

# Decree 3: Challenges to our Mission Today

## Sent to the Frontiers

### I. RE-AFFIRMING OUR MISSION

1.- As servants of Christ's mission, we recall with gratitude the graces received from the Lord during the past years. In our lives together as Jesuits, we have experienced an ongoing process of renewal and adaptation of our mission and way of proceeding as called for by the Second Vatican Council<sup>1</sup>.

2.- Since the Council, the Spirit has led the whole Society gathered in General Congregations to the firm conviction that

"The aim of our mission received from Christ, as presented in the Formula of the Institute, is the service of faith. The integrating principle of our mission is the inseparable link between faith and the promotion of the justice of the Kingdom".<sup>2</sup>

3.- Reflecting on our experience during GC 34, we discerned that the service of faith in Jesus Christ and the promotion of the justice of the Kingdom preached by him can best be achieved in the contemporary world if inculturation and dialogue become essential elements of our way of proceeding in mission.<sup>3</sup> We experience this mission as being part of the Church's overall mission of evangelization, "a single but complex reality" containing all these essential elements.<sup>4</sup> We want to re-affirm this mission which gives meaning to our religious apostolic life in the Church:

"Thus the aim of our mission (the service of faith) and its integrating principle (faith directed toward the justice of the Kingdom) are dynamically related to the inculturated proclamation of the Gospel and dialogue with other religious traditions as integral dimensions of evangelization".<sup>5</sup>

4.- During the past years, the fruitful engagement of the Society in the dialogue with people belonging to different cultures and religious traditions has enriched our service of faith and promotion of justice and confirmed that faith and justice cannot be simply one ministry among others; they are integral to all ministries and to our lives together as individuals, communities, and a worldwide brotherhood.<sup>6</sup>

5.- Our pastoral, educational, social, communication and spiritual ministries have increasingly found creative ways of implementing this mission in the challenging circumstances of the modern world. Different ministries carry out the mission in ways that are appropriate to them. However, all have experienced mission as the grace of being "placed with the Son". We remember with gratitude so many of our brothers and

---

<sup>1</sup> Vatican II, *Perfectae Caritatis*, 2.

<sup>2</sup> GC 34, D. 2, n. 14.

<sup>3</sup> GC 34, D. 2, nn. 14-21.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 41: "Mission is a single but complex reality, and it develops in a variety of ways". Cf. nn. 52-54; 55-57.

<sup>5</sup> GC 34, D. 2, n. 15.

<sup>6</sup> GC 32, D. 2, n. 9.

collaborators who have offered their lives generously in response to the call of the Lord to labour with him.

6.- In our desire to continue “serving the Lord alone and his spouse, the Church, under the Roman Pontiff”,<sup>7</sup> we find confirmation in the words the Holy Father addressed to the members of this congregation:

“Today I want to encourage you and your brothers to go on in the fulfilment of your mission, in full fidelity to your original charism, in the ecclesial and social context that characterises the beginning of this millennium. As my predecessors have often told you, the Church needs you, counts on you, and continues to turn to you with confidence...”.<sup>8</sup>

7.- In response to the challenging new contexts we face, we want to reflect further on our mission in the light of our experience.

## II. A NEW CONTEXT FOR MISSION

8.- The new context in which we live our mission today is marked by profound changes, acute conflicts, and new possibilities. In the words of the Holy Father:

“Your Congregation takes place in a period of great social, economic, and political changes; sharp ethical, cultural and environmental problems, conflicts of all kinds, but also of more intense communication among peoples, of new possibilities of acquaintance and dialogue, of a deep longing for peace. All these are situations that challenge the Catholic Church and its ability to announce to our contemporaries the Word of hope and salvation”.<sup>9</sup>

9.- We live in a global world. GC 34 already noted the “growing consciousness of the interdependence of all people in one common heritage”.<sup>10</sup> This process has continued at a rapid pace; as a result, our interconnectedness has increased. Its impact has been felt deeply in all areas of our life, and it is sustained by interrelated cultural, social and political structures that affect the core of our mission of faith, justice, and all aspects of our dialogue with religion and culture.

10.- Globalisation has also given birth to a world culture affecting all cultures; often this has resulted in a process of homogenisation and in policies of assimilation that deny the right of individuals and groups to live and develop their own cultures. In the midst of this upheaval, post-modernism, mentioned also by GC 34,<sup>11</sup> has continued to shape the way the contemporary world and we Jesuits think and behave.

11.- In this new world of instant communication and digital technology, of worldwide markets, and of a universal aspiration for peace and well being, we are faced with growing tensions and paradoxes: we live in a culture that shows partiality to autonomy and the present, and yet we have a world so much in need of building a future in solidarity; we have better ways of communication but often experience isolation and exclusion; some have greatly benefited, while others have been marginalised and excluded; our world is

---

<sup>7</sup> *Exposcit Debitum* (1550), § 3 (MHSI 63, 375).

<sup>8</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Allocution to the 35th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus* (21 February 2008), § 2 (Allocution).

<sup>9</sup> *Allocution*, § 2.

<sup>10</sup> GC 34, D. 3, n. 7.

<sup>11</sup> GC 34, D. 4, n. 19-24.

increasingly transnational, and yet it needs to affirm and protect local and particular identities; our scientific knowledge has reached the deepest mysteries of life, and yet the very dignity of life itself and the world we live in are threatened.

### III. CALL TO ESTABLISH RIGHT RELATIONSHIPS.

#### A MISSION OF RECONCILIATION

12.- In this global world marked by such profound changes, we now want to deepen our understanding of the call to serve faith, promote justice, and dialogue with culture and other religions in the light of the apostolic mandate to establish right relationships with God, with one another, and with creation.<sup>12</sup>

13.- In Luke's Gospel Jesus inaugurated his public ministry in the synagogue of Nazareth.<sup>13</sup> Reading from the prophet Isaiah, and acknowledging being anointed by the Spirit, he announced good news to the poor, the release of captives, the recovery of sight by the blind, and freedom for the oppressed. With this action he rooted himself and his ministry in the tradition of the Jewish prophets who passionately proclaimed God's justice, the duty of the people of Israel to establish right relationships with God, with one another (especially with the least among them), and with the land.<sup>14</sup>

14.- In proclaiming God's message of love and compassion Jesus crossed over physical and socio-religious frontiers. His message of reconciliation was preached both to the people of Israel and to those living outside its physical and spiritual frontiers: tax collectors, prostitutes, sinners, and persons of all kinds who were marginalised and excluded. His ministry of reconciliation with God and with one another knew no boundaries. He spoke to the powerful, challenging them to a change of heart. He showed special love for the sinner, the poor widow, and the lost sheep. The kingdom of God, which he constantly preached, became a vision for a world where all relationships are reconciled in God. Jesus confronted the powers that oppose this kingdom, and that opposition led him to death on the cross, a death which he freely accepted in keeping with his mission. On the cross we see all his words and actions revealed as expressions of the final reconciliation effected by the Crucified and Risen Lord, through whom comes the new creation in which all relationships will be set right in God.<sup>15</sup>

15.- Ignatius and his first companions understood the importance of reaching out to people on the frontiers and at the centre of society, of reconciling those who were estranged in any way.<sup>16</sup> From the centre in Rome, Ignatius sent Jesuits to the frontiers, to the new world, "to announce the Lord to peoples and cultures that did not know him as yet".<sup>17</sup> He sent Xavier to the Indies. Thousands of Jesuits followed, preaching the Gospel to many cultures, sharing knowledge with and learning from others. He also wanted Jesuits to cross other types of frontiers between rich and poor, between educated and unlearned. He wrote a letter to the Jesuits at the Council of Trent on how to behave and insisted that they should minister to the sick. Jesuits opened colleges in Rome and in the great cities of Europe, and they taught children in villages across the world.

---

<sup>12</sup> *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, § 575.

<sup>13</sup> Luke 4:16 ff.

<sup>14</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, §§ 11-13.

<sup>15</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:19; Eph 2:16.

<sup>16</sup> *Expositio Debitum* (1550), § 3 (MHSI 63, 376).

<sup>17</sup> *Allocution*, § 3.

16.- We are sent on mission by the Father, as were Ignatius and the first companions at La Storta, together with Christ, risen and glorified but still carrying the cross, as he labours in a world yet to experience the fullness of his reconciliation. In a world torn by violence, strife and division, we then are called with others to become instruments of God, who “in Christ reconciled the world to himself, not counting their trespasses”.<sup>18</sup> This reconciliation calls us to build a new world of right relationships, a new Jubilee reaching across all divisions so that God might restore his justice for all.

17.- This tradition of Jesuits building bridges across barriers becomes crucial in the context of today’s world. We become able to bridge the divisions of a fragmented world only if we are united by the love of Christ our Lord, by personal bonds like those that linked Francis Xavier and Ignatius across the seas, and by the obedience that sends each one of us in mission to any part of this world.<sup>19</sup>

## IV. OUR APOSTOLIC RESPONSE

18.- As servants of Christ’s mission we are invited to assist him as he sets right our relationships with God, with other human beings, and with creation. “Our world is the theatre of a battle between good and evil”, the Holy Father reminded us:<sup>20</sup> and so we again place ourselves before the Lord in the meditation on the Two Standards. There are powerful negative forces in the world, but we are also aware of God’s presence permeating this world, inspiring persons of all cultures and religions to promote reconciliation and peace. The world where we work is one of sin and of grace.

### *Reconciliation with God*

19.- The Spiritual Exercises invite us to a renewed and deepened experience of reconciliation with God in Christ. We are called to share, with joy and respect, the grace of this experience that we have received and that nourishes our hope. Globalisation and new communication technologies have opened up our world and offer us new opportunities to announce with enthusiasm the Good News of Jesus Christ and the Kingdom he proclaimed. Our ministries of the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the life of Christ in the sacraments continue to be fundamental for our mission and our lives together as Jesuits. They must be seen as part of the three-fold responsibility that lies at the heart of the deepest nature of the Church: proclamation of the word of God (*kerygma-martyria*), celebrating the sacraments (*leitourgia*), and exercising the ministry of charity (*diakonia*).<sup>21</sup> In fulfilling this responsibility, we search for new forms of integral evangelization to “reach the geographical and spiritual places others do not reach or find it difficult to reach”,<sup>22</sup> always attentive to the demands of the cultural context within which we carry out our mission.

20.- Globalization has hastened the spread of a dominant culture which has brought to many people wide access to information and knowledge, an enhanced sense of the individual and freedom to choose, and openness to new ideas and values across the world. At the same time, this dominant culture has been marked by subjectivism, moral relativism, hedonism, and practical materialism leading to a “erroneous or superficial vision of God and

---

<sup>18</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:19.

<sup>19</sup> *Constitutions*, 655-659.

<sup>20</sup> *Allocution*, § 6.

<sup>21</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* (2005), 25.

<sup>22</sup> *Allocution*, § 2.

of man".<sup>23</sup> In many societies people find themselves increasingly alone and struggling to find meaning for their lives. This has become a new apostolic challenge and opportunity for us. In all our ministries, we are called to a more serious engagement with this reality and to broaden the spaces of a continuing dialogue and reflection on the relationship between faith and reason, culture and morality, and faith and society, in order "to make the true face of the Lord known to so many for whom it remains hidden or unrecognizable."<sup>24</sup>

21.- The rapid pace of cultural change has been accompanied by an interior emptiness as well as a new interest in popular religiosity, a renewed search for meaning, and a thirst for a spiritual experience often sought outside institutional religion. The *Spiritual Exercises*, which from the start have been a precious instrument in our hands, are today of invaluable assistance to many of our contemporaries. They help us to initiate and to progress in a life of prayer, to search for and to find God in all things, and to discern his will, making faith more personal and more incarnate. Our contemporaries are also helped in the difficult task of feeling a deeper sense of integration in their lives; the experience of the *Exercises* helps them achieve this by entering into a dialogue with God in freedom. We encourage Jesuits to give the *Spiritual Exercises*, "to allow the Creator to deal immediately with the creature and the creature with its Creator and Lord"<sup>25</sup> to lead people to a deeper relationship with God in Christ and through that relationship to service of his Kingdom.

22.- We live in a world of many religions and cultures. The erosion of traditional religious beliefs and the tendency to homogenise cultures has strengthened a variety of forms of religious fundamentalism. Faith in God is increasingly being used by some to divide people and communities, to create polarities and tensions which tear at the very fabric of our common social life. All these changes call us to the frontiers of culture and of religion. We need to strengthen and support those Jesuits and collaborators actively involved in the fourfold dialogue recommended by the Church,<sup>26</sup> to listen carefully to all, and to build bridges linking individuals and communities of good will.

23.- We need to discern carefully how we carry out educational and pastoral ministries, especially among youth, in this fast-changing post-modern culture. We need to walk with young people, learning from their generosity and compassion so as to help each other to grow through fragility and fragmentation to joyful integration of our lives with God and with others. Volunteer work with and for the poor helps young people to live in solidarity with others and find meaning in and direction for their lives.

24.- Since Christ's death and resurrection has re-established our relationship with God, our service of faith must lead necessarily to the promotion of the justice of the Kingdom and to the care of God's creation.

### ***Reconciliation with one another***

25.- In this global world, there are social, economic, and political forces that have facilitated the creation of new relationships among people, but there are other forces which have broken the bonds of love and solidarity within the human family. While many poor people have been lifted from poverty, the gap between rich and poor within nations and across national boundaries has increased. From the perspective of those living at the

---

<sup>23</sup> *Allocution*, § 3.

<sup>24</sup> *Allocution*, § 4.

<sup>25</sup> *Spiritual Exercises*, 15.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. GC 34, D. 5, n. 4: dialogues of life, action, religious experience, and theological exchange.

margins, globalisation appears to be a massive force that excludes and exploits the weak and the poor, which intensifies exclusion on the basis of religion, race, caste, and gender.

26.- A political consequence of globalisation has been the weakening of political sovereignty experienced by many nation-states all over the world. Some states feel this phenomenon as a particular type of global marginalisation and the loss of national respect. Transnational interests, unconstrained by national laws and often abetted by corruption, frequently exploit the natural resources of the poor. Powerful economic groups foment violence, war, and arms trafficking.

27.- Our commitment to help establish right relationships invites us to see the world from the perspective of the poor and the marginalised, learning from them, acting with and for them. In this context, the Holy Father reminds us that the preferential option for the poor "is implicit in the Christological faith in a God who for us became poor, to enrich us with his poverty (2 Cor 8:9)".<sup>27</sup> He invites us with a prophetic call to renew our mission "among the poor and for the poor".<sup>28</sup>

28.- The complexity of the problems we face and the richness of the opportunities offered demand that we build bridges between rich and poor, establishing advocacy links of mutual support between those who hold political power and those who find it difficult to voice their interests. Our intellectual apostolate provides an inestimable help in constructing these bridges, offering us new ways of understanding in depth the mechanisms and links among our present problems. Many Jesuits in educational, social promotion, and research institutions, together with others engaged directly with the poor, are already committed to this work. Still others have helped in the growth of corporate social responsibility, the creation of a more humane business culture, and economic development initiatives with the poor.

29.- Among the defining characteristics of our globalized world are new communications technologies. They have a tremendous impact on all of us, especially the young. They can be powerful instruments for building and supporting international networks, in our advocacy, in our work of education, and in our sharing of our spirituality and our faith. This Congregation urges Jesuit institutions to put these new technologies at the service of those at the margins.

30.- Our response to these situations must come from our deep faith in the Lord who calls us to work with others for the Kingdom of God, for the establishment of right relationships among people and with creation. In this way we cooperate with the Lord in building a new future in Christ for a "globalization in solidarity, a globalization without marginalization".<sup>29</sup>

### ***Reconciliation with creation***

31.- Following the directive<sup>30</sup> of GC 34, Fr. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach commissioned a study and invited all "Jesuits and those who share our mission to show ever more effective ecological solidarity in our spiritual, communal, and apostolic lives".<sup>31</sup> This invitation calls us to move beyond doubts and indifference to take responsibility for our home, the earth.

---

<sup>27</sup> *Allocution*, § 8.

<sup>28</sup> *Allocution*, § 8.

<sup>29</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *From the Justice of Each Comes the Peace of All, World Day of Peace Message (1 January 1998)*, § 3.

<sup>30</sup> GC 34, D. 20, n. 2.

<sup>31</sup> Peter-Hans KOLVENBACH S.I., *We Live in a Broken World. Introduction, Promotio Iustitiae* 70, April 1999.

32.- Care of the environment affects the quality of our relationships with God, with other human beings, and with creation itself. It touches the core of our faith in and love for God, “from whom we come and towards whom we are journeying”.<sup>32</sup> It might be said that St. Ignatius teaches us this care of the environment in the Principle and Foundation<sup>33</sup> when speaking of the goodness of creation, as well as in the *Contemplatio ad Amorem* when describing the active presence of God within creation.<sup>34</sup>

33.- The drive to access and exploit sources of energy and other natural resources is very rapidly widening the damage to earth, air, water, and our whole environment, to the point that the future of our planet is threatened. Poisoned water, polluted air, massive deforestation, deposits of atomic and toxic waste are causing death and untold suffering, particularly to the poor. Many poor communities have been displaced, and indigenous peoples have been the most affected.

34.- In heeding the call to restore right relationships with creation, we have been moved anew by the cry of those suffering the consequences of environmental destruction, by the many postulates received, and by the recent teaching of the Holy Father and many episcopal conferences on this issue.

35.- This Congregation urges all Jesuits and all partners engaged in the same mission, particularly the universities and research centres, to promote studies and practices focusing on the causes of poverty and the question of the environment’s improvement. We should find ways in which our experiences with refugees and the displaced on one hand, and people who work for the protection of the environment on the other hand, could interact with those institutions, so that research results and advocacy have effective practical benefits for society and the environment. Advocacy and research should serve the poor and those who work for the protection of the environment. This ought to shed new light on the appeal of the Holy Father that costs should be justly shared “taking due account of the different levels of development” .<sup>35</sup>

36.- In our preaching, teaching, and retreat direction, we should invite all people to appreciate more deeply our covenant<sup>36</sup> with creation as central to right relationships with God and one another, and to act accordingly in terms of political responsibility, employment, family life, and personal lifestyle.

## V. Global preferences

37.- In continuity with the recommendations<sup>37</sup> made by GC 34, and to respond effectively to the global challenges described above, this Congregation has emphasized the importance of structures for apostolic planning, implementation, and accountability at all levels of the Society’s government.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Message of Peace* (1 January 2008), § 7.

<sup>33</sup> *Spiritual Exercises*, 23.

<sup>34</sup> *Spiritual Exercises*, 230-237.

<sup>35</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Message for the day of Peace* (1 January 2008), § 7.

<sup>36</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Message for the day of Peace* (1 January 2008), § 7.

<sup>37</sup> GC 34, D. 21.

<sup>38</sup> GC 35, D. 5, nn. 12, 18 -21.

38.- During the last years the Society has made a concerted and generous effort to increase inter-provincial cooperation in a variety of ways. In this context, GC 34 stated that “Fr. General [...] in his regular contacts with Provincials and with the Moderators of the Conferences will discern the greater needs of the universal Church and will establish global and regional priorities”.<sup>39</sup>

39.- While respecting provincial or regional priorities, these “preferences” indicate apostolic areas requiring “special or privileged attention”.<sup>40</sup> In our present context, we may confidently say that they offer areas for the realisation of the mission orientations provided by this decree. In consultation with the Conferences of Major Superiors, Fr. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach decided on the following apostolic preferences:

- (i) *Africa*. Aware of the cultural, social, and economic differences in Africa and Madagascar, but also conscious of the great opportunities, challenges, and variety of Jesuit ministries, we acknowledge the Society’s responsibility to present a more integral and human vision of this continent. In addition, all Jesuits are invited to greater solidarity with and effective support of the Society’s mission of inculturating faith and promoting more justice in this continent.
- (ii) *China* has become of central importance not only for East Asia but for the whole of humanity. We want to continue our respectful dialogue with its people, aware that China is an important key for a peaceful world and has great potential for enriching our faith tradition, as many of its people long for a spiritual encounter with God in Christ.
- (iii) The *intellectual apostolate* has been a defining characteristic of the Society of Jesus from its beginning. Given the complex yet interrelated challenges that Jesuits face in every apostolic sector, GC 35 calls for a strengthening and renewal of this apostolate as a privileged means for the Society to respond adequately to the important intellectual contribution to which the Church calls us. Advanced studies for Jesuits must be encouraged and supported throughout formation.
- (iv) The *Inter-provincial Institutions in Rome* are a special mission of the Society received directly from the Holy Father.<sup>41</sup> Ignatius wrote that we should “treat the missions from His Holiness as being most important”.<sup>42</sup> This Congregation reaffirms the commitment of the Society to the Houses and Common Works of Rome as an apostolic preference of the universal Society. To serve that mission most fruitfully, there should be ongoing strategic planning and evaluation by the institutions and by the Society.<sup>43</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> GC 34, D. 21, n. 28.

<sup>40</sup> Peter-Hans KOLVENBACH S.I., “*Souhais de Noël et de Nouvel An: Nos préférences apostoliques*” (1 January 2003), AR 23,1 (2003) 31-36: “[The choice of apostolic priorities] has been accomplished in prayerful discernment, identifying some of the most important and urgent needs, those that are more universal, or those to which the Society is being called to respond more generously”.

<sup>41</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Address to the Pontifical Gregorian University* (3 November 2006), AR 23,4 (2006) 696-697.

<sup>42</sup> *Constitutions*, 603.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. GC 34, D. 22.

- (v) *Migration and Refugees.* Ever since Fr Arrupe called the attention of the Society to the plight of refugees, the phenomenon of forced migration for different reasons has increased dramatically. These massive movements of people create great suffering among millions. Therefore, this Congregation reaffirms that attending to the needs of migrants, including refugees, internally displaced, and trafficked people, continue to be an apostolic preference of the Society. Moreover, we reaffirm that the Jesuit Refugee Service adhere to its present Charter and Guidelines.

40.- We invite Fr. General to continue to discern the preferences for the Society, to review the above preferences, to update their specific content, and to develop plans and programmes that can be monitored and evaluated.

## VI. CONCLUSION

41.- Our mission is not limited to our works. Our personal and community relationship with the Lord, our relationship to one another as friends in the Lord, our solidarity with the poor and marginalised, and a life style responsible to creation are all important aspects of our lives as Jesuits. They authenticate what we proclaim and what we do in fulfilling our mission. The privileged place of this collective witness is our life in community, Thus, Jesuit community is not just for mission: it is itself mission.<sup>44</sup>

42.- An apostolic body that lives in creative obedience and in which the members know how to appreciate their collaborators in mission gives a powerful witness to the world. Our ministries and institutions are the first place where faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, which we profess, should be incarnated through the justice of our relationships with God, others, and creation.

43.- In this global context it is important to highlight the extraordinary potential we possess as an international and multicultural body. Acting consistently with this character can not only enhance the apostolic effectiveness of our work but in a fragmented and divided world it can witness to the reconciliation in solidarity of all the children of God.

---

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Peter-Hans KOLVENBACH S.I., “*Sur la vie communautaire*” (12 March 1998), AR 22 (1996-2002) 276-289.