

THE SERVICE OF FAITH AND THE PROMOTION OF JUSTICE

IN

AMERICAN JESUIT HIGHER EDUCATION*

Rev. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J.

Superior General of the Society of Jesus

Introduction

This conference on the commitment to justice in American Jesuit higher education comes at an important moment in the rich history of the twenty-eight colleges and universities

I. The Jesuit commitment to faith and justice, new in 1975

I begin by recalling another anniversary, which this conference commemorates. Twenty-five years ago, ten years after the closing of the Second Vatican Council, Jesuit delegates from around the world gathered at the 32nd General Congregation (GC), to consider how the Society of Jesus was responding to the deep transformation of all Church life that was called for and launched by Vatican II.

suppression of the apostolate of education in favor of social activity. On the contrary, he affirmed that "even an apostolate like education - at all levels - which is so sincerely wanted by the Society and whose importance is clear to the entire world, in its concrete forms today must be the object of reflection in the light of the demands of the social problem."⁶

Perhaps the incomprehension or reluctance of some of us delegates, was one reason why GC 32 finally took a radical stand. With a passion both inspiring and disconcerting, the General Congregation coined the formula, "the service of faith and the promotion of justice," and used it adroitly to push every Jesuit work and every individual Jesuit to make a choice, providing little leeway for the fainthearted. Many inside and outside the Society were outraged by the "promotion of justice." As Father Arrupe rightly perceived, his Jesuits were collectively entering upon a more severe way of the cross, which would surely entail misunderstandings and even opposition on the part of civil and ecclesiastical authorities, many good friends, and some of our own members. Today, twenty-

I do not think we delegates at the 32nd Congregation were aware of the theological and ethical dimensions of Christ's mission of service. Greater attention to the "diakonia fidei" may have prevented some of the misunderstandings provoked by the phrase "the promotion of justice."

B. The promotion of justice

This expression is difficult to translate in many languages. We delegates were familiar with sales promotions in a department store or the promotion of friends or enemies to a higher rank or position; we were not familiar with the promotion of justice. To be fair, let us remember that a general congregation is not a scientific academy equipped to distinguish and to define, to clarify and to classify. In the face of radically new apostolic needs, it chose to inspire, to teach and even to prophesy. In its desire to be more incisive in the promotion of justice, the Congregation avoided traditional words like charity, mercy, or love, unfashionable words in 1975. Neither philanthropy nor even development would do. The Congregation instead used the word "promotion" with its connotation of a well-

world [as] a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the gospel."13 But one can understand the Congregation's fear that too neat or integrated an approach might weaken the prophetic appeal and water down the radical change in our mission.

In retrospect, this simple juxtaposition sometimes led to an "incomplete, slanted and unbalanced reading" of Decree 4,14 unilaterally emphasizing "one aspect of this mission to the detriment of the other,"15 treating faith and justice as alternative or even rival tracks of ministry. "Dogmatism or ideology sometimes led us to treat each other more as adversaries than as companions. The promotion of justice has sometimes been separated from its wellspring of faith."16

On the one side, the faith dimension was too often presumed and left implicit, as if our identity as Jesuits were enough. Some rushed headlong towards the promotion of justice without much analysis or reflection and with only occasional reference to the justice of the Gospel. They seemed to consign the service of faith to a dying past.

Those on the other side clung to a certain style of faith and Church. They gave the impression that God's grace had to do only with the next life, and that divine reconciliation entailed no practical obligation to set things right here on earth.

In this frank assessment I have used, not so much my own words but rather those of subsequent Congregations, so as to share with you the whole Society's remorse for whatever distortions or excesses occurred, and to demonstrate how, over the last twenty-five years, the Lord has patiently been teaching us to serve the faith that does justice in a more integral way.

C. The ministry of education

In the midst of radical statements and unilateral interpretations associated with Decree 4, many raised doubts about our maintaining large educational institutions. They insinuated, if they did not insist, that direct social work among the poor and involvement with their movements should take priority. Today, however, the value of the educational apostolate is generally recognized, being the sector occupying the greatest Jesuit manpower and resources, but only on condition that it transform its goals, contents, and methods.

Even before GC 32, Father Arrupe had already fleshed out the meaning of "diakonia

This valley, this nation and the whole world look very different from the way they looked twenty-

our schools and, in the long run, to identify them. At the same time, the U.S. Provincials have recently established an important Higher Education Committee to propose criteria on the staffing, leadership and Jesuit sponsorship of our colleges and universities.²³ May these criteria help to implement the ideal characteristics we now meditate on together.

A. Formation and learning

Today's predominant ideology reduces the human world to a global jungle whose primordial law is the survival of the fittest. Students who subscribe to this view want to be equipped with well-honed professional and technical skills in order to compete in the market and secure one of the relatively scarce fulfilling and lucrative jobs available. This is the success which many students (and parents!) expect.

All American universities, ours included, are under tremendous pressure to opt entirely for success in this sense. But what our students want - and deserve - includes but transcends this "worldly success" based on marketable skills. The real measure of our Jesuit universities lies in who our students become.

For four hundred and fifty years, Jesuit education has sought to educate "the whole person" intellectually and professionally, psychologically, morally and spiritually. But in the emerging global reality, with its great possibilities and deep contradictions, the whole person is different from the whole person of the Counter-Reformation, the Industrial Revolution, or the 20th Century. Tomorrow's "whole person" cannot be whole without an educated awareness of society and culture with which to contribute socially, generously, in the real world. Tomorrow's whole person must have, in brief, a well-educated solidarity.

We must therefore raise our Jesuit educational standard to "educate the whole person of solidarity for the real world." Solidarity is learned through "contact" rather than through "concepts," as the Holy Father said recently at an Italian university conference.²⁴ When the heart is touched by direct experience, the mind may be challenged to change. Personal involvement with innocent suffering, with the injustice others suffer, is the catalyst for solidarity which then gives rise to intellectual inquiry and moral reflection.

Students, in the course of their formation, must let the gritty reality of this world into their lives, so they can learn to feel it, think about it critically, respond to its suffering and engage it constructively. They should learn to perceive, think, judge, choose and act for the rights of others, especially the disadvantaged and the oppressed. Campus ministry does much to foment such intelligent, responsible and active compassion, compassion that deserves the name solidarity.

Our universities also boast a splendid variety of in-service programs, outreach programs, insertion programs, off-campus contacts and hands-on courses. These should not be too optional or peripheral, but at the core of every Jesuit university's program of studies.

Our students are involved in every sort of social action - tutoring drop-outs, demonstrating in Seattle, serving in soup kitchens, promoting pro-life, protesting against the School of the Americas - and we are proud of them for it. But the measure of Jesuit universities is not what our students do but who they become and the adult Christian responsibility they will exercise in future towards their neighbor and their world. For now, the activities they engage in, even with much good effect, are for their formation. This does not make the university a training camp for social activists. Rather, the students need close involvement with the poor and the marginal now, in order to learn about reality and become adults of solidarity in the future.

B. Research and teaching

If the measure and purpose of our universities lies in what the students become, then the faculty are at the heart of our universities. Their mission is tirelessly to seek the truth and to form each student into a whole person of solidarity who will take responsibility for the real world. What do they need in order to fulfil this essential vocation?

The faculty's "research, which must be rationally rigorous, firmly rooted in faith and open to dialogue with all people of good will,"²⁵ not only obeys the canons of each discipline, but ultimately embraces human reality in order to help make the world a more fitting place for six billion of us to inhabit. I want to affirm that university knowledge is valuable for its own sake and at the same time is knowledge that must ask itself, "For whom? For what?"²⁶

Usually we speak of professors in the plural, but what is at stake is more than the sum of so many individual commitments and efforts. It is a sustained interdisciplinary dialogue of research and reflection, a continuous pooling of expertise. The purpose is to assimilate experiences and insights according to their different disciplines in "a vision of knowledge which, well aware of its limitations, is not satisfied with fragments but tries to integrate them into a true and wise synthesis"²⁷ about the real world. Unfortunately many faculty still feel academically, humanly and I would say spiritually unprepared for such an exchange.

In some disciplines such as the life sciences, the social sciences, law, business, or medicine, the connections with "our time and place" may seem more obvious. These professors apply their disciplinary specialties to issues of justice and injustice in their research and teaching about health care, legal aid, public policy, and international relations. But every field or branch of knowledge has values to defend, with repercussions on the ethical level. Every discipline, beyond its necessary specialization, must engage with human society, human life, and the environment in appropriate ways, cultivating moral concern about how people ought to live together.

All professors, in spite of the cliché of the ivory tower, are in contact with the world. But no point of view is ever neutral or value-free. By preference, by option, our Jesuit point of view is that of the poor. So our professors' commitment to faith and justice entails a most significant shift in viewpoint and choice of values. Adopting the point of view of

those who suffer injustice, our professors seek the truth and share their search and its results with our students. A legitimate question, even if it does not sound academic, is for each professor to ask, "When researching and teaching, where and with whom is my heart?" To expect our professors to make such an explicit option and speak about it is obviously not easy; it entails risks. But I do believe that this is what Jesuit educators have publicly stated, in Church and in society, to be our defining commitment.

To make sure that the real concerns of the poor find their place in research, faculty members need an organic collaboration with those in the Church and in society who work

full character of a Jesuit university; they neither exhaust its faith-justice commitment nor really fulfill its responsibilities to society.

What, then, constitutes this ideal character? and what contributes to the public's perception of it? In the case of a Jesuit university, this character must surely be the mission, which is defined by GC 32 and reaffirmed by GC 34: the diakonia fidei and the promotion of justice, as the characteristic Jesuit university way of proceeding and of serving socially.

In the words of GC 34, a Jesuit university must be faithful to both the noun "university" and to the adjective "Jesuit." To be a university requires dedication "to research, teaching and the various forms of service that correspond to its cultural mission." To be Jesuit "requires that the university act in harmony with the demands of the service of faith and promotion of justice found in Decree 4 of GC 32."²⁹

The first way, historically, that our universities began living out their faith-justice commitment was through their admissions policies, affirmative action for minorities, and

24 John Paul II, Address to Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Milan, 5 May 2000, n.9.

25 Ibid. n.7.

26 Cf. GC34, D.17, n.6.

27 John Paul II, *op.cit.*, n.5.

28 John Paul II, Address to the Faculty of Medicine, Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, 26 June 1984.

29 GC34, D.17, nn.6,7.

30 "For the poor [the universities] serve as major channels for social advancement" (GC34, D.17, n.2).

31 "The University is a social reality and a social force, historically marked by what the society is like in which it lives, and destined as a social force to enlighten and transform that reality in which it lives and for which it should live" (Ellacuría, *op.cit.*).

32 Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., Address to the Congregation of Provincials (20 September 1990), AR 20 (1990), p. 452.

33 John Paul II, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, August 1990, n. 32.

34 Galatians 5:6.

35 GC32, D.2, n.8.

* The twenty-eight Jesuit Colleges and Universities in the United States held a Conference on "Commitment to Justice in Jesuit Higher Education," at Santa Clara University (California), 5-8 October 2000, to mark the 25th anniversary of Decree 4 of the 32nd Gen