

**MISSION DAY ADDRESS  
LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY  
JANUARY 28, 2010**

Most Reverend Gordon D. Bennett, S.J.

Thank you, President Lawton, for your gracious introduction certainly, but also for the many, many ways LMU has been enriched during your tenure here. In every way, your stewardship of our university continues to be an enormous blessing.

Now there are those who would say that inviting a bishop to deliver the keynote address at a Jesuit university is truly letting the fox into the chicken coop, so I hasten to assure you that you have absolutely nothing to fear from me. I love LMU.

I began my undergraduate education here. I was formed by the likes of Sullivan, Carothers, Claymaet, Lester and Salamunovich. It was here that I began to make necessary connections between learning and living, that I began to appreciate art and beauty. I chose Sacred Heart Chapel here to celebrate my first mass as a priest. You have nothing to fear from me. I love LMU.

Please let me begin this reflection by recalling and emulating that often quoted elementary school teacher from the rural south who, upon her retirement after teaching first grade for forty-five years, shared with her grateful community the secret of her success as a teacher. She said: "Well, first I tells 'em what I'm gonna tell 'em; then I tells 'em, then I tells what I told 'em."

So, after some opening remarks in which I will share with you the mandate the organizing committee gave me and the rationale for it, I will do my best to tell you to trace LMU's identity and mission

to its origins in the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, and, in particular, to Ignatius' worldview out of which his Spiritual Exercises emerge. Next I will tell you what we should expect a school inspired by St. Ignatius of Loyola to look like.

And lastly, I would like to say something about the primacy that faith in God should assume in an Ignatian-inspired university.

The invitation to address the university community this morning came with specific direction to offer you more than lofty words and ideas. The planning committee was quite clear that they wanted this keynote address to stimulate a meaningful conversation in which all members of our university community would feel invited to participate and which would lead to further discussion and even, if appropriate, to recommendations for concrete action which would improve this community we all love.

I would never have trusted myself to fulfill this mandate alone or adequately, so, I asked Dr. Irene Oliver and Sean Grant to address the same mandate by sharing with you their own perspectives and experience, their hopes and dreams; and I am so grateful to them for accepting my invitation.

Engaging the university community in conversation about our mission is certainly timely and may even be urgent. For example, the colleges and academic departments remain involved in a continuing process of revising the university's core curriculum. They are attempting to come to some consensus on what makes an LMU education distinctive and what areas of inquiry are most likely to provide the best synthesis for understanding and living peacefully in the world of the twenty-first century. This project cannot be completed effectively unless there is general agreement on the university's mission.

Also, there is the fact that, next year, LMU will celebrate 100 years of service to the city, the nation, the Catholic Church, and the entire world. As we prepare for this very public proclamation of our unique place in the history and the future of all our beneficiaries, it is important that we have a clear idea of what, precisely, we are celebrating.

As any organizational behaviorist would agree, every successful attempt at institutional renewal must begin with an examination of the institution's original inspirations. Over time, the original mission might have lost its urgency. The mission will certainly have faced challenges and opportunities unforeseen when it was originally articulated. It might be carried out in the present by persons who are unfamiliar with or who lack the original founding passion. It might, over the years, have been tortured and twisted into justifying any kind of change; yet, as everyone knows, not all change is progress, just as not all movement is forward. Recovering and adapting its mission is an institution's best safeguard against self-destructive change.

So we might start our collective reflection by asking ourselves these important questions: what is the perception of Loyola Marymount University outside these walls and is that perception what we would want it to be? When the wider community thinks about LMU, what is it they are most grateful for? Why do candidates choose LMU over other reputable options? It makes a difference, doesn't it, whether candidates choose LMU because we promise a unique educational opportunity or whether candidates come here primarily because they didn't get in anywhere else?

Another question is for the university community itself. What do we say of ourselves? What are we most grateful for and proud of about LMU? Do we, in fact, live up to the promises we make or do we simply silently agree not to make promises we have no intention of keeping?

Back in the day, there was a joke about old Loyola University, probably made up by a Jesuit from Santa Clara, "Loyola: built on a bluff, and run on the same principle." Is that a judgment we can really afford to laugh off?

We are here today to address these questions. Just as everyone in this community is affected by what happens here, so everyone in this community is entitled to participate in this discussion. This will mean that, in some areas, we will be able to truly confirm and celebrate our uniqueness; and, in other areas, we will be forced to come face to face with the old Chinese proverb: If we don't change direction, we cannot help but end up where we are going.

Now I tells 'em.

LMU finds the source of its identity and mission in the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius; and these Exercises reveal, if not clear answers to our questions, at least definite directions to where our answers need to be searched for and found.

St. Ignatius described his Exercises, not so much as a path to holiness, which, of course, they clearly are, but as a path to authentic human freedom. He himself said that the purpose of the journey through the Exercises was that one would become free from any force, from either outside or inside a person, which has the power to destroy, or in any way even to diminish the soul, the true self, who we really are.

What St. Ignatius had discovered from his reflection on his own experience and then described for us was a powerful and effective way to live day to day in that kind of spiritual balance which demonstrates that our living is free from fear, free from feeling insecure in our life and in our world, free from external or internal compulsion, free from incidental or habitual disorder. Through the Exercises, Ignatius attempts to lead any open, willing and generous person beyond fear to confidence, beyond addictions and compulsions to authentic self-direction, beyond meaninglessness, apathy and despair to focused, purposeful action.

I need to emphasize right here that, by freedom, Ignatius is not describing a life in which we can do anything we want to do. That is obviously an immature notion of freedom and an invitation into personal and social chaos. When Ignatius is describing freedom, he is pointing to a life in which we can do anything we ought to do.

This mature notion of freedom assumes such critical importance for Ignatius because it is only when we are free, only when there are no obstacles to being and doing what we ought to do, that we become able to love. And by “love”, Ignatius is not describing mere attraction or preference. For Ignatius, as the Magis brotherhood begins each of our weekly meetings, “love consists of sharing what one has and what one is with those one loves.”

In summary, the Spiritual Exercises are meant to help lead one to a freedom by which we reach the purpose of our existence – and that purpose, according to Ignatius, is to return the love with which God has first loved us by loving God and by loving one another, all others, without exception.

And so, because they are inspired by the Spiritual Exercises, whether it is carried out in a school, in a retreat center, in a parish community, or among the poor and those on the margins of society, every Ignatian endeavor has as its purpose to draw men and women toward the operational conviction that their true purpose in life is to arrive at love, and that they will only do so as, each day, they exhibit the strength and courage which come from the habit of claiming their freedom.

By extension, then, an Ignatian educational endeavor like LMU would have to be a community of learning which proudly and passionately distinguishes itself by helping all its members learn the virtue of love by way of becoming spiritually free.

In a nutshell, that is who we are and why we are here.

How is that happening here at LMU? Where do you see it? Where do you not see it where you think you should see it? Is there any place here at LMU where you see the opposite of this?

Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises emerged out of his worldview, his understanding of reality. His worldview is the distillation of all of his life experience, his reflection on his experience, and the particularly spiritual mysticism which he attributed to the direct action of God on his life. That worldview is called the First Principle and Foundation, a brief statement of purpose which, just like all of Fr. Lawton's speeches, consists of three basic points which I would like to explain.

Point one is that the fact that we exist at all is not the result of fate or chance but is the intentional act of a loving Creator. I can still hear our dear Sr. Peg Dolan emphasizing this point both in

word and deed as she said so many times in her prayers, in her addresses, and by the testimony of her whole life: "Each of us is a unique word of God spoken only once." It flows from this point that the purpose of our existence is to respond to the gift of our being created by returning our love to God by the activities of praise, reverence, and service. In the concrete, praise, reverence and service mean, simply, acknowledging and choosing to be as completely and fully ourselves as we are able.

Point two is the fact that we exist in a context which includes the rest of creation, everything that surrounds us, whether we can see it or not. It follows, then, that we have an obligation to respect and revere all of creation as its stewards, especially as the rest of creation assists us to achieve the purpose for which we were ourselves created. It follows further that when we take creation for granted, when we lose reverence for it, exploit it or waste it, we mar it irrevocably. And it is also true that we ourselves can be marred when we allow things in creation to shape us into someone or something we are not, something God did not intend.

Consequently, we have point three: our deepest concern in life should be that we continue to choose habitually what we, in fact, are; and, conversely, to choose not to pretend that we can, by will or by force, be what we can never be. It follows here that, whenever we try to appropriate for ourselves what are really God's prerogatives, whenever we treat persons and things as if we were in charge of the universe instead of God, what we are really doing is setting in motion a path both to ultimate frustration and to a chronic lack of true freedom. Concretely, point three means that our conscious life should be a continual process of discerning which of our choices, among the many

beautiful aspects of God's creation, will result in the most loving response to God's love.

The three points of the Principle and Foundation are axioms in Ignatius' mind, indivisible and irreducible truths. The Principle and Foundation assumes that reality itself is nothing other than God continuously at work in us, that reality is the project of God's infinite outpouring of love being shared with us humans; and the Principle and Foundation assumes, as well, that we humans become most truly ourselves when we freely choose to cooperate with God's project through our own generous return of love.

One can see, then, that this Ignatian worldview is very distinct and very unique. It has challenged whatever culture it has engaged from the time it was formulated, and it certainly stands in stark contrast to our own. The Ignatian worldview reveals a stance toward reality that has moved away from one of "inevitability" toward one of "possibility."

In a worldview based on inevitability, one's basic attitude is: "I'll believe it when I see it." In a worldview based on possibility, one's basic attitude is: "I'll see it when I believe it."

Here is the relevance of the choice Albert Einstein gives us in the published theme of today's address: "We can live life as if nothing is a miracle or we can live life as if everything is a miracle." Four centuries apart, Ignatius and Einstein came to the same conclusion. In the inevitable world, everything is determined, mechanistic, predictable. There is no need for faith and no such thing as a miracle. In the Ignatian worldview, miracles abound because they are not thought of as supernatural events in a natural world, but, in the words of the theologian Jurgen

Moltmann, “miracles are the only natural events in a world that has become unnatural, dehumanized, and wounded.”

So it should come as no surprise that the Ignatian-inspired education I am describing, even as it presumes academic excellence, is fundamentally ordered toward acquiring habits of character and living that extend way beyond purely intellectual inquiry.

Fr. Dean Brackley, who gave this Mission Day address a few years ago, asserts that the Ignatian mission in education should extend beyond helping students to advance their careers, but should help them to find their vocations in life, that point at which, “one’s deepest gladness meets the world’s deepest need.” In the Ignatian worldview, education and service of others are inextricably bound together.

Is this what you see at LMU? Where do you see it? Where do you not see it where you think you should see it? Where do you see the opposite? What consequences of the Ignatian vision of education should we expect to see here at LMU?

The University Trustees, who should be, above all, the guardians of the mission, and the school administration, who are those charged with the implementation of the mission, need to be particularly sensitive to their obligation to provide the various offices and departments with the human and other resources they need in order to make the mission visible and tangible. What part does the mission play in the various strategic plans and in the lists of goals and learning outcomes the university is developing as we speak?

The recruitment, hiring, initial orientation, evaluation, and promotion of faculty and professional staff must assume the highest priority in order to ensure that the Ignatian mission is being continually and unequivocally addressed. Implementing this unique mission requires a faculty who are not only excellent in their fields but are also truly passionate about leading students into transformation of life and who have the skills to do so effectively. What institution can be expected to thrive or even to endure if its principal agents are indifferent about, subversive of, or hostile to its mission?

In an analogous way, the recruitment, admission, initial orientation and continuing formation of students are also critical concerns. Are those in charge of recruiting and evaluating applicants able to identify those who are most open to and prepared for our distinct offerings? Is there an orientation process for new students which highlights the goals of an Ignatian education? Does the university's "hidden curriculum," that panoply of non-academic offerings and experiences, reflect the priority we place on moving through freedom to love? Surely, no institution can become generative of itself if its primary clients are either ignorant of the product they are buying, or if they are content to pay very good money for something they don't really value and have no intention of using.

The default critique of this vision of a university, even among those who should be devoted to this very task, is that it is simply so ideal as to be impossible to implement effectively. This critique is proof positive that there is an "inevitable" point of view. In effect, to abandon this ideal of a university is equivalent to surrendering meekly to an academic culture which, rather than engaging in the struggle for authentic human freedom and human

dignity, substitutes instead ideological posturing, entitled cynicism, and political correctness.

Instead of despairing that the task of implementing the Ignatian vision is too far above our reach, let's instead take great heart in the marvelous and elegant ways in which the Principle and Foundation is being explicitly displayed this very day here at LMU. Let me emphasize that the examples I am going to cite now are in no way exhaustive of the exemplary things going on here:

- the university's response to the recent incidents of racism; I was deeply moved and inspired by ASLMU President Frontiera's swift and creative response;
- the reflective and challenging editorials and conversations about mission we find in the *Loyolan*;
- the university's exemplary and responsible commitment to ethnic, gender, and economic diversity and authentic inclusion;
- the proliferation of service organizations on campus;
- the programs sponsored by the Center for Service and Action and by Campus ministry's justice outreach;
- the person-centered orientation of Campus Ministry and student life;
- the excellent post-graduate service opportunities;
- the career placement office and offerings;
- the PLACE Corps program in the School of Education;
- the Center for Ignatian Spirituality and its offerings;
- the Center for Teaching Excellence and the attempt to inculcate Ignatian pedagogy;
- the efforts of resident life to study and apply the principles of the Spiritual Exercises;
- the continuing efforts for faculty and students to become more aware of the issues that affect the greater Los Angeles area through community based learning, inserting themselves where

the action is in person and as servants and by bringing community leaders and advocates to campus;

-particular efforts by faculty members to connect their academic fields to real world scenarios;

- the Christian Life Communities: groups of students, faculty and staff pursuing the possibilities that emerge from discernment, prayer, mutual spiritual support.

And so, it is obvious that there are, definitely and without a doubt, verifiable Ignatian aspirations here at LMU, and many of these are unique to LMU. The real concern is whether these activities are intentional or merely haphazard, whether they are incidental, accidental, or increasingly emblematic. Would most faculty, staff and students choose to involve themselves in these or other similar experiences or would only a special few make such a choice?

What is your experience?

We come now to the last point I feel I need to bring to consciousness and discussion today, and that is the primacy of God in the Ignatian worldview and the consequences that brings to an Ignatian-inspired university.

I hope that it is obvious that, from Ignatius' experience, God, as the one who authors all creation as sacred and as gift, is absolutely essential to any endeavor which bears his imprint. For Ignatius, the attempt to achieve freedom and love would be futile, even meaningless without first positing a God who embodies them both. For Ignatius, God is always present, always at work in the universe, and is always working for us.

In addition, for Ignatius, as for every Christian, as Pope Benedict XVI put it: “God has a human face and his name is Jesus Christ.” Nearly three quarters of the Spiritual Exercises are meditations on the life of Jesus who, as God-become-human, as our Lord, our liberator, our friend and brother, shows us the only way to freedom and love.

This explicitly religious stance, nevertheless, exists side by side with an observation by the social observer and writer Dinesh D’Douza who writes: “The conventions of academic life, almost universally, revolve around the assumption that religious belief is something that people grow out of as they become educated.”

There are, no doubt, those at LMU who identify as atheists and believe that God does not exist. There are, no doubt, those at LMU who identify as agnostics and cannot confirm whether God exists. In many of both of these persons, there exists an “honest doubt,” the fruit of a sincere and serious search for the truth.

D’Souza, however, identifies a third group which finds difficulties with God, and is no doubt present in numbers here at LMU. He calls them “apatheists,” those who don’t really care whether God exists. That seems to me to be “dishonest doubt” and should more correctly be called what it really is: a thinly veiled attempt to live a privatized and unfronted life, answerable, ultimately, to no one but oneself.

And then there are also those on campus for whom faith in God is a true part of their lives, those who approach God as an ongoing and organic mystery, something they would describe as alluring just as it is baffling. Like all emerging adults, to quote Ronald Rolheiser, they might feel “more comfortable with the questions than they do with the answers, they might find themselves more

drawn to Jesus than they are to the church, and find themselves more excited by the truth than they are about obedience to it.”

To all of these, to atheists, agnostics, apatheists and believers, it seems to me, Ignatius would give encouragement to continue to look closely at the evidence for the existence of God that comes from creation and to reflect honestly and deeply on their own experience, mindful that the God revealed there always invites, and never compels. God always proposes, never imposes. Our human freedom extends even to the decision to accept or reject God.

But D’Souza’s critique of higher education is that contemporary university culture is not content to leave the issue of God to the students themselves, but deliberately attempts to lead students away from the religious values they may have arrived with, and that it does so by two sinister strategies: first, by making religion seem simplistic and unsophisticated and, by implication, hostile to human advancement; and second, by standing idly by, if not by actually abetting, attitudes, behaviors and habits which encourage young people to “liberate” themselves from any moral constraints and indulge their appetites without conscience or consequence.

To the extent that LMU, either by will or by benign neglect, would cooperate with this cynical and dangerous conspiracy, we have to know that we would be acting completely contrary to the Ignatian vision and values.

It seems to me, though, that even in an environment which is wishy-washy about or even hostile to God, Ignatius’ Exercises can still be, and often are, a powerful and transformational force in peoples’ lives. Last year’s Mission Day speaker, Fr. Adolfo Nicolas,

drawing on his experience in the largely non-Christian Far East, made this very point.

I say this because freedom is always a human value and a human longing; and it remains so even when one is neutral about or unconvinced of the existence of God. It was the famous self-proclaimed atheist, Jean-Paul Sartre, who observed with sober irony: “L’homme est condamné à être libre”; Humankind is condemned to be free.

And, of course, love, giving love and receiving love, is always a value, our deepest longing and our highest aspiration. As John Lennon, who I don’t think was ever ordained priest, put it: “All you need is love; love is all you need.” Lennon may not have ever got to the point where he could say with conviction what we hear in the first letter of St. John: “God is love”, but Lennon did happen to paraphrase Jesus Christ: “My one command to you is to love one another.”

No matter how you feel about God at LMU, one should still, just by being here, have to confront the Ignatian ideal: becoming free in order to love.

Now I tell ‘em what I told ‘em.

By way of conclusion, I want to draw everything together by using an image rather than words. I invite you to call to mind the sculpture of St. Ignatius which stands sentry in front of the Jesuit Residence on campus; and I want you to use your imagination and let that sculpture come to life. Let St. Ignatius wander around campus and see how he wonders as he wanders. He cannot help but appreciate the beauty of the campus: the elegantly planned and magnificently kept byways and gardens, the varying and

attractive architecture of the buildings. He listens to the conversations of students going to and from class, all the while, of course, dodging bicycles and skateboards and wondering about the meaning of word: “Dude.”

And then he takes a walk along the bluff and looks over the city of Los Angeles, a place which, even from this vantage point, screams out its diversity, its complexity, its need for prophets and for servants, its opportunities, its challenges. Does Ignatius feel that the institution named for him is making a contribution to the world he is beholding? Are the people out there, especially those in need, being encouraged to claim their freedom so that they can love God and each other because this place has received its inspiration from him?

In your heart, you have an answer. In your heart, you know.

At the end of his tour, Ignatius resumes his posture as before, he becomes bronze again, and our eye is drawn to the little plaque at the base of the statue which reads in part: ***St. Ignatius Loyola. The first Jesuit, leans into the winds blowing from the ends of the earth. ....Adventurous and reflective, St. Ignatius meets God’s challenges as the contemplative in action, finding God in all of creation.”***

Ignatian institutions like LMU will always lean into the winds, I think. They will always also be both adventurous and reflective. They will always bring both humble contemplation and heroic action to the long, strong search to help everyone experience the wonder and beauty of themselves, of the world, and of the God who, Ignatius believed, is before all, above all, and in all – and to give that God praise, reverence and service with all our life and with all our breath.

Thank you.