

“The Idea of the Catholic University in the 21st Century”

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ABSTRACT:

Humanizing Education: Dialogue, Critique, and Transformation

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This paper examines the humanistic dimensions of the Catholic intellectual tradition and their continued influence on Catholic/Jesuit universities today. Through theoretical analysis and concrete examples, I argue that humanism and Catholic/Jesuit universities share a common commitment to dialogue, critique, and transformation.

In the first section of the paper, I discuss the perduring educational synergies between Catholic/Jesuit and humanist pedagogies. Engaging a range of Catholic thinkers from Ignatius of Loyola (and recent interpreters such as John O'Malley, S.J.) to the Congregation for Catholic Education (“Educating to Fraternal Humanism”), I highlight the shared goals of humanizing education such as fostering a culture of dialogue and constructing inclusive and collaborative networks. In unpacking and analyzing these goals, I also appeal to the work of philosopher Paul Ricoeur (namely, “What Does Humanism Mean?”). Ricoeur reaffirms the humanistic enterprise as one that celebrates the achievement of civilization-building and yet self-critically resists both reductionism (losing human agency) and epistemological hubris (overstating human achievement) in order to open up the horizon of revolutionary possibilities. I contend that these Catholic/Jesuit and humanistic approaches engender sensibilities that are critically important for constructively resisting parochial perspectives and promoting the flourishing of all persons, including students and faculty from different faith traditions and those with no faith tradition.

In the paper's second section, I draw upon two concrete examples at my Catholic university that integrate Catholic/Jesuit and humanistic values. The first is a Youth Theology Institute (YTI), which is a program that brings together nearly 100 high students to campus for a week of big spiritual questions, leadership training, intercultural and ethical engagement, and vocational discernment. The second is a post-doctoral Fellow program, which consists of monthly seminar meetings focused on Ignatian pedagogy, pedagogical strategies, and professional development. Though distinct in terms of their design and implementation, both programs seek to think deeply about the ways in which education must be holistic, dialogical, critical, and transformative. They affirm that a commitment to dialectical and innovative education resists the static and the regressive, stimulates human freedom, imagination, and virtue, and mediates between the particular/concrete and the universal/theoretical.

As a conclusion, I begin to map out the distinctively Catholic expressions of humanistic impulses: they not only advocate for freedom and responsibility, but they also galvanize solidarity and support for the common good that surpass mere tolerance of others.