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Service of Faith: What's It All About?
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When we say “the service of faith,” what are we talking about? And why am I talking about it?

Last June, I received a letter from the vice-president for mission and ministry inviting me to join you today to examine and to discuss the phrase, ‘Service of faith’. I had no idea what it meant and as a subsequent conversation with Robert Caro, S.J., made clear, I was not the first person to ask: “What does it mean?” I am here because I am among a large pool of the ignorant and uninformed, and therefore, I am the perfect choice to help open your discussion today. And to do that, I have six more questions to ask.

1. Why, really, are we talking about this phrase, service of faith?
2. Where did this phrase, service of faith, come from?
3. What's the problem with this phrase?
4. Why is it in the LMU mission statement
5. Why do so many say they don't know what it means?
6. What could it mean?

I. Why, really, are we talking about this phrase, service of faith?

- First of all, the phrase, “The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice” is a part of Loyola-Marymount’s mission statement. In fact, it’s one of the sub-titles in a booklet published in 2003 enumerating the tri-partite purpose of the university: the three are: first, the encouragement of learning, second, the education of the whole person, and third, the service of faith and the promotion of justice. The mission statement was adopted according to this booklet in 1990.
- Someone big and important asked some of you what it meant, namely The Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), the university’s accrediting agency. After their most recent accreditation visit, the committee pointed out that two phrases in the mission statement seemed to be unclear to many members of the university community; or at least there was no general agreement about the two: The phrases are “The service of faith” and “Education of the Whole Person,” (where the issue was not knowing who was responsible for this). In particular WASC reported that “many people on campus could speak eloquently about the promotion of justice but turned mute when asked to say what the service of faith means.” As a result the university launched an effort to clarify those phrases by appointing a subcommittee.

- A university study group took on this task and issued a reflection statement dated February 2007 (I'll return to that statement a bit later). I mention it here because it seems to signal a genuine desire and effort to understand and define what the subcommittees agrees is a "certain complexity" associated with the phrase "service of faith."
- Let's go to the text of the mission statement itself. In the context of the paragraph in which it appears, the second part of the phrase, "promotion of justice" is pretty clear, not easy to implement perhaps, but not hard to understand and a kind of definition is offered in the mission statement: "In linking active concern for the poor to the service of faith, LMU follows the lead of its sponsoring religious communities and the post-Vatican II Church in acknowledging that work for social justice is a requirement not simply an option of biblical faith."

II. Where did this phrase come from?

- The phrase, "service of faith and the promotion of justice" was examined and given context in a speech by the now-former General of the Jesuits Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., in October 2000 at Santa Clara. There he traced these conjoined phrases back to the Jesuits' 32nd general congregation in 1975. After Vatican II, he says, it was clear that a new direction was required for the Jesuits, "The overriding purpose of the society of Jesus, namely 'the service of faith,' must also include the 'promotion of justice.'" By way of explaining the addition, Fr. Kolvenbach describes his experience working in the Near East, "where, for centuries, the apostolic activity of the Jesuits [was] concentrated on education in a famous university and some outstanding high schools." Though some Jesuits worked with the poor and with refugees, this was thought to be secondary. Yet, as he says, "In Beirut...our medical school, staffed by very holy Jesuits, was producing...some of the most corrupt citizens in the city, but this was taken for granted." [And this was probably true also in various Central and Latin American countries; perhaps even the United States] Thus, as Fr. Kolvenbach describes it, the addition by the congregation of the phrase, "promotion of justice," to the "service of faith" was a novel, even radical turn in the Jesuit mission and communal-understanding.
- The speech is well worth reading. First, it reminds us that "the service of faith" was the prevailing mission of the Jesuits "from [its] origins in 1540 the Society [was] officially and solemnly charged with the defense and the propagation of the faith." Second, the speech reminds us of one aspect of Catholicism's institutional situation in the mid-twentieth century: namely, apostolic works that abetted or ignored or were unconscious of the corrupt civic structures that they implicitly supported, for example, in some places, racial segregation. And third, the speech alludes to the struggle, after the 32nd congregation, within the Jesuit community and between that community and the Vatican in meeting the challenges presented by the "promotion of justice," which is to be understood in the context of the Second Vatican Council particularly in the light of *Gaudium et spes*, The Church in the Modern World. whose opening words are: "The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men of our time, especially those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human," the council fathers say, "fails to find an echo in [our] hearts...."

"Christians, they go on, "cherish a feeling of deep solidarity with the human race and its history."

- This intra-church history is not the subject of today's meeting. But recognize that the phrase "service of faith," and not just service but propagation of the faith is the original mission and that the promotion of justice is an amendment, a novel but critical one to the Jesuit mission. As Fr. Kolvenbach sums up: "So central to the mission of the entire Society was this union of faith and justice that it was to become the 'integration factor' of all the Society's works, and in this light 'great attention' was to be paid in evaluating every work, including educational institutions."

III. What is the problem with this phrase? Or maybe better: Is there a problem?

- This history shows that the juxtaposition of the two phrases, service of faith and promotion of justice has a distinctly Jesuit meaning and history, although, please note that there is also a strong focus on faith and justice in the Marymount Order and in the Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange. The specifically Jesuit history has a distinctly Jesuit meaning and history. This history, as Fr. Kovenbach explains it, has played out in vigorous debate, even disagreement and division within the Jesuit community. Nonetheless, thirty-some years after the 32nd congregation, the promotion of justice has become part of the university's mission.
- Ironically, as the need for today's discussion points up, it is the phrase, "Service of Faith" that seems to have become opaque or incomprehensible for many, and perhaps troubling for some. Certainly, one plain reading of the whole phrase, "service of faith and the promotion of justice" is that the promotion of justice constitutes the service of faith.
- In the 21st century, does the service of faith mean anything—or not—for an American Catholic university? What does it **not** mean? In the view of the subcommittee's reflection "in no way does it imply proselytizing"; how far or how different is that from the Jesuit's tradition, "the propagation of the faith"? The subcommittee, at least, does not understand "service of faith" in its traditional meaning—a least as the Society of Jesus once understood it.
- Is this phrase loose in your mission statement detached from its original meaning?

IV. How did this get into LMU's mission statement? I don't really know. But, let me speculate...

- When LMU adopted the phrase, the service of faith and the promotion of justice, in 1990, it, no doubt, seemed a good, useful, even an inspiring addition to the mission statement. Back then, it may have also addressed a major concern of all Catholic colleges and universities, that is, their Catholic identity.
- You will recall that in 1990 Pope John Paul II promulgated *Ex Corde Ecclesia*, which followed a decade or more of discussion in this country and between the Vatican and institutions of Catholic higher education in the United States about how higher education could be seen to be Catholic and actually to be Catholic. The norms enumerated in *Ex Corde* did not fully represent the concerns of many U.S. Catholic educators, and indeed, some bishops, about the signs, symbols, and realities of Catholic identity in Catholic higher education; in fact, some observers

argued that certain of the norms enumerated by the pope would prove to be counter-productive.

- We cannot rehearse that history here or its relationship to LMU's mission statement, and perhaps no one really knows or remembers how or who or why the phrase, 'Service of faith and promotion of justice,' was added, but it was.
- We who are old enough to remember would probably agree that the disagreement or discussion that the Jesuit community had in the 1970s and 80s about how to implement its revised and enlarged mission to include 'the promotion of justice' was not the same discussion an American Catholic university, or even an American university would have about this phrase: The promotion of justice is a perfectly ordinary, acceptable, even expected part of a university's goals, whether or not the university actually does it. On the other hand, what had been the Jesuit's traditional commitment, service of faith, is not ordinary or expected in the academic world. Hence, the incomprehension about 'the service of faith,' which is the point of today's considerations. Maybe there are also suspicions and resistances.

V. Why is there confusion? What are the suspicions, incomprehension, or resistance to understanding the meaning of "the service of faith"?

- I suppose some of you are among the crowd of suspicious Americans and even more likely Catholic Americans scrutinizing the meaning of 'the service of faith,' and perhaps the word faith itself. In considering this today, we should ask without requiring a definite answer: Why does it raise suspicions? Why does it seem threatening, at least to some people? No doubt, there are many reasons; some of them good, some of them dubious. Here are some possibilities. And I don't think you have to choose one:
 - There is a misunderstanding about the First Amendment. There is the separation of church and state called for in the First Amendment—a first amendment that also protects free exercise of religion. Many believe that the separation of church and state requires the separation of religion and culture, religion and politics, religion and public life. For some, religion belongs strictly to the realm of personal and private life, where you are free to exercise whatever you want. But this is not what is enshrined in the free exercise clause. In fact, there is no constitutional bar to religion playing a vital role in civic life or educational institutions.
 - There is the assumption that the independence of the modern university and the autonomy of academic disciplines require independence from church bodies and ecclesiastical authorities. But does this require that lived religion be barred from the university?
 - The phrase 'service of faith' or any other religious reference in a mission statement raises the specter of a creedal requirement for faculty, administrators, and perhaps even students. This can seem threatening to a faculty and student body many of whom are not Catholic, perhaps not Christian and very likely not Jesuit. Of course, the phrase can also seem threatening to Catholics.
 - For some, the phrase may hint at proselytizing. Or of subsuming academic life under the rubric of religious doctrine. For some, the phrase may echo the requirement for unstinting obedience to higher authority for which the Jesuits

were once renowned, right or wrong, famously or infamously. For some, the phrase may suggest a readiness to trim academic freedom and the rights of conscience.

- And then there is the general cultural indifference to religion as part of the well-lived human life.
- These seem to me some of the reasons some people might bristle or recoil or raise an alarm about the service of faith. No doubt, there are others. And then, there is the larger context: At the current moment, some of the hierarchy and clergy of the Catholic Church in the United States are in the lamentable position of not having practiced what they preached. The storm over clerical sexual abuse of children has not gone away. Though this may seem distant from our purpose today, we should recognize the degree to which the scandal has brought back a deeply embedded anti-Catholicism in U.S. culture; the church and Catholics will be living with that for a long time to come; indeed, even many Catholics share in the skepticism and antipathy of the larger culture brought on by the scandal.

VI. Let's turn than to the question at hand: What can the phrase, service of faith, mean, if you want it to mean something?

- Some might say that it is wholly congruent with the promotion of justice and let it go at that.
- We could be wholly post-modern and say it means what the appropriate committees, subcommittees, and water-cooler crew decides.
- The subcommittee I mentioned earlier took a crack. In summary, their report said that the phrase, "service of faith," can be understood to have "deep resonance in the documents of our founding religious communities. One way to answer the question then is obvious: ask a Jesuit. The subcommittee itself delimited the phrase with three points:
 - It encompasses all those ways in which the university engages its Catholic intellectual, cultural, and religious heritage;
 - It embraces the tension of being institutionally committed to Roman Catholicism while at the same time actively engaging those of other faiths [or no faiths];
 - It is inseparably tied to the promotion of justice.
 - This encompassing, embracing and inseparably tying doesn't exactly specify what service of faith is:
- The phrase seems to want filling out with meaning, especially at a time when Catholic higher education is in a slow and likely irreversible transition in the shift from control by founding religious communities, whose history and charism gives the phrase specificity and examples, to Catholic lay people and to lay people of other faiths and no faiths at all. In other words, the people who once knew what the phrase meant are being replaced by people who haven't a clue.
- For the purposes of discussion today, here are some further thoughts and considerations.

- The faith we are talking about in the service of faith is Catholicism. It is a rich and varied tradition, theologically, aesthetically, spiritually, intellectually, emotionally, devotionally. This multiplicity of means is available to all Catholic institutions of higher education and therefore there are multiple ways of defining an institution's Catholic identity, in other words, the service of faith could be expressed in different ways: Catholic identity is not a strait jacket, but an opportunity. St. John's in Collegeville so closely tied to the Benedictine community at St. John's Abbey, exhibits, maybe exudes is better, one way of expressing Catholic identity; urban Jesuit institutions like LMU or Fordham or Loyola Chicago have other ways; for example, the religious development of their cities, their ethnic mix, their relations with other religious traditions in their communities. This may be heterodox, but I'll say it anyway: There may be one Catholicism, but there can be plural Catholic identities; colleges and universities can discern their own by thoughtful and honest canvassing of their past, their present, and their expectations for the future.
- Whatever means and modes are chosen, there have to be people who will do this, who want to do this. There has to be a critical mass of knowledgeable Catholics. If Catholics aren't going to do this, why should anyone else?
 - Please note, I don't say only Catholics can do this. It is important to observe that many who are not Catholic do collaborate in forming and maintaining a Catholic identity in Catholic colleges and university, that is, they can and do act in service of faith. Religious people of different traditions may have a good deal in common with respect to scriptural, theological, moral, devotional matters; we can learn from one another and practice with one another. University of Notre Dame has its refugees from Calvin College. Our Jewish text group at Fordham offers a bracing experience of theological discourse: many questions, few answers.
- This critical mass of people needs to be serious and proactive, that is, there needs to be general agreement about what should be done and continuous and serious evaluation and critique of how that service of faith is understood and implemented in the university—across the campus and across the curriculum. Does it work? At all levels? Students as well as faculty and administrators. Not only campus ministry but the English Department and Business School, student affairs and resident halls.
 - That means hiring for mission. I am told the university is working on this as well as hiring for diversity. How is that going? In the context of today's discussion I want to emphasize the importance of hiring for religious mission. The English, Mathematics, History, all departments and schools hire for the specific mission of a discipline; coaches and trainers are hired for a specific mission. Why shouldn't a university that declares that the "service of faith" is part of its mission hire for that purpose. I have already suggested that not all of these hires would be Catholic; others of varied religious traditions would

- certainly be legitimate hires not only for their specialty but for their interest in the university's religious mission.
- What is the content of the "service of faith"?
 - The Catholic intellectual tradition is part of the content, the whole thing; history, but not just yesterday's issues but today's:
 - At a recent Fordham event, John Haught's presentation: "After Darwin and Einstein: Is Faith in a Personal God Possible," brought home to me how eager students and others may be to think about the reconciling of faith and science. So with many of today's issues: religion and science, theology and philosophy, history and literature. We need an engagement with what that tradition has produced and an engagement with the issues that confront us today: materialism, determinism, narcissism, all round depravity!
 - The Catholic religious tradition: worship, learning, spiritual and devotional practices, fasting, meditation. These exist in other traditions as well as our own. It is always impressive to find Muslim students praying at the appointed hours in the Fordham chapel. The Mass of the Holy Spirit—how spirited is it? Do Liturgical and ritual practices generate the same interest and enthusiasm as that other ritual: sports and cheer leaders? Liturgical practice is the heart of Catholicism. So are the sacraments; what place do they have in campus life, for example, the RCIA?
 - The university and the promotion of justice; many Catholic schools have focused on this, and rightly so, as a major component of their identity. But it too deserves evaluation and attention. Has it become a species of do-goodism with little probing of justice and injustice? Is the pilgrimage to the SOA enough? A week in Thailand or El Salvador? What about the briefing and debriefing of participants. What about justice within the university's own walls and the surrounding community? What about student loans? Or dormitory life? Respect for human dignity among students, starting with their own dignity.
 - Whose job is this to practice the service of faith?
 - The decline in numbers of the founding religious communities is an issue in almost every Catholic college and university. What is the half-life of institutional memory? One generation or two? Ray Schroth in a recent article in the *National Catholic Reporter* gives an approximate scenario for the Jesuits: big changes are in the offing, consolidation of provinces, continuing decline in numbers, the globalization of the Society of Jesus. Who will remember what "the service of faith" means when there are too few Jesuits, or even no more Jesuits.
 - Lay faculty and administrators will in the not-to-distant future be in charge of the Catholic and Jesuit identity of LMU and, the mission and ministry of all Jesuit colleges and universities; in your case,

which will include “the service and faith and the promotion of justice.”
It is up to you.

We don't know what the service of faith could mean. Could it prove to be like the appendix, a vestigial organ having no real function—or the pituitary gland that governs and balances the whole body? That's what today's discussion comes down to. And I hope it will be vigorous, insightful, and candid.