily last a lifetime. Catholics, of course, find their identity in Eucharist (which means “thanksgiving”). As they meet in eucharistic assembly to remember the Lord in the breaking of the bread, Catholics are at once thanks-sayers, thanks-givers, and

thanks-doers. This deep, internalized sense of gratitude, this attitude of praise and thanks for the gift of redemption, is something quite characteristically Jesuit; it should direct and sustain the Jesuit educational enterprise.

Eucharist as sacramental food is nourishment for the faith journey. Eucharist as thanks is a habitual disposition that opens us up in awe toward God and all the gifts of creation and then turns us out of ourselves in a posture of generous service toward others in the human community. And Eucharist as reconciliation gives us all the more reason to be thankful because it has the power to heal and forgive our failures to be of service, as we know we should, to persons in need.

The internalization of this seventh habit, this principle of behavior, is the work of classroom theology and campus ministry. The practical application of the theory should be expected and encouraged by student-personnel administrators throughout any given student's undergraduate experience. Typically, this theory should find expression in consideration for others on campus. We know that there are many self-centered, even selfish, students on Jesuit campuses; we have to help them overcome that selfishness. Otherwise we fail them; we let them down.

Gross violations of consideration for others—in other words, serious violations of disciplinary codes—typically result in penalties that go by the name *community service*. As a judicial sentencing category, *community service* is an unfortunate misnomer. Compensatory service—making up or restoring to the community what was damaged or taken by an infraction of the rules—is what our disciplinary codes should call for. Community service enacts an ethic that we should expect to find in all our students as responsible members of the campus community. It is a quality we would hope to find continuing on in the postgraduation lives of our alumni.

Show me a person who has cultivated the habits of reasoning clearly, reading widely, communicating effectively, reflecting often, praying faithfully, helping generously, and always giving thanks,

and I will show you evidence of a total Jesuit education. Any institution of Jesuit higher education hopes to have such persons show up for alumni reunions. And when they do, the system that produced them takes comfort in the realization that, indeed, there is nothing so practical as a great educational ideal.

Recently, I reread Robert K. Greenleaf's book *Servant Leadership*. He insists that any institution, for-profit as well as not-for-profit, must care about people. Leaders in industry, education, or any other type of organized activity are servants. This includes trustees—directors in Jesuit institutions as well as in for-profit corporate enterprises. "Clearly," says Greenleaf, "the trustees cannot take over and manage the universities. They have neither the time nor the competence to do this, and it is not their proper role. What then can they do? These things . . ."4

Here begins a list that I reproduce for the consideration of anyone interested in or responsible for governance on Jesuit campuses:

1. Insist that the goals of the university (and its major parts) be stated in clear, unequivocal, behavioral terms. What is supposed to happen? In what measurable ways should students be different after they have met the requirements?
2. Once the goals are stated, the trustees should then ask: "To what extent does the university now reach these goals, at a reasonable level of excellence, with the students it now has, and with resources it now has? If the discrepancy between the goals and the current state of the university is serious, the trustees should then ask for plans: "How can the gap be closed, and on what kind of timetable—in specific terms that can be measured and evaluated?"
3. If the internal constituencies cannot produce the plans or a reasonable timetable, the trustees may then suggest the engagement of consulting resources to help.
4. If, after a reasonable time, there is still a material gap between goals and performance and concrete plans for

better performance, the trustees might ask that the goals be scaled down to what is realistically achievable. If this is done, the trustees should ask that all the students be advised, as clearly and candidly as possible, just what help they can expect from the university. This is an age of great candor, and honesty has risen (commendably) as a student priority. The trustees should insist that this be respected.

5. As an alternative the trustees may have their own study made to try to find ways to set goals and propose innovations.
6. When the goals are realistically set and plans are fully made, the trustees should then attend to the top leadership of the university.

Anyone working in Jesuit education can substitute his or her job title for *trustee* in these Robert Greenleaf recommendations. And, of course, when it comes to attending “to the top leadership,” all the rest of us should turn the searchlight on ourselves, not call for the replacement of higher-ups in the organization.

Assuming that you are now at work on a Jesuit campus, and assuming sufficient autonomy in managing your area of responsibility, you should begin to examine the goals of your division and be courageous enough to articulate clearly and in writing what you expect by way of behavior in the territory you govern and in the outcomes of the total educational process you are helping to provide for your students. This is a special application of the Ignatian examen. What do you stand for? If you come up empty in your response to that question, you will have ridiculously modest expectations of your graduates. If you really do stand for something Ignatian, something related to the formation of human character in those young men and women under your charge, you can look forward to the day when you will welcome returning alumni you will be proud to call your own. You will recognize them not as products but as persons of genuine quality, quality that lasts a lifetime.