

## **Lay-Jesuit Collaboration in Higher Education**

by James L. Connor, S.J.

### **Foreword**

*James L. Connor, S.J., served director of the Woodstock Theological Center, located at Georgetown University, from 1987-2002. He previously served as provincial superior of the Maryland Province (1968-1973), president of the National Jesuit Conference (1975-1981), and pastor of Holy Trinity Church, Washington, D.C. (1981-1987). His areas of interest include pastoral and systematic theology, Ignatian spirituality in its application to decision-making and business ethics. His publications include articles in Theological Studies, America, and The Way. Father Connor took part in the 32nd and 34th Jesuit General Congregations as a representative of the Jesuits of the United States Assistancy.*

### **The Loci of Collaboration: Three Institutions**

On February 16, 2001, it was announced that Dr. John J. DeGioia would become the 48th president of Georgetown University. This was a precedent-setting moment in the 212 year history of Jesuit higher education in the United States, for Dr. DeGioia was the first-ever lay person to be named president of a Jesuit university.

"What are the Jesuits thinking about?" "How can there be a Jesuit university without Jesuit leadership?" "Won't this be the beginning of the end of the Jesuit educational tradition at Georgetown University? - and, one by one, over time, of the other 27?"

These are actual questions that I, and many of us Jesuits, were asked by alumnae/i and friends of Georgetown as soon as the lay president was announced. Of course, reactions to Jack DeGioia as a person were overwhelmingly positive. He is bright, administratively experienced, thoroughly Ignatian in his spirituality and educational philosophy, personable, and dedicated. Rather, the hesitations and questions that arose were related to the institutional implications of this decision. And the institutions in question were principally the Society of Jesus, the Catholic Church, and Georgetown University - and by implication all of the 28 Jesuit colleges and universities in this country.

About the Society of Jesus people asked questions like: is the "bench" of qualified Jesuits so short, is the manpower so scarce, that the Society cannot come up with a president for a Jesuit University that many regard not only as the oldest in the country, but as the one with the highest international name recognition, because of its School of Foreign Service and other professional schools. Or is it, people asked, that Jesuit priorities are no longer with higher education, but rather with high schools and middle schools, pastoral and social works, and other apostolates that more directly meet the immediate needs of people? Or is there something about the Society's regard of Georgetown University? - that provincials are unwilling to release men to come here or the men themselves are unwilling to come? Or, is there something about the administrative structure and style of the Society itself that blocks flexibility in setting priorities and making effective and

timely decisions in accord with those priorities? These were some of the questions about the Jesuit order occasioned by this precedent-setting appointment of Dr. DeGioia.

About Georgetown University some of the questions were: Would it long sustain its traditional Jesuit educational philosophy and pedagogical style with the appointment of a lay president? It is proving difficult enough for Jesuit universities with Jesuit presidents to sustain this tradition. And the Jesuit president has the advantage of institutional membership within the larger Society of Jesus and access to resources which this relationship provides. How will a lay person be able to sustain and support that tradition over the long haul? Secondly, how will the lay president relate to the local Jesuit community which has a special responsibility for representing and communicating the Jesuit charism and philosophy of education within the University? The president may enjoy warm personal friendships with key Jesuits - and Jack DeGioia certainly does - but is there an institutionally grounded relationship between him and the Jesuit community? For instance, how will the rector of the Jesuit community relate to the president of the university? Do formal agreements about patterns of responsibility and mutual cooperation need to be drafted? More than 30 years ago, a formal agreement of the legal separation of the Jesuit community from Georgetown University was drafted and approved. At this new juncture in history, do we need, as a complement, an agreement about the form of unity we would like to see institutionally assured into the future? Are there precedents we can look to or call upon? What advantages are offered by this new situation? What cautions must be noted?

Last but by no means least were the questions regarding the relationships between Georgetown University and the Catholic Church, both local (the archdiocese and the cardinal) and universal. When a Jesuit was president of Georgetown University, he was formally related to the local bishop or cardinal both as a priest with the faculties and jurisdictions granted by the archdiocese, and as a member of the Society of Jesus, related to the cardinal through his provincial superior. Even though as president he was appointed civilly by the board of directors of the University, he was, as a Jesuit, assigned to this office by his provincial. A layman, quite clearly, does not have these ecclesial relationships with the local Church and the leader of that Church, the cardinal. Will the "Catholic" quality of Georgetown University, depend, in the future, on the personal faith and Catholic practice of the lay person who is president? Or is there some provision in the statutes and by-laws of the University which oblige the board to appoint someone who unquestionably will continue the tradition of Jesuit, Catholic education at Georgetown?

### **In Search of "Ignatian Community": The Purpose of Our Dialogue**

These were some of the questions in the air at the time Jack DeGioia was selected as president of Georgetown last February. Of greatest concern, it seems, in the minds of alumni and alumnae, was the preservation of the Jesuit educational philosophy that they had found so distinctive at Georgetown when they were students and so valuable to them in their later lives. I heard this personally from a number of people; and it was their high regard for the Jesuit educational experience and their fears for its future that first prompted me to consider sponsoring a Woodstock Forum on this topic.

What does "Jesuit" education mean in people's minds? Training in ethical reasoning; the rigorous demand for logical thinking, persistent inquiry, and working till you get it and get it right; facility in persuasive and coherent written and verbal expression (eloquentia perfecta); a broad, liberal arts context within which one's specialization or "major" is situated in a meaningful way; cultivation of the imagination and emotions through literature, poetry, drama, music, and the arts; character formation and discipline built into every course offering and campus activity; the personal support and even warm friendships with faculty, some of them life-long; religious practice and religious studies that were integral to the whole academic enterprise and not an "add-on;" concern for the "whole person," and not merely with a "pure intellect" (mens sana in corpore sano); formation for responsible leadership in society as a "person for others" - these are some of the traits of traditional Jesuit education for which alumni and alumnae express gratitude and whose loss they fear - downstream, if not immediately.

All of these questions are, at root, a concern about the ability of someone who is not a Jesuit to represent, cultivate, and provide strong academic leadership throughout the campus for an educational philosophy and pedagogy which are expressions of a spirituality, the Ignatian spirituality. By definition, a spirituality is a way of living, rooted in a world view, which has been deeply and freely appropriated by an individual in a community.

Is there an "Ignatian community" in which a lay president can be a member? - in which his or her spirituality is continually refreshed, such that its educational expression is sure, vigorous, and constantly developing in its implications and applications?

Is the Society of Jesus, universal and local, ready to be that kind of an "Ignatian community" for a lay president? How would it work? How would it look? How could it be nourishing for the lay president, and not be restrictive? Supportive but not domineering? What forms could it conceivably take?

These are the underlying questions about "Lay-Jesuit Collaboration" which the Woodstock Forum addressed on November 15, 2001. They are the questions which the Jesuit General Congregation 34 (held in 1995) had in mind when it drafted and issued its decree entitled, "Lay-Jesuit Cooperation." These are the questions that are central to Georgetown's future, and not simply Georgetown's but all 28 Jesuit colleges and universities. Therefore, the Woodstock Center hoped to serve as an "honest broker" in bringing together the key players to share publicly with one another their perspectives on these questions, their proposals for cooperative action, and their commitment to carry out their respective roles for its success.

Theodore Cardinal McCarrick spoke for the Catholic Church, and its admiration and concern for Georgetown University, particularly at this point in its history. Father Howard Gray, S.J., spoke as a very influential member of the Jesuit Congregation 34, which issued the decree on "Lay-Jesuit Cooperation." And finally, President John

DeGioia spoke of his understanding of his presidency as a lay person, his hopes, and his commitments.

Woodstock fellow Dolores Leckey was the moderator of the panel discussion. Dolores had been asked back in 1992 by Jesuit Father General Peter-Hans Kolvenbach to react to the original draft of the document on Lay-Jesuit Cooperation. At the time she headed up the Secretariat for the Laity of the U.S. Bishops Conference. Finally, Brian O. McDermott, S.J., rector of the Georgetown Jesuit Community, and a board member of the Woodstock Theological Center, introduced the evening's events and hosted an earlier informal dinner for all the participants. The provincial of the Maryland Province, James R. Stormes, S.J., and the president of the national Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities (AJCU), Charles L. Currie, S.J., were also active dinner partners with the panelists.

We are delighted, thanks to the generosity of Mr. John P. Keyser, to be able to give broad distribution gratis to the remarks of our panelists. Theirs, of course, is not, nor will it be, the "last word." It is not even the "first word." But we feel it is an important word, and we hope that it will stimulate vigorous conversation, reflection, and decision-making on many Jesuit and Catholic campuses across the country, and even beyond our shores. Moreover, we hope that it will occasion the convening of similar panels of bishops, presidents, provincials, rectors, and experts on Jesuit educational spirituality on many other campuses to address together their future patterns of cooperation.

A central theme in all these talks is the need for dialogue - open, non-judgmental, disciplined, and responsible. Such dialogue is not just an occasional means to meet a specific end; it is, rather, the contemporary and indispensable modus operandi of any social enterprise. Bernard Lonergan, S.J., opens his book, *Method in Theology*, saying, "When the classicist notion of culture prevails, theology is conceived as a permanent achievement, and then one discourses on its nature. When culture is conceived empirically, theology is known to be an ongoing process, and then one writes on its method." Change "theology" to "education," and we soon see that method, the "way of proceeding," or dialogue - with the participation of all the "key players" - is absolutely essential for unity of purpose and effective outcomes in a Catholic, Jesuit educational enterprise today.

We are delighted to have as our partner in the publication and distribution of this booklet the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities. Its president, Charles L. Currie, S.J., expresses his own hopes and views for "Lay-Jesuit Collaboration in Jesuit Higher Education" in his Afterword to this booklet.