

## Drinking From Our Own Wells A Reflection on Change in a Jesuit School

“With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation” says the Prophet Isaiah (12:3).

To whom can we turn in a time of change? What is the Ignatian charism of a Jesuit school? What resources do we possess to meet the challenges ahead? What should be our understanding of authentic change?

At times one could be forgiven for thinking that all that really matters is that we are able to keep pace (and perhaps by implication agree) with the constant changes we face in society. One only need take a cursory look at the number of professional courses on all aspects of change management to witness the burgeoning of this self-generating industry.

Indeed, we seem to be living through an age governed by a great Tyrant Change, with a Chief of State Propaganda ensuring that all spokespersons employ the attendant Rhetoric of Change in official pronouncements. There is a supposed need for continuous change in all things and for all of us to play our part in the implementation of the Policy of Change. Measurements are now made, according to an index of change, against which an individual’s or an institution’s relative success or failure can be judged.

In November 2006, Avery Cardinal Dulles SJ, delivered a lecture at Fordham. The Cardinal’s theme, The Ignatian Charism at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century, spoke to the continued relevance of the Jesuit order in an increasingly fast-paced and secular world. He defined a charism as a “gift of grace for the benefit of others” and argued that the Jesuits should continue to abide by the founding principles of Saint Ignatius: living lives of evangelical poverty, and synthesizing the active and contemplative lives. I think that we can learn something from this. As a school in the Jesuit tradition, if we are to keep this Ignatian charism alive in our community, **we** must become contemplatives in action for the benefit of our students. We should also seek opportunities to develop this capacity in our students. We can achieve this aim in simple ways, like taking seriously morning prayers with our tutor groups and by encouraging reflection not just on **what** we are learning in our lessons, but more importantly reflection on **why/for what purpose** are we learning what we are learning. This is true in all subjects of the curriculum. We should be wary of falling into the temptation of thinking that this is the proper business of only curriculum Religious Education and Chaplaincy provision.

John Henry Cardinal Newman (or the Blessed John Henry Newman as we may now call him) is quoted on the front of the leaflet in your hands this morning: “To live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often.” He was arguing this not to encourage an attitude that all change is good, or that any change is better than no change, or simply a love of novelty. No, he was arguing for change in a very specific context, namely that of the development of Church doctrine. In the face of criticism targeted at the Catholic Church in the mid to late nineteenth century, he was defending an understanding of the Church as a living tradition and not a moribund Tradition incapable of engaging with the world at large. At a time when the Catholic Church was in very real danger of a fortress mentality unwilling and unable to engage with the modern world, Newman was laying the philosophical-theological foundations for an emergence from that era to a confident Church willing

and able to engage with humility on the questions of human meaning and purpose that really mattered to the modern man and woman. In other words he was developing a theology for authentic change in the Church, the principles of which are as valid today as they were in Newman's day. Such change must always remain true to the ancient and venerable Christian tradition, but in reading the signs of the times, is free to dig deep into this tradition to discover riches which can be employed in the contemporary context to enable us to make sense of the world in which we now live. We thirst, and we are offered water from the wells which bring us life.

Laus Deo Semper

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