

Decree 4: OUR MISSION TODAY: THE SERVICE OF FAITH AND THE PROMOTION OF JUSTICE

Introduction and Summary

1. To the many requests received from all parts of the Society for clear decisions and definite guidelines concerning our mission today, the 32nd General Congregation responds as follows.

2. The mission of the Society of Jesus today is the service of faith, of which the promotion of justice is an absolute requirement. For reconciliation with God demands the reconciliation of people with one another.

3. In one form or another, this has always been the mission of the Society;¹ but it gains new meaning and urgency in the light of the needs and aspirations of the men and women of our time, and it is in that light that we examine it anew. We are confronted today, in fact, by a whole series of new challenges.

4. There is a new challenge to our apostolic mission in a fact without precedent in the history of mankind: today, more than two billion human beings have no knowledge of God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, whom He has sent,² yet feel an increasing hunger for the God they already adore in the depths of their hearts without knowing Him explicitly.

5. There is a new challenge to our apostolic mission in that many of our contemporaries, dazzled and even dominated by the achievements of the human mind, forgetting or rejecting the mystery of man's ultimate meaning, have thus lost the sense of God.

6. There is a new challenge to our apostolic mission in a world increasingly interdependent but, for all that, divided by injustice: injustice not only personal but institutionalized: built into economic, social, and political structures that dominate the life of nations and the international community.

7. Our response to these new challenges will be un-availing unless it is total, corporate, rooted in faith and experience, and multiform.

-total: While relying on prayer, and acting on the conviction that God alone can change the human heart, we must throw into this enterprise all that we are and have, our whole persons, our communities, institutions, ministries, resources.

-corporate: Each one of us must contribute to the total mission according to his talents and functions which, in collaboration with the efforts of others, give life to the whole body. This collaborative mission is exercised under the leadership of Peter's Successor

¹ See *FI*, especially [3] (1). The Formula was approved by Popes Paul III and Julius III.

² See *SpEx* 102.

who presides over the universal Church and over all those whom the Spirit of God has appointed Pastors over the churches.³

-rooted in faith and experience: It is from faith and experience combined that we will learn how to respond most appropriately to new needs arising from new situations.

-Multiform: Since these situations are different in different parts of the world, we must cultivate a great adaptability and flexibility within the single, steady aim of the service of faith and the promotion of justice.

8. While offering new challenges to our apostolic mission, the modern world provides new tools as well: new and more effective ways of understanding man, nature and society; of communicating thought, image and feeling; of organizing action. These we must learn to use in the service of evangelization and human development.

9. Consequently we must undertake a thoroughgoing reassessment of our traditional apostolic methods, attitudes and institutions with a view to adapting them to the new needs of the times and to a world in process of rapid change.

10. All this demands that we practice discernment, that spiritual discernment which St. Ignatius teaches us in the Exercises. Moreover discernment will yield a deeper grasp of the movements, aspirations and struggles in the hearts of our contemporaries, as well as those in the heart of mankind itself.

11. In short, our mission today is to preach Jesus Christ and to make Him known in such a way that all men and women are able to recognize Him whose delight, from the beginning, has been to be with the sons of men and to take an active part in their history.⁴

12. In carrying out this mission, we should be convinced, today more than ever, that "the means which unite the human instrument with God and so dispose it that it may be wielded dexterously by His divine hand are more effective than those which equip it in relation to men."⁵

A. OUR MISSION YESTERDAY AND TODAY

The Charism of the Society

13. The mission we are called to share is the mission of the Church itself, to make known to men and women the love of God our Father, a love whose promise is eternal life. It is from the loving regard of God upon the world that the mission of Jesus takes its rise, Jesus who was sent "not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many."⁶ The mission of Christ, in turn, gives rise to the mission shared by all Christians as members of the Church sent to bring all men and women the Good

³ See LG, 22.

⁴ See Prov. 8, 22-31; Col. 1.15-20.

⁵ *Cons.* [13].

⁶ Matt. 20:28.

News of their salvation and that "they may have life and have it to the full."⁷

14. St. Ignatius and his first companions, in the spiritual experience of the Exercises, were moved to a searching consideration of the world of their own time in order to discover its needs. They contemplated "how the Three Divine Persons look down upon the whole expanse or circuit of all the earth, filled with human beings" and decide "that the Second Person should become man to save the human race." Then they turned their eyes to where God's gaze was fixed, and saw for themselves the men and women of their time, one after another, "with such great diversity in dress and in manners of acting. Some are white, some black; some at peace, and some at war; some weeping, some laughing; some well, some sick; some coming into the world, some dying, etc."⁸ That was how they learned to respond to the call of Christ and to work for the establishment of His Kingdom.⁹

15. United in a single vision of faith, strong in a common hope and rooted in the same love of Christ whose companions they wished to be, Ignatius and his first band of apostles believed that the service they could give to the people of their time would be more effective if they were more closely bound to one another as members of a single body, at once religious, apostolic and priestly, and united to the Successor of Peter by a special bond of love and service reflecting their total availability for mission in the universal Church.

16. It is in this light that we are asked to renew our dedication to the properly apostolic dimension of our religious life. Our consecration to God is really, a prophetic rejection of those idols which the world is always tempted to adore, wealth, pleasure, prestige, power. Hence our poverty, chastity and obedience ought visibly to bear witness to this. Despite the inadequacy of any attempt to anticipate the Kingdom which is to come, our vows ought to show how by God's grace there can be, as the Gospel proclaims, a community among human beings which is based on sharing rather than on greed; on willing openness to all persons rather than on seeking after the privileges of caste or class or race; on service rather than on domination and exploitation. The men and women of our time need a hope which is eschatological, but they also need to have some signs that its realization has already begun.

17. Finally, the Apostolic Letters of Paul III (1540) and Julius III (1550) recognize that the Society of Jesus was found "chiefly for this purpose: to strive especially for the defense and propagation of the faith, and for the progress of souls in Christian life and doctrine, by means of public preaching, lectures, and any other ministrations whatsoever of the word of God, and further, by means of the Spiritual Exercises, the education of children and unlettered persons in Christianity, and the spiritual consolation of Christ's faithful through hearing confessions and administering the other sacraments," as well as "in reconciling the estranged, in holily assisting and serving those who are found in prisons and hospitals, and indeed in performing any other works of charity, according to what will seem expedient for the glory of God and the common good."¹⁰ This primordial statement remains for us a normative one.

⁷ John 10.10. See Matt. 9.36, 10.1-42; John 6.

⁸ *SpEx*, 102, 106 (Contemplation on the Incarnation).

⁹ *Ibid.*, 91-100 (Contemplation of the "Kingdom").

¹⁰ *Fl*, [3] (1), approved by Julius III.

18. The mission of the Society today is the priestly service of the faith, an apostolate whose aim is to help people become more open toward God and more willing to live according to the demands of the Gospel. The Gospel demands a life freed from egoism and self-seeking, from all attempts to seek one's own advantage and from every form of exploitation of one's neighbour. It demands a life in which the justice of the Gospel shines out in a willingness not only to recognize and respect the rights of all, especially the poor and the powerless, but also to work actively to secure those rights. It demands an openness and generosity to anyone in need, even a stranger or an enemy. It demands towards those who have injured us, pardon; toward those with whom we are at odds, a spirit of reconciliation. We do not acquire this attitude of mind by our own efforts alone. It is the fruit of the Spirit who transforms our hearts and fills them with the power of God's mercy, that mercy whereby he most fully shows forth His justice by drawing us, unjust though we are, to His friendship.¹¹ It is by this that we know that the promotion of justice is an integral part of the priestly service of the faith.

19. In his address of December 3, 1974,¹² Pope Paul VI confirmed "as a modern expression of your vow of obedience to the Pope" that we offer resistance to the many forms of contemporary atheism. This was the mission he entrusted to us at the time of the 31st General Congregation, and in recalling it he commended the way in which the Society down the years has been present at the heart of ideological battles and social conflicts, wherever the crying needs of mankind encountered the perennial message of the Gospel. Thus if we wish to continue to be faithful to this special character of our vocation and to the mission we have received from the Pope, we must "contemplate" our world as Ignatius did his, that we may hear anew the call of Christ dying and rising in the anguish and aspirations of men and women.

20. There are millions of men and women in our world, specific people with names and faces, who are suffering from poverty and hunger, from the unjust distribution of wealth and resources and from the consequences of racial, social, and political discrimination. Not only the quality of life but human life itself is under constant threat. It is becoming more and more clear that despite the opportunities offered by an ever more serviceable technology, we are simply not willing to pay the price of a more just and more humane society.¹³

21. At the same time, people today are somehow aware that their problems are not just social and technological, but personal and spiritual. They have a feeling that what is at stake here is the very meaning of man: his future and his destiny. People are hungry: hungry not just for bread, but for the Word of God. (Deut. 8.3; Mt. 4.4). For this reason the Gospel should be preached with a fresh vigour, for it is in a position once again to make itself heard. At first sight God seems to have no place in public life, nor even in

¹¹ See Rom. 5:89.

¹² Pope Paul VI, "Address to the Members of the 32nd General Congregation," December 3, 1974, pp. 519-536.

¹³ We find a Gospel echo, a truly apostolic echo of the anguish and questioning of our times, in *Gaudium et Spes, Mater et Magistra, Pacem in Terris, Populorum Progressio, Octogesima Adveniens*. In these documents of the church's magisterium the needs of our world touch us and break in upon us both on the level of our personal lives and of our apostolic service.

private awareness. Yet everywhere, if we only knew how to look, we can see that people are groping towards an experience of Christ and waiting in hope for His Kingdom of love, of justice and of peace.

22. Of these expectations and converging desires the last two Synods of Bishops have reminded us in their reflections on *Justice in the World and Evangelization in the Modern World*. They point to concrete forms which our witness and our mission must take today.

23. The expectations of our contemporaries – and their problems – are ours as well. We ourselves share in the blindness and injustice of our age. We ourselves stand in need of being evangelized. We ourselves need to know how to meet Christ as He works in the world through the power of His Spirit. And it is to this world, our world, that we are sent. Its needs and aspirations are an appeal to the Gospel which it is our mission to proclaim.

B. THE CHALLENGES WE FACE

New Demands, New Hopes

24. The first thing that must be said about the world which it is our mission to evangelize is this: everywhere, but in very; different situations, we have to preach Jesus Christ to men and women who have never really heard of Him, or who do not yet know of Him sufficiently.

a) In what were once called "mission lands" our predecessors endeavoured by their preaching of the Gospel to set up and foster new Christian communities. This task of direct evangelization by the preaching of Jesus Christ remains essential today, and must be continued, since never before have there been so many people who have never, heard the Word of Christ the Saviour. At the same time dialog with the believers of other religions is becoming for us an ever more important apostolate.

b) In the traditionally Christian countries, the works we established, the movements we fostered, the institutions – retreat houses, schools, universities – we set up, are still necessary for the service of faith. But there are many in these countries who can no longer be reached by the ministries exercised through these works and institutions. The so-called "Christian" countries have themselves become mission lands."

25. The second decisive factor for our preaching of Jesus Christ and his Gospel is this: the new opportunities – and problems – disclosed in our time by the discoveries of technology and the human sciences. They have introduced a relativism, often of a very radical kind, into the picture of man and the world to which we were accustomed, with the result that traditional perspectives have altered almost beyond recognition. Changes of this kind in the mind-sets and structures of society inevitably produce strong repercussions in our lives as individuals and as members of society. As a result, there has been gradual erosion of traditional values, and gradual diminution of reliance on the power of traditional symbols. Simultaneously, new aspirations arise which seek to express themselves in the planning and implementation of practical programs.

26. The secularization of man and the world takes different forms in different groups, classes, ages and parts of the world, and in all its forms offers challenges to the preaching of the Gospel to which there is no ready-made answer.

a) On the one hand, certain false images of God which prop up and give an aura of legitimacy to unjust social structures are no longer acceptable. Neither can we admit those more ambiguous images of God which appear to release man from his inalienable responsibilities. We feel this just as much as our contemporaries do; even more, perhaps, given our commitment to proclaim the God who has revealed himself in Christ. For our own sake, just as much as for the sake of our contemporaries, we must find a new language, a new set of symbols, that will enable us to leave our fallen idols behind us and rediscover the true God: the God who, in Jesus Christ, chose to share our human pilgrimage and make our human destiny irrevocably his own. To live our lives "in memory of Him" requires of us this creative effort of faith.

b) On the other hand, part of the framework within which we have preached the Gospel is now perceived as being inextricably linked to an unacceptable social order, and for that reason is being called into question. Our apostolic institutions, along with many of those of the Church herself, are involved in the same crisis that social institutions in general are presently undergoing. Here again is an experience we share with our contemporaries, and in a particularly painful way. The relevance of our work as religious, priests and apostles is often enough not evident to the men and women around us. Not only that; despite the firmness of our faith and our convictions the relevance of what we do may not be clear, sometimes, even to ourselves. This unsettles us, and in our insecurity we tend to respond to questioning with silence and to shy away from confrontation. Yet there are signs of a contemporary religious revival which should encourage us to reaffirm our commitment with courage, and not only to welcome but to seek new opportunities for evangelization.

27. Finally, a third characteristic of our world particularly significant to our mission of evangelization is this: it is now within human power to make the world more just but we do not really want to. Our new mastery over nature and man himself is used, often enough, to exploit individuals, groups and peoples rather than to distribute the resources of the planet more equitably. It has led, it is leading, to division rather than union, to alienation rather than communication, to oppression and domination rather than to a greater respect for the rights of individuals or of groups, and a more real brotherhood among men. We can no longer pretend that the inequalities and injustices of our world must be borne as part of the inevitable order of things. It is now quite apparent that they are the result himself, man in his selfishness, has done. Hence there can be no promotion of justice in the full and Christian sense unless we also preach Jesus Christ and the mystery of reconciliation He brings. It is Christ who, in the last analysis, opens the way to the complete and definitive liberation of mankind for which we long from bottom of our hearts. Conversely, it will not be possible to bring Christ to people or to proclaim His Gospel effectively unless a firm decision is taken to devote ourselves to the promotion of justice.

28. From all over the world where Jesuits are working, very similar and very insistent requests have been made that, by a clear decision on the part of the General Congregation, the Society should commit itself to work for the promotion of justice.

Our apostolate today urgently requires that we take this decision. As apostles we are bearers of the Christian message. And at the heart of the Christian message is God revealing Himself in Christ as the Father of us all whom through the Spirit He calls to conversion. In its integrity, then, conversion means accepting that we are at one and the same time children of the Father and brother and sisters of each other. There is no genuine conversion to the love of God without conversion to the love of neighbour and, therefore, to the demands of justice. Hence, fidelity to our apostolic mission requires that we propose the whole of Christian salvation and lead others to embrace it. Christian salvation consists in an undivided love of the Father and of the neighbour and of justice. Since evangelization is proclamation of that faith which is made operative in love of others,¹⁴ the promotion of justice is indispensable to it.

29. What is at stake here is the fruitfulness of all our apostolic endeavors, and notably of any coherent attempt to combat atheism. The injustice that racks our world in so many forms is, in fact, a denial of God in practice, for it denies the dignity of the human person, the image of God, the brother or sister of Christ.¹⁵ The cult of money, progress, prestige and power has as its fruit the sin of institutionalized injustice condemned by the Synod of 1971, and it leads to the enslavement not only of the oppressed, but of the oppressor as well – and to death.

30. At a time when so many people are sparing no effort to put the world to rights without reference to God, our endeavour should be to show as clearly as we can that our Christian hope is not a dull opiate, but a firm and realistic commitment to make our world other than it is, to make it the visible sign of another world, the sign – and pledge – of "a new heaven and a new earth."¹⁶ The last Synod vigorously recalled this for us: "The Gospel entrusted to us is the good news of salvation for man and the whole of society, which must begin here and now to manifest itself on earth even if mankind's liberation in all its fullness will be achieved only beyond the frontiers of this life."¹⁷ The promotion of justice is, therefore, an integral part of evangelization.

31. We are witnesses of a Gospel which links the love of God to the service of man, and that inseparably. In a world where the power of economic, social and political structures is now appreciated and the mechanisms and laws governing them are now understood, service according to the Gospel cannot dispense with a carefully planned effort to exert influence on those structures.

32. We must bear in mind, however, that our efforts to promote justice and human freedom on the social and structural level, necessary though they are, are not sufficient of themselves. Injustice must be attacked at its roots which are in the human heart by transforming those attitudes and habits which beget injustice and foster the structures of oppression.

¹⁴ See Gal. 5.6; Eph. 4.15.

¹⁵ On the dignity of man, image of God and brother of Christ see: LG, 42; GS, 22, 24, 29, 38, 93; *Nuntium Councilii Vaticani II ad omnes homines*, December 20, 1962; Declarations of the Synods of Bishops of 1971, 1974; Addresses of Pope Paul VI.

¹⁶ Apoc. 21.1.

¹⁷ Final Declaration of the Synod of Bishops of 1974, n.12; see also the address of Pope Paul VI at the closing session of the Synod.

33. Finally, if the promotion of justice is to attain its ultimate end, it should be carried out in such a way as to bring men and women to desire and to welcome the eschatological freedom and salvation offered to us by God in Christ. The methods we employ and the activities we undertake should express the spirit of the Beatitudes and bring people to a real reconciliation. In this way our commitment to justice will simultaneously show forth the spirit and the power of God. It will respond to humanity's deepest yearnings, not just for bread and freedom, but for God and His friendships – a longing to be sons and daughters in His sight.

34. The initiatives required to respond to the challenges of our world thoroughly surpass our capabilities. Nonetheless we must set ourselves to the task with all the resourcefulness we have. By God's grace, a new apostolic awareness does seem to be taking shape gradually in the Society as a whole. There is evidence of a widespread desire, and often of a whole-hearted effort, to renew and adapt our traditional apostolates and to embark on new ones. The guidelines that follow are meant to confirm or focus decisions and to urge us to more definite programs of action.

35. *Our involvement with the world.* Too often we are insulated from any real contact with unbelief and with the hard, everyday consequences of injustice and oppression. As a result we run the risk of not being able to hear the cry for the Gospel as it is addressed to us by the men and women of our time. A deeper involvement with others in the world will therefore be a decisive test of our faith, of our hope, and of our apostolic charity. Are we ready, with discernment and with reliance on a community which is alive and apostolic, to bear witness to the Gospel in the painful situations where our faith and our hope are tested by unbelief and injustice? Are we ready to give ourselves to the demanding and serious study of theology, philosophy and the human sciences, which are ever more necessary if we are to understand and try to resolve the problems of the world? To be involved in the world in this way is essential if we are to share our faith and our hope, and thus preach a Gospel that will respond to the needs and aspirations of our contemporaries.

36. New forms of apostolic involvement, adapted to different places, have already been developed. The success of these initiatives, whatever form they take, requires of us a solid formation, intense solidarity in community and a vivid awareness of our identity. Wherever we serve we must be attentive to "inculturation"; that is, we must take pains to adapt our preaching of the Gospel to the culture of the place so that men and women may receive Christ according to the distinctive character of each country, class or group and environment.

37. *Our collaboration with others.* The involvement we desire will be apostolic to the extent that it leads us to a closer collaboration with other members of the local churches, Christians of other denominations, believers of other religions, and all who hunger and thirst after justice; in short, with all who strive to make a world fit for men and women to live in, a world where brotherhood opens the way for the recognition and acceptance of Christ our Brother and God our Father. Ecumenism will then become not just a particular ministry but an attitude of mind and a way of life. Today it is essential for the preaching and acceptance of the Gospel that this spirit of ecumenism embrace the whole of mankind, taking into account the cultural differences and the traditional spiritual values and hopes of all groups and peoples.

38. *The wellspring of our apostolate.* We are also led back again to our experience of the Spiritual Exercises. In them we are able continually to renew our faith and apostolic hope by experiencing again the love of God in Christ Jesus. We strengthen our commitment to be companions of Jesus in His mission, to labour like Him in solidarity with the poor and with Him for the establishment of the Kingdom. This same spiritual experience will teach us how to maintain the objectivity needed for a continuing review of our commitments. Thereby we gradually make our own that apostolic pedagogy of St. Ignatius which should characterize our every action.

C. APOSTOLIC DECISIONS FOR TODAY

People and Structures

39. For the greater glory of God and salvation of men, Ignatius desired that his companions go wherever there was hope of the more universal good; go to those who have been abandoned; go to those who are in greatest need. But where is the greatest need today? Where are we to locate this hope for the more universal good?

40. It is becoming more and more evident that the structures of society are among the principal formative influences in our world, shaping people's ideas and feelings, shaping their most intimate desires and aspirations; in a word, shaping mankind itself. The struggle to transform these structures in the interest of the spiritual and material liberation of fellow human beings is intimately connected to the work of evangelization. This is not to say, of course, that we can ever afford to neglect the direct apostolate to individuals, to those who are the victims of the injustice of social structures as well as to those who bear some responsibility or influence over them.

41. From this point of view of desire for the more universal good is perfectly compatible with the determination to serve the most afflicted for the sake of the Gospel. Our preaching will be heard to the extent that witness accompanies it, the witness of commitment to the promotion of justice as an anticipation of the Kingdom which is to come.

Social Involvement

42. Our faith in Christ Jesus and our mission to proclaim the Gospel demand of us a commitment to promote justice and to enter into solidarity with the voiceless and the powerless. This commitment will move us seriously to verse ourselves in the complex problems which they face in their lives, then to identify and assume our own responsibilities to society.

43. Our Jesuit communities have to help each of us overcome the reluctance, fear and apathy which block us from truly comprehending the social, economic, and political problems which exist in our city or region or country, as well as on the international scene. Becoming really aware of and understanding these problems will help us see how to preach the Gospel better and how to work better with others in our own particular way without seeking to duplicate or compete with their strengths in the struggle to promote justice.

44. We cannot be excused from making the most rigorous possible political and social analysis of our situation. This will require the utilization of the various sciences, sacred and profane, and of the various disciplines, speculative and practical, and all of this demands intense and specialized studies. Nothing should excuse us, either, from undertaking a searching discernment into our situation from the pastoral and apostolic point of view. From analysis and discernment will come committed action; from the experience of action will come insight into how to proceed further.

45. In the discernment mentioned above, the local superior, and at times the provincial as well, will take part. This will help to overcome the tensions that arise and to maintain union of minds and hearts. The superior will enable the members of the community not only to understand and appreciate the particular – and possibly unusual – apostolates undertaken by their companions under obedience, but also to take joint responsibility for them. And if contradictions arise as a result of a particular course of action, the community will be better prepared to "suffer persecution for justice's sake" if the decision to take that course has been prepared for by a discernment in which it had taken part or was at least represented by its superior.¹⁸

46. Any effort to promote justice will cost us something. Our cheerful readiness to pay the price will make our preaching of the Gospel more meaningful and its acceptance easier.

Solidarity with the Poor

47. A decision in this direction will inevitably bring us to ask ourselves with whom we are identified and what our apostolic preferences are. For us, the promotion of justice is not one apostolic area among others, the "social apostolate"; rather, it should be the concern of our whole life and a dimension of all our apostolic endeavors.

48. Similarly, solidarity with men and women who live a life of hardship and who are victims of oppression cannot be the choice of a few Jesuits only. It should be a characteristic of the life of all of us as individuals and a characteristic of our communities and institutions as well. Alterations are called for in our manner and style of living so that the poverty to which we are vowed may identify us with the poor Christ, who identified Himself with the deprived.¹⁹ The same questions need to be asked in a review of our institutions and apostolic works, and for the same reasons.

49. The personal backgrounds of most of us, the studies we make, and the circles in which we move often insulate us from poverty, and even from the simple life and its day-to-day concerns. We have access to skills and power which most people do not have. It will therefore be necessary for a larger number of us to share more closely the lot of families who are of modest means, who make up the majority of every country, and who are often poor and oppressed. Relying on the unity we enjoy with one another in the Society and our opportunity to share in one another's experience, we must all acquire deeper sensitivity from those Jesuits who have chosen lives of closer approximation to the problems and aspirations of the deprived. Then we will learn to

¹⁸ See Matt. 5.10.

¹⁹ See *SpEx*, 90, 147, 167; Matt. 25.35-45; also the decisions of the present General Congregation on poverty.

make our own their concerns as well as their preoccupations and their hopes. Only in this way will our solidarity with the poor gradually become a reality.

50. If we have the patience and the humility and the courage to walk with the poor, we will learn from what they have to teach us what we can do to help them. Without this arduous journey, our efforts for the poor will have an effect just the opposite, from what we intend, we will only hinder them from getting a hearing for their real wants and from acquiring the means of taking change of their own destiny, personal and collective. Through such humble service, we will have the opportunity to help them find, at the heart of their problems and their struggles, Jesus Christ living and acting through the power of the Spirit. Thus can we speak to them of God our Father who brings to Himself the human race in a communion of true brotherhood.

The Service of Faith

51. The life we lead, the faith-under-standing we have of it and the personal relationship to Christ which should be at the heart of all we do are not three separate realities to which correspond three separate apostolates. To promote justice, to proclaim the faith and to lead others to a personal encounter with Christ are the three inseparable elements that make up the whole of our apostolate.

52. We must therefore review not only our commitment to justice but our effectiveness in communicating the truths which give it meaning and in bringing men to find Christ in their daily lives. We must attentively examine our efforts to strengthen the faith of those who already believe in Christ, taking into account the formidable forces that in our time tend to undermine that faith. We must subject to a similarly searching examination our efforts to bring the Gospel to unbelievers (according to Decree 3 of the 31st General Congregation, especially n.11).

53. In recent years the Church has been anxious to give fuller expression to her catholicity by paying more attention to the differences among her various members. More, perhaps, than in the past, she tries to take on the identity of nations and peoples, to align herself with their aspirations, both toward a socio-economic development and an understanding of the Christian mystery, in accord with their own history and traditions.

54. The incarnation of the Gospel in the life of the Church implies that the way in which Christ is preached and encountered will be different in different countries, different for people with different backgrounds. For some Christian communities, especially those in Asia and Africa, this "economy of the Incarnation" calls for a more intensive dialog with the heirs of the great non-Christian traditions. Jesuits working in these countries will have to take account of this. In some Western countries which can hardly be called Christian any longer, the language of theology and of prayer will also have to be suitably adapted. In those countries dominated by explicit atheist ideologies, a renewed preaching of the Gospel demands not merely that our lives be, and be seen to be, in conformity with the commitment to justice Christ demands of us, but also that the structures of theological reflection, catechesis, liturgy and pastoral ministry be adapted to needs perceived through a real experience of the situation.

55. We are members of a Society with a universal vocation and a missionary tradition. We therefore have a special responsibility in this regard. We have a duty to ensure that our ministry is directed toward incarnating the faith and life of the Church in the culture and traditions of the people among whom and with whom we work and, at the same time, toward communion with all who share the same Christian faith.

56. Moreover, the Church is aware that today the problematic of inculturation must take into account not only the cultural values proper to each nation but also the new, more universal values emerging from the closer and more continuous interchange among nations in our time. Here, too, our Society is called upon to serve the Church; take part in her task of *aggiornamento*, of "bringing-up-to-date"; that is, of incarnating the Gospel in these values as well, these new values that are becoming increasingly planetary in scope.

The Spiritual Exercises

57. The ministry of the Spiritual Exercises is of particular importance in this regard. A key element in the pedagogy of the Exercises is that its aim is to remove the barriers between God and man so that the Spirit speaks directly with man. Inherent in this Ignatian practice of spiritual direction is a deep respect for the exercitant as he is and for the culture, background and tradition that have gone into making him what he is. Moreover, the pedagogy of the Exercises is a pedagogy of discernment. It teaches a man to discover for himself where God is calling him, what God wants him to do, as he is, where he is, among his own people.

58. The Exercises also help to form Christians who, having personally experienced God as Saviour, are able to stand back from the spurious absolutes of competing ideologies, and because of this detachment can play a constructive part in the reform of social and cultural structures. Thus, the ministry of the Spiritual Exercises is one of the most important we can undertake today. We should by all means encourage studies, research and experiment directed toward helping our contemporaries experience the vitality of the Exercises as adapted to the new needs which are theirs. Moreover the spirit of the Exercises should pervade every other ministry of the Word that we undertake.

Guidelines for Concerted Action

59. In presenting this review of our apostolate in its various dimensions, the General Congregation wishes to continue along the lines given by Father General to the Congregation of Procurators of 1970* (* See the Yearbook of the Society of Jesus, 1971-1972.) and to emphasize once more the importance of theological reflection, social action, education and the mass media as means of making our preaching of the Gospel more effective. The importance of these means rests in the fact that, in touching its most profound needs, they permit a more universal service to humankind.

60. In the concrete:

- We must be more aware of the need for research and for theological reflection, carried on in a context which is both interdisciplinary and genuinely integrated with

the culture in which it is done and with its traditions. Only thus can it throw light on the main problems which the Church and humanity ought to be coming to grips with today.

- Greater emphasis should be placed on the conscientization according to the Gospel of those who have the power to bring about social change, and a special place given to service of the poor and oppressed.

- We should pursue and intensify the work of formation in every sphere of education, while subjecting it at the same time to continual scrutiny. We must help prepare both young people and adults to live and labour for others and with others to build a more just world. Especially we should help form our Christian students in such a way that animated by a mature faith and personally devoted to Jesus Christ, they can find Him in others and having recognized Him there, they will serve Him in their neighbour. In this way we shall contribute to the formation of those who by a kind of multiplier-effect will share in the process of educating the world itself.

- We have to take a critical look at our ability to communicate our heart-felt convictions not only to persons we deal with directly, but also with those we cannot meet individually, and whom we can only help to the extent that we succeed in humanizing the social climate – attitudes and behaviour – where we are engaged. In this regard the communications media would seem to play a role of great importance.

61. We should pursue these objectives not separately, in isolation, but as complementary factors of a single apostolic thrust toward the development of the whole person and of every person.

D. A MISSIONARY BODY

62. The dispersal imposed on us today by our vocation as Jesuits makes it imperative that we strengthen and renew the ties that bind us together as members of the same Society.

63. That is why it is so important that our communities be apostolic communities, and it is the primary responsibility of the local superior to see to it that his community approach this ideal as closely as possible. Each one of us should be able to find in his community – in shared prayer, in converse with his brethren, in the celebration of the Eucharist – the spiritual resources he needs for the apostolate. The community should also be able to provide him with a context favourable to apostolic discernment.

64. It is this stress on the apostolic dimension of our communities that this 32nd General Congregation wishes to add to what the 31st General Congregation has already set forth in detail regarding the requirements of community life in the Society.²⁰ Our communities even those whose members are engaged in different ministries, must have for their principle of unity the apostolic spirit.²¹

²⁰ GC 31, D.19.

²¹ See the directives of the present General Congregation in the document "The Union of Minds and Hearts," especially those regarding spiritual and community life.

65. It is important that whether a Jesuit works in a team or whether he works alone, he must be, and must feel himself to be, sent. It is the responsibility of the superior, after he has shared with the individual Jesuit in his discernment, to see to it that the apostolic work of each is properly integrated into the global mission of the Society. The individual Jesuit normally receives his mission from his provincial superior; but it belongs to the local superior to adapt that mission to local circumstances and to promote the sense of solidarity of the members of the community with each other and with the whole body of the Society to which they belong.

66. This solidarity with the Society is primary. It ought to take precedence over loyalties to any other sort of institution, Jesuit or non-Jesuit. It ought to stamp any other commitment which is thereby transformed into "mission." The "mission" as such is bestowed by the Society and is subject to her review. She can confirm or modify it as the greater service of God may require.

67. This kind of responsibility on the part of the superior cannot be exercised without the living practice of the account of conscience, by which the superior is made capable of taking part in the discernment done by each of the members and can help him therein.²² It presupposes that, with the help of his companions, he engage in a continual, communitarian reflection upon fresh needs of the apostolate and upon the ways and means by which they can best be met. And it asks the superior to encourage the shy and the hesitant and to see to it that each individual finds a place in the community and a place in the apostolate which will bring out the best in him and enable him to cope with the hardships and risks he may encounter in God's service.

68. The apostolic body of the Society to which we belong should not be thought of just in terms of the local community. We belong to a province, which should itself constitute an apostolic community in which discernment and coordination of the apostolate on a larger scale than at the local level can and should take place. Moreover, the province is part of the whole Society, which also forms one single apostolic body and community. It is at this level that the over-all apostolic decisions and guidelines must be made and worked out, decisions and guidelines for which we should all feel jointly responsible.

69. This demands of all of us a high degree of availability and a real apostolic mobility in the service of the universal Church. Father General, with the help of his advisers, has the task of inspiring the Society as a whole to serve the cause of the Gospel and its justice. But we ask all our brothers, especially the provincials, to give Father General all the support, all the ideas and assistance which they can, as he tries to carry out this task of inspiring and coordinating, even if this should shake up our settled habits or stretch horizons sometimes all too limited. The extent to which our contemporaries depend on one another in their outlook, aspirations and religious concepts, to say nothing of structural connections that span our planet, makes this over-all coordination of our efforts indispensable if we are to remain faithful to our mission of evangelization.

²² Ibid.

E. PRACTICAL DISPOSITIONS

70. The decisions and guidelines about our apostolic mission set forth above have certain practical consequences which we now propose to detail in some points.

A Program for Deepening Awareness and for Apostolic Discernment

71. Considering the variety of situations in which Jesuits are working, the General Congregation cannot provide the programs each region will need to reflect upon and implement the decisions and guidelines presented here. Each province or group of provinces must undertake a program of reflection and a review of our apostolates to discover what action is appropriate in each particular context.

72. What is required is not so much a research program as a process of reflection and evaluation inspired by the Ignatian tradition of spiritual discernment, in which the primary stress is on prayer and the effort to attain "indifference," that is, an apostolic readiness for anything.

73. The general method to be followed to produce this awareness and to engage in this discernment may be described (see *Octogesima Adveniens*, n.4) as a constant interplay between experience, reflection, decision and action, in line with the Jesuit ideal of being "contemplative in action." The aim is to insure a change in our habitual patterns of thought, a conversion of heart as well as of spirit. The result will be effective apostolic decisions.

74. The process of evaluation and discernment must be brought to bear principally on the following: the identification and analysis of the problems involved in the service of faith and the promotion of justice and the review and renewal of our apostolic commitments. Where do we live? Where do we work? How? With whom? What really is our involvement with, dependence on, or commitment to ideologies and power centers? Is it only to the converted that we know how to preach Jesus Christ? These are some of the questions we should raise with reference to our membership individually, as well as to our communities and institutions.

Continuing Evaluation of Our Apostolic Work

75. With regard to the choice of ministries and the setting up of priorities and programs, the General Congregation asks that the following guidelines be taken into account.

76. The review of our ministries and the deployment of our available manpower and resources must pay great attention to the role in the service of faith and the promotion of justice which can be played by our educational institutions, periodicals, parishes, retreat houses, and the other apostolic works for which we are responsible. Not only should our structured activities undergo this review, so should our individual apostolates.

77. In each province or region, or at least at the Assistancy level, there should be a

definite mechanism for the review of our ministries.²³ Now is a good time to examine critically how these arrangements are working and, if need be, to replace them by others which are more effective and allow for a wider participation in the process of communal discernment. The appropriate major superior should make an annual report to Father General on what has been accomplished here.

Some Special Cases

78. The General Congregation recognizes how important it is that we should be present and work with others in different areas of human activity, especially in those parts of the world which are most secularized. It also recognizes the real opportunities for apostolic work afforded, in some cases, by the practice of a profession or by taking a job not directly related to the strictly presbyteral function.²⁴

79. The General Congregation considers that such commitments can be a part of the Society's mission, provided they meet the following conditions: They must be undertaken as a mission from our superiors. Their aim must be clearly apostolic. Preference should be given to work in an area which is de-Christianized or underprivileged. The activity must be in harmony with the priestly character of the Society as a whole. It must be compatible with the essential demands of the religious life – an interior life of prayer, a relationship with a Jesuit superior and a Jesuit community, poverty, apostolic availability.

80. Any realistic plan to engage in the promotion of justice will mean some kind of involvement in civic activity. Exceptional forms of involvement must conform to the general practice of the Church²⁵ and the norms laid down by Father General.²⁶ If, in certain countries, it seems necessary to adopt more detailed norms and directives, this must be seen to by provincials – as far as possible in regional conferences. These norms and directives should be submitted to Father General for approval. It will then be for the provincial – with the agreement, where the case demands it, of the local bishop or the bishops' conference – to give or refuse the permission that may be required.

International Cooperation

81. All the major problems, of our time have an international dimension. A real availability and openness to change will thus be necessary to foster the growth of cooperation and coordination throughout the whole Society. All Jesuits, but especially those who belong to the affluent world, should endeavour to work with those who form public opinion, as well as with international organizations, to promote justice among all peoples. To this end, the General Congregation asks Father General to make one or other of his advisers specifically responsible for the necessary organization of international cooperation within the Society, as required by our service of faith and promotion of justice.

²³ See GC 31, D.22.

²⁴ See GC 31, D.23, n.12.

²⁵ See Synod of Bishops, 1971.

²⁶ *ActRSJ*, XV, 942.