

## The Grand *Agere Contra* for Jesuit Education

Imagine a Jesuit college that boldly states that its primary mission is

*The progress of souls in Christian life and learning.*

Every person at the institution explicitly accepts this statement as the college's core intentionality. All major and many minor decisions are made with this mission in mind.

This phrasing of the mission exactly replicates the official expression of [one of the two main purposes for which the Society was founded](#), so it should not be at all controversial. The second purpose for the Society's founding, "the defense and propagation of the faith," might be made another chief aspect of the educational mission, but it does not require the heavy Counter-Reformational hand of the distant past. It remains especially relevant in this age of aggressive atheism, indifference to religion, and general personal, intellectual, and ethical confusion. People need to know the case for faith, understand its most positive forms, and see its importance for human fulfillment.

The challenge to establishing such a Jesuit school is immense because it would have to oppose directly Academe's widely accepted secularistic center of gravity in two very basic ways:

(1) *Jesuit education is essentially all about the full Christian formation of the person (docta pietas, or learned devotion), not about the production of better and higher and more advanced research, not about higher standardized test scores, not about following trendy secular lights, not about impressive riches or honors or pride. The formational nature of Jesuit schooling puts it in a very different mode and gives it an intentionality different from that of the profession-oriented framework of the typical college, where professors often must publish substantially to remain employed there. The graduate schooling of most college professors typically has little or nothing to do with forming teachers who can care for the personal growth of their students. Graduate school is by definition preparation for professional expertise in some discipline. Though technical teaching competence (even excellence) is not at all ignored in the Jesuit approach, it is not by any means sufficient either. The disposition, attitude, self-concept of the teacher is notably different in the Jesuit domain. The work is an apostolate, a calling—not a job. The program may share many important contents with other curricula, but these contents will be delivered under a different programmatic intentionality and supplemented with contents that lie well beyond the secular horizon.*

(2) *Jesuit education pursues truth, but it explicitly understands the truth of the Gospel to be just as true as any particular discipline's "truth"—and in fact it takes the Gospel truth as far more important for making a meaningful life. The standard secular approach will have none of this. And yet without this basic assumption, a Jesuit education cannot be what it is. Bible colleges may have this idea, but Jesuit education is not a version of a Bible college program: Jesuit education looks to broader horizons and towards a timely Christian synthesis of Letters, philosophy, and theology.*

These are but two major points that make establishing a true (Institute-rooted) Jesuit collegiate program almost impossible today. The times call for a massive *agere contra*. Who will dare to rise to the challenge?