



## A Journey of Justice and Reconciliation

# PROMOTIO IUSTITIAE

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GC 32–36

Reflections on faith, justice, and the global mission of the Society of Jesus. Fifty years after GC32: legacy, challenges, and future horizons.



Editor

**Roberto Jaramillo, S.J.**

Publication coordinators

**Milton Mervin Raj, S.J.**

**Rossana Mattei**

Translators

**Eric Velandria, S.J.**

**José María Bernal, S.J.**

**Bernard Goubin, S.J.**

**Robert Hurt, S.J.**

**Christine Gautier**

**Silvina Orsi**

**Beatriz Muñoz**

Graphic Design

**Gabriel Mosquera**

# PRESENTATION

**Roberto Jaramillo, S.J.**



The commemoration of fifty years since General Congregation 32 (GC32) offers a special opportunity to revisit a moment that was not only significant in the history of the Society of Jesus but also crucial for understanding who we are today and how we live out our mission. The reflections and testimonies collected in this issue of *Promotio Iustitiae* demonstrate that GC32 remains alive: it is not a closed chapter, but an ongoing process that continues to generate life, questions, and searching.

GC32 was born with an ongoing task inherited from GC31: to clarify a unifying priority for the Society's mission during a time of deep social, political, and ecclesial crises. The diagnosis was clear: a world marked by injustice, violence, poverty, and marginalization, along with increasing religious indifference. Confronted with this, the Society needed to realign its apostolic work. It

was in that context that Decree 4 emerged, defining the mission as “the service of faith, of which the promotion of justice is an absolute requirement.” That formulation took seriously the cry of the poor and structural inequalities, integrating contemporary theological and social perspectives. Its impact transformed Jesuit identity and sparked decades of creativity, exploration, and internal tensions.

One of the less-remembered themes of the post-conciliar Congregations is Pope Paul VI's clear mandate to tackle modern atheism. Although that memory has faded over time, today's secularization calls us to revisit it with fresh eyes. The analysis in this volume suggests understanding this task not as confrontation, but as a serious intellectual and spiritual effort: researching, engaging in dialogue, writing, training specialists, and providing a witness that honestly demonstrates—that God continues to act even where God seems absent. In a world that often acts as if God doesn't matter, this mission becomes even more urgent.

Several writings in this issue also encourage us to revisit concepts and practices that have become symbols of the mission: the Faith and Justice binomial, the *communitas ad dispersionem*, the sending to the frontiers, and communal apostolic discernment. Important questions arise.

- Have we truly renewed our way of understanding the mission in the light of Vatican II?
- Is global culture shaping us more than the mission moves us to challenge and transform it?
- Do current formation and governance help the mission—or hinder it?
- Do the Universal Apostolic Preferences (UAP) still carry transformative power, or have they become repeated formulas?
- How can we express the mission of the Society of Jesus today without diluting its Gospel root or its commitment to justice?

A particularly compelling idea is to revisit the Paschal Mystery, depicted as the Lamb slain yet standing: a symbol that unites suffering, hope, and renewal. Symbols are important; they reveal who we are, how we define our mission, and how we educate new generations. The mission endures; however, the way we communicate requires renewal.

This issue also includes testimonies from Jesuits who experienced the impact of GC32 from their earliest years of formation. One recalls how his life changed when, as a young man, he discovered the radical call to serve faith by promoting justice: a path that led him from the slums of Mumbai to interreligious dialogue and ecological commitment. Another recounts decades of walking with Indigenous peoples in pursuit of relationships that are more just and reconciled. Stories like these remind us that GC32 did not produce documents alone; it touched lives, opened risky paths, and sparked apostolic experiences that continue to bear fruit.

The texts and testimonies in this issue n°138 of *Promotio Iustitiae* suggest that GC32 was a moment of grace and rupture whose impact continues to develop. The mission of serving faith through justice continually calls the Society of Jesus to reinvent itself, to listen to the poor, to engage in dialogue with the secular world, and to collaborate more widely. Fifty years later, the question remains: what new forms should faithful adherence to the spirit of GC32 take today?

Perhaps, as Arrupe sensed, the answer is not just in words but in the way of life of those who still believe that faith expressed through justice can change history.

“FAITH  
EXPRESSED  
THROUGH  
JUSTICE CAN  
CHANGE  
HISTORY.”



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# THE 32<sup>ND</sup> GENERAL CONGREGATION



Juan Ochagavía, S.J. (CHL)

## GC 32 Background

GC 32 had an outstanding debt that needed to be settled. During the Second Vatican Council, GC 31 sought to incorporate and adopt the conciliar ideas and changes, both in their overall spirit and in relation to specific themes and areas. It was a Herculean task, but it failed to establish a hierarchy of priorities that would provide unity and apostolic direction to the Society. GC 32 was convened with that purpose in mind.

The world was experiencing extreme injustice, marginalization, and violence. There were dramatic situations of poverty, injustice, and violence. With the emergence of post-conciliar theological and philosophical currents that sought to break away from Eurocentric hegemony, drawing on conceptual tools from the social and political sciences, Latin America acquired a special role in the ecclesiastical and Jesuit panorama. On the other hand, secularism, fueled by colossal injustices and a growing religious indifference, was driving many away from faith in God. Pope Paul VI had already entrusted the Society with the mission of combating atheism. It was necessary to convoke a General Congregation to address this thorny issue.

In the years preceding the Second Vatican Council, Father General Janssens promoted the social apostolate by establishing the Centers for Research and Social Action (CIAS) and by assigning many Jesuits to specialize in and work with lay people in the

pursuit of a just social order. The CIAS's development, especially its publications, was a powerful instrument for forming a social conscience. For his part, Father Pedro Arrupe, who had first-hand experience of poverty and injustice, was a decisive promoter of commitment to the poor from the beginning of his term as Father General. His firm decision to accompany and serve the "boat people" (refugees fleeing the Vietnam War) was a clear manifestation of his social sensitivity, from which the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) was born.

In 1968, Pope Paul VI had already stated in his encyclical *Populorum Progressio* that "development is the new name for peace," and this concern was reflected in the Synod of Bishops held in 1971, just prior to the convocation of the 32nd General Congregation. In the document from the Synod, accepted and completely approved by Pope Paul VI, the cry of the poor and those suffering violence was the point of departure. There was talk of poverty and injustice, wealth to be shared, and the need for all people, "especially the poor, the oppressed and the afflicted," to collaborate with God to liberate the world from sin (n. 41). All these circumstances, meetings, and earlier documents prepared the fruit of GC 32. However, it is essential to say that the radical option for faith and justice as the meaning and principal direction of the Society's mission since GC 32 has, above all, a biblical foundation in both the Old and

New Testaments. The prophets unanimously condemn injustices and abuses against the poor and the weak; preferential love for the little ones and the oppressed is a constant of the Old Testament faith and an evident reality in the perfect image of the Father: Jesus Christ. His activity can be summarized in two points: Messiah comes and Messiah suffers, which correspond to the pairing of faith and justice. Jesus teaches the way of the Beatitudes of the Kingdom and heals sickness, hunger, violence, sin, meaninglessness, wars, and death.

These motives guided GC 32 to work for the service of faith and the promotion of justice.

***"The cry of the poor and those suffering violence was the point of departure."***



Juan Ochagavía, S.J. was a Chilean Jesuit priest and theologian from Santiago de Chile who participated in four General Congregations of the Society of Jesus (31–34), contributing to major discussions on theology and social justice. He has served as Provincial of Chile, master of novices, and is known for his extensive writings on Ignatian spirituality.



## How do I remember Father Arrupe?

I arrived in Rome a few days before GC 31 (in 1965) and was in my room reading documents. Suddenly, someone knocked on the door, and Arrupe entered: "I've come to chat with you for a while about the Society and Vatican II," he said. He jumped onto the bed in a single leap and began speaking while seated in a Japanese position. His kindness, simplicity, and love for the Society struck me.

When he was elected [Superior General], the question he asked Navarrete, seated next to him and a friend, became famous: "Navarrete, what should I do?" The answer was blunt: "Obey, Pedro. It will be your last time." During GC 31 and GC 32,

Fr. Arrupe inspired many with his friendliness, Jesuit spirit, courage to face new challenges, and respect for those who thought differently from him.

The Ignatian [Spiritual] Exercises, which he knew very well, sustained his spiritual strength. His first great impulse for renewal within the Society was to promote the Spiritual Exercises everywhere. To this end, he delegated responsibility to Father Luis González, who reinforced the centers of Saint Beuno and Guelph, among others. He wrote inspiring letters about the world's challenges and the Society's mission, as well as the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the importance of placing trust

solely in Christ, on poverty, discernment, social action, and fidelity to the Pope, among other topics. These were profound and extensive letters; true encyclicals.



Arrupe radiated joy even in the darkest hours. At the atomic bomb site in Hiroshima, he did everything he could to help the wounded.

He saw Jesus Christ in everything; for him, Jesus was everything. He had a special affection for young Jesuits, of whom he found many in India and East Asia.

I remember well a meeting of Provincials we had in Colombia. At that time, dictatorships dominated the landscape in Latin America. Arrupe listened to us talk about the state of our provinces. Suddenly, he interrupted and said, "Can't you talk about anything other than politics?" It was a lesson for all of us.

Arrupe also had his faults. He was incapable of refusing requests made to him. He had difficulty following up. However, he stood out for his generosity, making himself available and serving others. Due to his great enthusiasm, he sometimes understood things in his own way, without grasping the nuances of others, which would cost him dearly in GC 32 when he failed to understand the political language of the Vatican. This was the downside of his complete frankness and transparency. He was always generous to the point of treating his critics with special affection.

## Arrupe in the crisis of the grades

As I said at the beginning, the times of GC 32 were turbulent and challenging. The political atmosphere was tense. The post-conciliar Church entered a period of pessimism, negative criticism, and backward movement. Christian-Marxist currents were emerging everywhere, and critics of *Humanae Vitae*

were challenging the papal magisterium. Catholics accused each other of being either conservative or liberal.

The question of making all Jesuits equal—clergy and lay brothers—with the same grade as those who had professed four vows was a very pressing concern. In many Provinces, hesitating to do so was considered politically incorrect, with the Second Vatican Council being cited as an argument. On the other hand, advocates of maintaining the distinction of grades viewed it as going against the Formula of the Institute; it would be like opening the door to transforming the Society into a secular institute.

In November 1974, when I was at the General Curia in a group responsible for selecting postulants for GC 32, Fr. Arrupe came to visit us on St. Cecilia's Day. He had just spoken with Pope Paul VI and was very satisfied. They had discussed the issues of poverty and grades, both of which were reserved to the discretion of the Holy See. Fr. Arrupe told us that the Pope told him the GC could feel free to deal with them.

For this reason, Fr. Arrupe and those assembled could not understand the letter of Cardinal Villot at the beginning of the General Congregation, in which he [Villot] spoke of "the serious difficulties that would prevent the necessary approval by the Holy See". The members present then began to ask questions: Was it categorical? Would it be possible to represent the Pope? This was discussed, and the majority decided to represent, which was done in a respectful manner. However, this led to messages being sent back and forth, misinterpreted as a display of defiance.

Father Dezza himself said in the hall that it was a question of Vatican language, and that the language of the Holy See had not been understood. Finally, through a letter from Cardinal Villot, Paul VI settled the discussion by forbidding [the grades] to be changed or discussed further.

Many of the congregants were frustrated, and not a few thought of leaving the Congregation and returning to their Provinces.



*"He saw Jesus Christ in everything; for him, Jesus was everything."*

*“The union of faith and justice is a transcendental element that permeates and animates all the missions of the Society.”*

What was the central point of the Pope’s remarks? The central point was to affirm that the Society is a religious, priestly, apostolic, and an order linked to the Roman Pontiff by a special vow. These four notes intertwine with one another to form an inseparable whole. Given the success of the secular institutes in those years, there was a genuine concern that the Society would gradually adopt some of their characteristics. The Pope viewed this as a distortion of the Institute’s central idea.

However, that was not what the Congregation Fathers desired or proposed; it was more a matter of equality: “All men are created equal.” This respects the fundamental dignity of the human person, but it does not govern the order of charisms, as St. Paul says. And religious life is a charism. Pope Paul VI made other observations about the relationship between faith and justice, fidelity to the Magisterium, the formation of our members, poverty, and the Provincial Congregation, but the underlying observations had to do with the four characteristic notes of the Institute of the Society.

What did the Congregation do to satisfy the observations of the Holy See? Very simple: Decree 4, on Faith and Justice, was amended, and the amendments were submitted to a vote. It was a veritable shower of pious texts, mostly taken from Scripture, which were approved by the majority. Sometimes, it was a strange exercise and even a bit of fun. I remember that long afterward, during an informal meeting, Father Kolvenbach commented that he had not found these changes necessary because the text was not unbalanced. The Congregation, sometimes with sorrow and sometimes with deep satisfaction, approved **the amended texts, which were then presented to the Pope, who ultimately approved them.**

## **GC 32 and its influence today on the Society and the laity**

I want to begin by stating that the primacy of faith was evident from the outset. The union of faith and justice is a transcendental element that permeates and animates all the missions of the Society. That is to say, it must govern and be present in all the apostolic actions of the Society of Jesus. It is not a simple ministry, as promoting just wages would imply. The General Congregation discusses various topics, including studies, art, religious vows, poverty, and material goods, but the faith that generates justice must always be present.

Decree 4 has undoubtedly changed us in many ways: we live more austere, are a little closer to ordinary (modest) citizens, have fewer domestic helpers, participate in daily tasks, are obliged to budget, share surpluses, live among the poor, and lose wealthy friends and benefactors, among other things. However, what Decree 32 proposed, especially what Decree 4 developed, goes to the root of today’s problems. It is a proposal for a Christ-centered spirituality, promoting solidarity within the Church and the Society, fostering apostolic effectiveness, upholding order and professionalism in the use of goods, and striking a genuinely creative balance between faith and justice.

The Holy Spirit, a fine orchestra conductor, does not keep all the instruments playing the same melody all the time. There are allegros, adagios and others. The mark of good apostolic discernment is to grasp and orchestrate these changes. Are we not stuck on the same note and the same melody, which only tires us, slips through our sensibility, and no longer fits into the symphony? In Part VII of the Constitutions, St. Ignatius teaches us to ask where there is the greatest need and where we can bear the greatest

fruit in these ever-changing times. Is it not time to introduce some changes or strengthen other apostolates today? To create new apostolic contingents with the help of the laity, other religious men and women, and the clergy?

Our Zeitgeist (spirit of the time) seems to resonate more with spirituality than with the struggle for justice, as understood according to the manuals of the Social Doctrine of the Church. *Gaudium et Spes* had already taken some steps in this direction.

A less bellicose social justice, centered on Jesus Christ and the mystery of the Holy Spirit, who guides hearts and the Church, would be closer to the biblical concept of justice (*dikaioynē tou Theou*) and would probably bear more fruit. This also has some relation to vocations to the Society. Decree 4 on Faith and Justice has many elements that align with this direction, but have not been sufficiently explored so far.

***“Faith that generates justice must always be present.”***





# GC 32 - HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

Frazer Mascarenhas, S.J. (BOM)

*“When the heart is touched by direct experience, the mind may be challenged to change.”*

I am as old in the Society of Jesus as GC32 – 50 years! I have a secret to share: as a first-year novice, our Novice Master allowed us to take part in the Province sharing on the decrees of GC32 – against all norms for first-year novices! There I heard young radical Jesuits complain that our educational institutions of the Province only serve to sharpen the tools of the exploiters so that they can exploit people in a more efficient manner! I had just graduated from St. Xavier’s College, our Jesuit College in Mumbai, and I was amused to imagine that the College had motivated me to join the Jesuits in order to exploit better! But I also saw a strong resolve in the members of the Province to make sure that all our Jesuit institutions would find ways of integrating “justice” into our mission of “the service of the faith”. My Novitiate grounded me in this theme – so biblical, in any case – of working for justice in the world.

The Society in India took this theme of Decree 4, GC32 seriously and ways were found, for instance, of putting those in formation, in solidarity with the poor. Instead of the comfortable Jesuit residence, during my second year of philosophical studies, 4 of us (from 4 different Indian provinces) opted for and were allowed to stay in the biggest slum of Asia - Yeravada (a few minutes cycle-ride from our classes on philosophy in Pune, Maharashtra), where we hired a small hut, with tin sheet walls and mud floor, for the whole year. There were common toilets for the hundreds who lived in the slum and were only usable immediately after they were cleaned once a day! A humorous fact we soon learnt, was that the only source of water for all the residents, was within the enclosure of the women’s toilets and

so, the four of us males, had to take turns in carrying our buckets to the enclosure entrance and request any woman going in to fill them for us! We experienced gender discrimination in Indian society first-hand: the heavy work of filling water was exclusively a woman’s task. The experience in the slum had a strong impact on me - in particular, the poor living conditions and the unseen violence against women and children. We learnt solidarity with the poor.

Regency at the Ciudad de los Muchachos in Alicante, Spain, gave me an international flavour of solidarity – catering to children who were abandoned or from dysfunctional homes – a challenging task dealing with the volatile temperament of these emotionally disturbed children. Theological studies, back in Pune, took us once again to residence with the poor, building relationships with them, but this time, in the better-endowed chawl system, with one-room tenements and common toilets.

Having qualified for work in Higher Education, I began at St. Xavier’s College, my alma mater, looking for ways to integrate academic excellence with social consciousness: forming men and women for others and encouraging competence, conscience, and compassionate commitment. An opportunity arose when the College secured academic autonomy from the University, with the freedom to design our curriculum.

Jesuit team was instrumental in making concrete what we heard Fr. General Kolvenbach say to those in Higher Education, “When the heart is touched by direct experience, the mind may be challenged to change.



Frazer Mascarenhas, S.J. is an Indian Jesuit priest and sociologist who taught at St. Xavier's College, Mumbai from 1988 and served as its Principal from 2003, contributing nationally to higher-education policy and social justice initiatives.

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". He recommended that programs to give students such experiences should "not be too optional or peripheral, but at the core of every Jesuit University's program of studies". St. Xavier's College, which was the first Autonomous College under the University of Mumbai, introduced a mandatory 2-credit, non-academic, "Social Involvement Program." It required 60 hours of actual contact with the under-privileged in service, over a whole year – following in the footsteps of other Jesuit Autonomous Colleges in South India, but unheard of in academic institutions in the rest of the country. GC-32 was clearly the inspiration and had a strong impact on students, several of who thanked us for making it mandatory because otherwise, they felt, they would never have opted for it and would have missed a life-changing experience. We have evidence that it influenced the career-choices of several students, besides influencing the thoughts of many more on social justice.



## Dialogue, Debate, and Public Engagement

As Head of the institution for 12 years, I sought opportunities to keep St. Xavier's at the forefront of discussion and dialogue on the many justice issues facing our country – even though this could have had some negative repercussions. At our very popular College Cultural Festival called “Malhar” – our Jesuit team introduced a “Conclave” – a forum for serious discussion, bringing

in important resource persons like the Dalai Lama and other eminent thinkers and social activists from across the country. Our students were exposed to the most controversial yet crucial justice debates of our time.

The year 2014, known as a watershed in India's democratic history and in the run-up to the 2014 General Elections, on my Principal's blog, I wrote a critique of the Model of Development and Governance that a major National Political Party was advocating. This became the subject of prime-time National News-Channel programs, which criticized the involvement in politics by an academic administrator (the

political party in question also asked for my arrest) but also went into the merits of the subject raised – a discussion on public policy for justice. Sadly, my then critique of the communal and divisive agenda, along with the promotion of crony capitalism that would be destructive of the ecology, still holds true, more than ever, for the Indian national political scene.

***“Our students were exposed to the most controversial, yet crucial justice debates of our time”***





***“Partnering with women definitely needed and still needs a change in Jesuit attitude. Indian society, as is the case with many other cultures, does not treat women as equals and this is interiorized to such an extent that we are not even aware of it.”***



## Collaboration and Changing Mindsets

Many themes that emerged from GC32 inspired us to action. One was the need for “collaboration” with lay people. I remember objecting to a slogan from GC35 – that a Jesuit is “a flame that kindles other flames” – as it sounded to me and to some of my colleagues on the academic staff of the College, to be too condescending. Would we as Jesuits be ready to be kindled by a flame lit by others? Subsequently, the term, “collaborator” too came under critique and a “partner” was thought to be a better term to use for those we work with, giving them a status of equality. GC32 provided us with an inspiration that had deep consequences in our imagination of the Jesuit mission. It required a change of mindset that does not come easy and is still a work in progress.

Partnering with women definitely needed and still needs a change in Jesuit attitude. Indian society, as is the case with many other cultures, does not treat women as equals and this is interiorized to such an extent that we are not even aware of it. In my opinion, several of our Jesuit institutions did not accept good lay leadership at various points in time, due to Jesuits not being comfortable working under the leadership of women. But the change is visible (forced or not) and we now find lay and religious women leading some of our important institutions. I wonder if this would have happened without the sea-change started by GC32 and we need to admit that this remains a challenge!

## Interreligious Dialogue

India is a land of diverse religions. Christians are a minuscule minority and hence our relationship with people of other faith is crucial. Vatican II gave us the lead, creating a movement to treat other religious traditions (containing possible 'seeds of the Word') with respect. But for us Jesuits, GC32 provided the catalyst and the motivation to look to other religious groups as partners in the building up of God's Kingdom of justice and peace.

After retirement from academics, as Parish Priest of a Jesuit Parish in Mumbai, attempts to initiate lay people to this change in worldview even earned for us the title "anti-Christ" from some of those who could not understand the new acknowledgement that other religious traditions also offer their adherents an authentic God-experience. The cultural celebrations of the Hindu dandiya dance festival or the communal meal of the Muslim iftar during Ramzan – held on Church grounds to bring together people of all faith, as well as a pilgrimage for Catholics to the religious shrines of others to understand their traditions of worship, were considered unacceptable by some, yet greatly appreciated by others who were open to learn what God's Spirit is doing among diverse groups of honest seekers. Some even felt they appreciated their own faith better from their exposure to other religions.

I am convinced that Pedro Arrupe and Decree 4 has prepared us to confront an emergency that the world has not sufficiently awakened to yet: the ecological crisis of global warming and climate change, caused by the use of fossil fuel. Many of us are now trying to find a biblical foundation for what is needed and I have begun by asking many groups, "Why did Jesus not die of old age?!" I argue that Jesus went about doing good – healing, feeding the hungry, calming the storm, even raising the dead and speaking so effectively of a loving God. People wanted more of Him and pursued him across the countryside. Why then did he not live long and finally die of old age? A very simple answer: because he also worked for justice... and paid the price. He pointed out the accusers' own sinfulness when the woman caught in adultery was brought before him; he spoke

plainly to the Pharisees, calling them 'a brood of vipers' and 'whitened sepulchres'; he cleansed the temple declaring, 'you have made it a den of robbers'. Jesus worked to change unjust structures and He is our model of working for justice.

I submit that our 50 years of reflecting over and acting on Decree 4 has brought us to the point where we must evolve an ecological liberation spirituality (much like the liberation theology of Latin America) to involve the Society and the Church in advocacy against the use of fossil fuel through socio-political action. Scientists state clearly that the world has only about 15 to 20 years to act decisively, to prevent the increase in the earth's temperature above 2 degrees from pre-industrial times, which is estimated to bring ecological disaster on a large scale, some of which is already in evidence. On January 10, 2025, the World Meteorological Organization released official temperature data for 2024, showing it to be the hottest on record, exceeding the pre-industrial level by nearly 1.55°C. Ecological justice – which is required to prevent the type of climate change that will adversely affect all life on the planet – needs advocacy with the Governments of the world. The recent Jesuit Policy Brief on Ecology states: "The Society of Jesus is called to advocate for Climate Justice, especially for the most vulnerable communities affected by climate change, at two critical meetings of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) taking place in 2025: in Bonn, Germany, in June, and Belem do Pará, Brazil, in November." Advocacy is an ongoing process aimed at changing attitudes, actions, policies and laws by influencing, both people in power and systems or structures at different levels, for the betterment

"THE EXPERIENCE IN THE SLUM HAD A STRONG IMPACT ON ME."

of those affected by the problem. No other issue has ever been so crucial for all God's creatures as the need to prevent global warming through the elimination of fossil fuel. Can GC32 inspire us all to urgent action? Having just directed an 8-day Ignatian Retreat for Jesuits on the theme of Ecology, at the invitation of the Provincial of an Indian Province, I feel that GC32 has empowered us to take on this task, led by God's Spirit. The seed sown by Decree 4 has taken firm root and has grown into a tree. May the Golden Anniversary inspire us on to an adequate effort to Care for Creation!



***“Advocacy is an ongoing process aimed at changing attitudes, actions, policies and laws by influencing both people in power and systems or structures at different levels, for the betterment of those affected by the problem.”***



***"...it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God."  
Mt, 19. 23-26***

# FIGHTING FOR FAITH AND JUSTICE

**Martin Maier, S.J. (ELC)**

Forty-six years ago, I became a Jesuit because I wanted to follow in Jesus' footsteps and advocate for greater justice in the world. If it had been up to my dear grandfather, I would have studied dentistry to take over his dental practice.

Dentists earn a lot of money in Germany. When I realized that millions of people in our world are starving, I couldn't rest easy. The story of the rich young man in the Gospel was important to my decision. He has a great fortune, but he feels that money and material possessions alone do not fulfill life. He is searching for something more. Jesus makes him an offer: "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."

I remember that before I joined the Jesuit order, I gave away all the money I had. I felt great happiness doing it and thought of Jesus' words: "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world if he loses his life?" The Gospel story ends differently: the young man leaves sad because he had a lot of wealth and didn't want to part with it. Then Jesus says to his disciples: "It is difficult for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

In the novitiate, I learned that the Society of Jesus, with Decree 4 of the 32nd General Congregation, summarized its mission for today's world as the fight for faith and justice. That confirmed my decision to become a Jesuit. On March 24, 1980, I was deeply moved by the news of Archbishop Oscar Romero's assassination in El Salvador during Holy Mass. I was shocked, but I also felt profound admiration for his witness of following Jesus to the ultimate consequences.



Martin Maier, S.J. is a German Jesuit priest, theologian, and former editor-in-chief of *Stimmen der Zeit*. He worked as a parish priest in rural El Salvador (1989–1991), earned his doctorate in theology in 1993, and later served as rector of the Berchmanskolleg in Munich. Since 2021, he has been the Director General of the Latin America aid organization Adveniat.





The question of global justice accompanied me on my journey within the order. During my philosophy studies, conversations with Johannes Müller, S.J., who led the Socio-Political Institute of the Faculty of Philosophy in Munich, were significant. I was persuaded by his idea of an ethical foundation for development policy: to eliminate human suffering in all its forms and aspects, or at least to minimize it as much as possible.

I made my regency at the magazine *Orientierung* in Zurich. From its then editor-in-chief, Ludwig Kaufmann, S.J., I learned that journalism and communication can serve the struggle for faith and justice. In his book on "The Forerunners of Faith," he provided an impressive account of the conversion of Oscar Romero, who went from being a fearful and apolitical bishop to becoming a prophetic defender of the poor. He had close personal ties with the Jesuits in El Salvador, whom he visited in 1979 after the Latin American Bishops' Conference in Puebla. He opened my eyes to Latin America.

During my studies in Paris, I searched for a theology that would connect faith and justice. I found it in Johann Baptist Metz's political theology and in liberation theology. After a meeting with Jon Sobrino, S.J., the idea for a doctoral thesis on liberation theology developed. For me, it was important to spend some time in El Salvador to understand the country, the people of Archbishop Romero, and the context in which Jon Sobrino and Ignacio Ellacuría's theology evolved.

On October 8, 1988, I was ordained a priest. I chose the motto for my first Mass: "Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me." This is also the most quoted passage in Karl Rahner's theological writings, the European theologian who has influenced me the most. During the conflict over liberation theology, he defended Gustavo Gutiérrez, rightly considered its father.

In 1989, I traveled to El Salvador. Jon Sobrino warmly welcomed me on September 1, 1989, at the community of the Central American University, where I would be staying. However, there was a disappointment: the guest rooms were full, so I had to move to a nearby community. The first few weeks became a meaningful pilgrimage to key sites in Archbishop Óscar Romero's life: his birthplace, Ciudad Barrios; his first diocese, Santiago de María; his simple home near the chapel where he was assassinated; and his tomb in the cathedral.

For my studies, Sobrino encouraged me to read not only the books in the library, but also the book of reality. This was the most important source for his theology. So I accompanied a young colleague to a rural parish called Jayaque, where Ignacio Martín-Baró SJ, in addition to his work at the UCA, served as parish priest on weekends. The people of Jayaque welcomed me warmly and sang me a welcome song about the martyrdom of Archbishop Óscar Romero. Their living conditions contrasted sharply with this. In Jayaque, I learned to distinguish between poverty and misery. The vast majority of the people of Jayaque lived in misery: without running water, without enough food, without healthcare, without electricity, without schooling.

At the end of October, Ignacio Martín-Baró introduced me at Mass as the new priest of the parish. Less than three weeks later, he and five colleagues, along with Elba and Celina Ramos, were murdered by army soldiers. I had the opportunity to meet them all. Archbishop Arturo Rivera y Damas said before their riddled bodies: "The same hatred that killed Archbishop Romero also killed the Jesuits and the two women." I thought of the words of

***"Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me."***

the 32nd General Congregation: “We will not work for justice without paying a price for it.”

Ignacio Ellacuría SJ, as the university's rector, demanded it be the voice for the voiceless. Segundo Montes SJ, a sociologist and director of the university's Human Rights Institute, was especially concerned with the fate of refugees from the civil war. Ignacio Martín-Baró SJ, a social psychologist, focused on the effects of war on children. Amando López SJ and Juan Ramón Moreno SJ taught theology aligned with liberation theology and maintained close ties with grassroots church communities. Joaquín López y López SJ was one of the founders of the José Simeón Cañas Central American University and was director of the popular education movement “Fe y Alegría” (Faith and Joy) when he was murdered. Elba Ramos, a cook in my community, was someone I knew well, as was her daughter Celina.

After the funeral, the mourners in Jayaque “appointed” me as the parish pastor. I was surprised and hesitant, but the then provincial José María Tojeira SJ encouraged me to keep working in Jayaque. In the following months, we experienced both challenging and beautiful moments. The challenges included harassment and persecution by the military, and three of our dedicated community leaders were arrested and tortured. We managed to secure their release only by paying cash. On the positive side, I enjoyed walking with the community along the path of the Gospel—the path of death and resurrection. Later, with my parents, I dedicated my doctoral thesis, titled “Theology of the Crucified People,” to the community of Jayaque.



It was difficult for me to leave El Salvador in 1991 and return to Germany. In Europe, the wall between East and West had fallen, and the Cold War had ended. An era of peace and reconciliation was anticipated. However, in 1991, amidst a disintegrating Yugoslavia, a new war erupted in Europe for the first time since World War II. The young Jesuits of the Croatian province reached out for help in a letter, seeking aid for victims of expulsions and ethnic and religious hatred. Ottmar Edenhofer SJ, who was then studying theology in Frankfurt, responded to this plea. Demonstrating great organizational skill, he founded the Jesuit relief organization “Bosnien und Kroatienhilfe der Jesuiten” (Help for the People of Bosnia and Herzegovina) for Bosnia and Croatia, which provided food and medicine to war zones and allowed students who had fled Sarajevo to continue their studies in Zagreb.

In 1993, I took over leadership of the aid program for Bosnia and Croatia, which we linked institutionally to the Jesuit Refugee Service. Its then director, Mark Raper SJ, sent Dutchman Jan Stuyt SJ as a valuable collaborator. The support of the then Croatian provincial Stjepan Kušan SJ, who later became responsible for JRS in Bosnia and Croatia, was important. I especially remember a stay in besieged Sarajevo, where Tomislav Slokar SJ was the only Jesuit who remained until the end of the war. In a conversation with Archbishop Vinko Puljić, I told him about Archbishop Óscar Romero. Later, I was able to send him one of my books on Óscar Romero, which had been translated into Croatian.

## Global Mission and Solidarity

I then completed my third probation in the Society of Jesus in India. There, I was particularly involved with the Dalits, the untouchables of the Indian caste system. I met Antony Raj SJ, who was a Dalit and fought for the liberation and equality of Dalits in Indian society and the Church. In 1989, Antony founded the Dalit Christian Liberation Movement, which also faced criticism and resistance within the Church. I was especially interested in Dalit theology, inspired by Latin American liberation theology. Its most notable representative is Sebastian Kappen SJ, who died in 1993. In a lengthy article, I discussed the struggle for the liberation of Dalits in Indian society and the Church.

After my Tertianship, I wanted to return to El Salvador. However, Provincial Jörg Dantscher SJ convinced me that, in today's globalized world, it is more important to build bridges than to take sides. From 1995 to 2009, I worked as editor-in-chief of the monthly magazine *Stimmen der Zeit*. Jon Sobrino, SJ, provided me with important guidance for my journalistic work: to be honest with reality. The reality of our world is that millions of people are victims of poverty and exploitation. Bringing this truth to

light is a fundamental challenge for responsible journalism. As a guest lecturer, I regularly gave lectures at the Central American University in San Salvador and at the Centre Sèvres in Paris. This allowed me to keep my connection with the community of Jayaque alive.

From 2014 to 2021, I served as Secretary for European Affairs at the Jesuit European Social Center in Brussels. There, with a team of Jesuits and laypeople, we aimed to defend the interests of those who have no voice in Europe and the world. In addition to the directives from our General Congregations on faith and justice, we relied on the principles of Catholic social teaching, which remain highly relevant to the effort of European unification. In 2020, India was sadly represented in Brussels by the arrest of Stan Swamy SJ, who was advocating for the rights of India's indigenous peoples, the Adivasis. Attempts were made to link him to violent acts using false evidence. Alongside French MEP

Pierre Larroutourou, I was able to secure signatures from 50 members of the European Parliament on a letter to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, demanding Stan Swamy's release. Stan died in July 2021, still behind bars.



In 2021, I unexpectedly received a request from the German Bishops' Conference to lead the Latin American charity Adveniat. Founded in 1961, Adveniat was established in gratitude for the aid that Christians in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile sent to Germany to help alleviate suffering after World War II. With a team of 80 employees at Adveniat's headquarters in Essen and partners across Latin America and the Caribbean, we fund more than 1,000 projects annually with a budget of 34 million euros. The name Adveniat is derived from the Latin petition in the Lord's Prayer: "Thy kingdom come." Our goal is to contribute to the growth of the Kingdom of God.

Church charities are seen in Germany as the positive face of the Church. For me, Adveniat is an institutional expression of the fight for faith and justice. We gather donations and thus foster sharing. Through our information and education efforts, we raise awareness of the challenges of global justice.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, we work with parishes, dioceses, religious communities, and non-governmental organizations. Our guiding principle is the option for the poor. We support pastoral work, education, human rights, the

protection of indigenous peoples, and the environment. In doing so, we are especially influenced by Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'* and the documents of the Synod of the Amazon. This year's donation campaign is called "The Future of the Amazon" and emphasizes protecting rainforests and indigenous communities. Through the projects we support and help develop, we show that change is possible for the better; that's why I like to call them "biotopes of hope."

Jerónimo Nadal S.J., one of the first Jesuits, summarized the global scope of the Society of Jesus with the phrase: "The world is our home." Our mission is universal and worldwide. Here, we also hear the missionary mandate of the Risen Christ to his disciples: "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature." This means that we are "communitas ad dispersionem": a global community sent not only to human beings but to all creatures, to proclaim through words and actions the good news of God's humanity and His kingdom.

I also understand Nadal's phrase in a practical way: Jesuits have houses and communities all over the world. A UN employee once asked me who booked my hotels. To his surprise, I said I didn't need hotels

because my order has houses in major cities worldwide. I just check in there. It's always very comforting for me to find welcome in one of our communities and feel at home.

It's not just about buildings but about communities. We have brothers all over the world. We are friends in the Lord who can rely on each other. This is especially important in difficult missions. As the person responsible for aid to Bosnia and Croatia, I could count on my local brothers when deciding how far I could venture into war zones. As general director of Adveniat and on behalf of the German Bishops' Conference, I support the challenging peace and reconciliation process in Colombia. Here, too, trust in my Colombian brothers is essential.

Pope Francis once described the uniqueness of the Jesuits as follows: "men of the whole" (men who face reality in its entirety). The Society of Jesus is a global player in the struggle for faith and justice. Like previous popes, Pope Leo XIV has recently encouraged Jesuits to go beyond geographical, cultural, intellectual, and spiritual boundaries, where known maps are no longer sufficient. As servants of Christ's mission, we are called to make this world more human, more just, and therefore more divine.





# MY LIFE WITH DECREE 4

James Martin, S.J. (UEA)

Few things words have influenced me as a Jesuit as much as the ringing words from Decree 4 of the 32nd General Congregation of the Society of Jesus: "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."

GC 32 was convened in 1975, some 13 years before I entered the Jesuit novitiate in Boston, then in the old New England Province. But from the number of times that this line (and GC 32 overall) was quoted by my novice director and the assistant novice director one might have thought that GC 32 had just happened a few weeks before.

The "faith that does justice" was an animating focus of my novitiate, my subsequent formation and, indeed, the whole of my Jesuit life.

To begin with, our novitiate "experiments," that is, our various ministries, were geared towards working with the poor. For me, as someone who had spent several years working in the corporate world and making a good salary, this was a novelty. My first ministry in the Jesuit novitiate was at a hospital for the seriously ill,

in Cambridge, Massachusetts. There I worked, alongside the hospital chaplains with people who had suffered severe brain injuries (among other illnesses). Many of the patients no longer received visits from their families, so, as the pastoral care department told us, they were poor in ways that might escape the casual observer.

Decree 4, one could say, was as influential as anything else we read during the novitiate. In fact, it even became the source of some lighthearted humor.

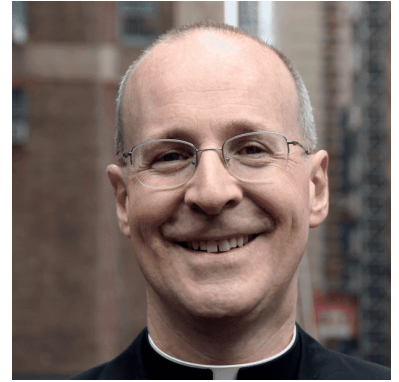
(Anyone with even the slightest exposure to Jesuits will not be surprised by this!) The phrase "the faith that does justice" was applied seriously in our novitiate, but occasionally humorously. For example, the oldest and most broken down of our few community cars, and therefore the one that seemed the simplest and most in keeping with poverty, was called "the car that does justice"!

But it wasn't until a few months later, when my fellow novice and I were sent to work in Kingston, Jamaica, that I really encountered those "on the margins." We were missioned by our novice director to work with Mother Teresa's Sisters (the Missionaries of Charity), who worked with men and women who were homeless in the poorer sections of Kingston.

The Sisters' ministry, to me, seemed like Decree 4 in action. They would bring in from the streets those who were too poor or sick to care for themselves and, often, gave them a dignified place to die. My fellow novice, William ("Bill") Campbell and I were asked to clean, dress and feed the men (while the Sisters worked with the women).

***"The mission of the Society of Jesus today is the service of faith... the promotion of justice is an absolute requirement."***

James Martin, S.J. is an American Jesuit priest, bestselling author, and editor-at-large at *America* magazine. He entered the Society of Jesus in 1988 after leaving a corporate career and has since become known for his writing on Ignatian spirituality and for his prominent outreach to the LGBTQ+ community.



## Formation and Work with the Poor

Working in Kingston (I also worked as an orphanage for boys, teaching them how to read) brought me into contact, for the first time, with grinding poverty. I saw, for the first time, how difficult the lives of the poor were, how little they had in terms of resources and how much they suffered. To a relatively young man (age 28 at this point) I remember thinking, "This is so unfair!" In other words, unjust.

The impetus to work with the poor continued through the novitiate. In the second year of the novitiate, I worked at a homeless shelter in downtown Boston and then at a Nativity School (the original school, in fact) with middle-school students from underprivileged backgrounds in

New York City. (That school would later serve as a model for small "middle schools" in the inner city.)

One of the many things I'm grateful for in terms of my formation is that these ministries with the poor were simply a "given." That is, we discerned where we would work with the poor, not if we would work with the poor. It was not only animated by St. Ignatius Loyola's desires for men in formation but, once again, the restatement of our mission as Jesuits, as outlined by Decree 4.

In terms of "justice," though, it was my regency experience that made me see, in detail, the injustices visited upon those with precious little. My formation director sent me to work with the Jesuit Refugee Service in Nairobi, Kenya, where I helped refugees from all around East Africa who had studied in Nairobi. There we assisted them in starting small businesses to help them support them and their families. In time, we started a small shop (still in business) called the Mikono Centre, which marketed their wares. (Many of the refugees made handicrafts like wooden sculptures, paintings and batiks.)

The question of justice was brought much more to the fore than ever before. Why? Mainly because I was there for a full two years, which meant a deeper familiarity with their situations. There I realized that no matter how hard they worked, they were often condemned to poverty. It's not enough, as we were taught in the novitiate, to ask why someone is poor; it's important to look at the systems that keep people poor.

*Let me give you an example.*

At the time, JRS would give to many of the refugees modest grants to help them start small businesses, based on skills that they brought with them from their home countries. So, for example, a woman who wanted to start a small sewing business in her house (her shack, really, in a slum) would apply for a small grant and then would be given funds to begin a small business. For example, a woman with knowledge of sewing would be given funds to purchase a small sewing machine and some little fabric. (To guard against their being robbed or misusing the funds, we would make the cheques out to the suppliers.) These were exceedingly modest grants to refugees who lived in some of the worst slums of Nairobi.

But for the local people it was a lot of money. And sometimes the Kenyan neighbors of the refugees would see that they had a new sewing machine and the ability to now make a living, and they would grow jealous (naturally) and sometimes (again, not surprisingly, given the grinding poverty) they would grow angry and vituperative. Often it was even worse if the refugee business was a success. On one occasion, a refugee's neighbors grew so angry and jealous that they burned her house down. And it was here that I thought of

***"It's not enough to ask why someone is poor; it's important to look at the systems that keep people poor."***

GC 32. It wasn't enough to give the woman charity (the grant for her sewing machine). Because the very social construct in which she lived made it impossible for her to get ahead. It was a question not simply of an individual's being poor, but an individual's being poor in a system that kept all poor, and that, as a result, turned people against one another. Even though she did everything right (apply for a grant, purchase the sewing machine and work hard) the unjust system in which she lived conspired against her.

Here I saw the need for "reconciliation of people with another." That meant reconciliation between the refugee and her Kenyan neighbors, but also between the poor in Kenya and the wealthy in Kenya, and the poor worldwide with the wealthy worldwide. At least that's how I saw it as a young Jesuit. These days when you mention "Decree 4" to some young Jesuits, they may look at you with a blank stare. Perhaps this is not surprising. For them, 1975 is ancient history and, besides, there have been several other General Congregations since then.

These days younger Jesuits are perhaps more likely to know the Universal Apostolic Preferences, which are, I think, guided by Decree 4. What else is "Walking with the Excluded" after all?

The Society of Jesus has long carried out the Gospel message to care for the poor, and has more recently lived out the call of GC 32 and now asks its members and our colleagues to "walk with the excluded," who include many of the people I've been talking about: migrants and refugees, the poor in our inner cities, the sick, the lonely, the marginalized overall.

I have also tried, as best as I could, in my work at America Media (and on social media) to live out the call of Decree 4 by focusing attention on these groups. It's easy for people to "tune out" the problems of those on the margins, because it makes us uncomfortable. For me, however, as someone working in the media, I can share stories of those on the margins to awaken people's compassion for them. And this, thankfully, is easy to do. (For example, it's easy to share stories from the Jesuit Refugee Service or other works that care for the poor.)

Whenever Jesus saw someone who was struggling, the Gospels tell us that his heart was "moved with pity." (The Greek word used, *splanchnon*, was even stronger: he felt it in his "guts.") The same can happen when people read compelling stories of those struggling, even if it's on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or TikTok. And when our hearts are moved, it can move us to action. So it's up to all of us to raise up such stories of those on the margins.

But let me suggest another group that may go overlooked, with whom I've ministered for the last few years: LGBTQ Catholics. And they are among the most marginalized in the world. As many people know, in several countries you can be executed for engaging in same-sex relationships, and in dozens more countries you can be imprisoned. Lesbians, gays, bisexual and transgender people are regularly beaten, harassed and treated like dirt. And when it comes to

LGBTQ Catholics, they often feel unwelcome in what is, after all, their church too. In certain parts of the church, in fact, church leaders don't even want to acknowledge their existence. It's hard to imagine a greater "marginalization," or how one could feel more excluded.

So these days when I think of Decree for and reflect on "reconciliation of people with another," I think of the need to bring together this group of people, LGBTQ Catholics, with their brothers and sisters in the church. I'm grateful that many Jesuits and their colleagues are taking the first tentative steps in this ministry, which, to me, is part of the living out of Decree 4, because reconciliation with God "demands" the reconciliation of people with one another.

That's one reason I was so moved when a Jesuit mentor said that he understood this new ministry with LGBTQ people, as a "ministry of reconciliation." It helped me understand that ministry in a new way and connect it to the ministries that I had done ever since the novitiate. All of this thanks not only to Jesus, not only to the Gospels, not only to the long tradition of Catholic Social Teaching, but to that remarkable statement that we call Decree 4.



***"It's easy for people to 'tune out' the problems of those on the margins."***

# FAITH AND JUSTICE: IN SEARCH OF ANOTHER SYMBOL



**Emilio Travieso, S.J. (CAR)**

From the perspective of understanding the Jesuit mission in terms of “faith and justice,” one could say what João Batista Libanio, S.J., said about liberation theology: it is like a bag of salt dissolved in water; it has lost its consistency, but now everything tastes a bit saltier. This change seems so obvious to us that I do not need to explain it further. However, I believe it still needs clarification, and I hope this re-examination can help us revisit some aspects we might overlook today.

The formulation of Decree 4 of the 32nd General Congregation, which summarizes the Jesuit mission as “the service of faith, of which the promotion of justice is an absolute requirement,” was partly a response to revolutionary Marxism and related movements of the “new left” during the time of the Second Vatican Council and the Cold War. These movements, along with the social theories supporting them, challenged the Christian faith as a source of meaning and a primary guide for community life. Additionally, they criticized it directly, portraying it as a drug that sustains social injustice. They emphasized these injustices so strongly that it became impossible to see poverty and inequality as natural, showing instead that they are the results of oppression — not only at the individual level but also within institutions and at other structures shaping relationships between people. Considering this, it became clear that charity work alone is insufficient to

alleviate the suffering of the poor. Why are they poor? This question needs a clear answer. The model of “cooperation with development,” as seen in *Populorum Progressio*, Pope Paul VI’s social encyclical from 1967, does not fully address the issue either. To address poverty and exclusion caused by harmful structures, it is essential to target the root of the problem and transform those structures into ones that promote life.

With *Gaudium et Spes*, the Second Vatican Council paved the way for dialogue with the secular world, repositioning the Church as part of civil society and calling it to actively participate without seeking to control it. In Latin America, bishops collectively envisioned a transformation that would lead them to denounce oppression and to make a preferential option for the poor. Inspired by this stance from the hierarchy, liberation theologians did not hide their leaning toward socialism, which many at the time regarded as a promising alternative to capitalism, which had caused so much harm.

***“It is like a bag of salt dissolved in water; it has lost its consistency, but now everything tastes a bit saltier.”***

Emilio Travieso, S.J. is a Miami-born Jesuit priest who entered the Society of Jesus in 2002 after studying at Harvard. He completed his novitiate in the Dominican Republic, earned a master's degree at The New School in New York, pursued theology studies in Brazil, and has long worked with Haitian and Latin American communities. He is also a researcher in international development at Oxford, focusing on grassroots food-sovereignty initiatives in Chiapas, Mexico.



## Faith and Justice

In this context, the highest governing body of the Society of Jesus decided in 1975 to incorporate the language of “struggle” and “liberation” into its way of understanding itself. In Decrees 2 and 4 of the 32nd General Congregation, an effort was made to “baptize” this inherently conflictual approach in three ways. First, Christian concepts were used to interpret categories that could originate from secular Marxism; for example, oppressive structures were described as the result of sin. Second, it emphasized that defending rights within the perspective of the Gospel must go hand in hand with reconciliation and forgiveness. Finally, the goal was not limited to a historical project; instead, it leaves open the eschatological significance of the Kingdom or reign of God.

Interestingly, the [GC 32] Jesuit assembly justified its forward-looking stance with an argument rooted in a very traditional scheme. They

claimed that participating in the struggle for justice was the only way to bring the 2 billion people who have not yet accepted the Gospel to be baptized, as it would be the only way to give credibility to evangelization in the context of injustice or secularization. On the one hand, there seemed to be a dissonance with the emerging theology of that time, which was beginning to downplay the goal of converting the entire world to Christianity. They were going through an era of change, and it could have been a rhetorical device to persuade those who understood mission in such terms. On the other hand, the argument aimed to show that promoting justice was a prerequisite for serving the faith. In this sense, promoting justice was always a function of proclaiming the Good News. However, it is worth pointing out that back then, it seemed like they felt the need to express themselves this way, as if it were not enough that justice with itself emerges from the Gospel.

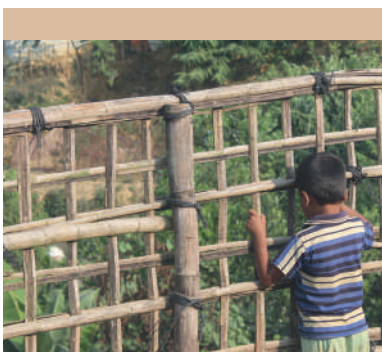
In any case, these Decrees [2 and 4] were sufficient to shape a way of understanding the Jesuit mission. The spirit of the document was much more meaningful than its actual words. Many Jesuits fully identified with the mission and wholeheartedly committed to it, summed up as “faith and justice.” That has been lost.

“Faith and justice” no longer hold the same appeal as they used to. Moreover, what’s most striking is

that they haven’t been replaced by anything else. Our generation lacks a unifying inspiration to guide our collective generosity.

However, the same people continue to suffer.

Therefore, if we are to remain companions of Jesus of Nazareth, we must confront the same challenge our companions faced in 1975: “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” (D4 26a).





## The Kingdom or Reign of God

Without a clear understanding of the mission that unites and inspires us to give our best, our energies become dispersed. Without a doubt, Jesuits continue to work hard, and our works continue to do much good. However, there is no shared vision of what we are trying to achieve with all these efforts, both collectively and in accordance with the Gospel. As a result, we often chase after professional success or personal well-being, which are not terrible things, but neither do they fully reflect the invitation extended to us by Jesus Christ. When Father General Adolfo Nicolás spoke to the Jesuits in Latin America, he said that we are “distracted.” By this, he meant that we put secondary things first.

Therefore, another possible interpretation is that we must recover what came “first.” As the saying goes, alpha means omega. Therefore, when we refer to the “first,” we are also referencing the “last.” In other words, if we have lost sight of what is most important, it is mainly because we no longer have a clear vision of what we are ultimately trying to achieve through our work, or of what, at the end of the day, gives meaning to our mission. At its core, our many crises are a sign of a more profound crisis of meaning: a crisis of eschatological imagination. Therefore, to revive our mission with a strong sense of purpose and a clear direction, we need to renew how we imagine and relate to the “ultimate.”

Indeed, throughout our history, both as a Society and as a Church, the most extraordinary moments of missionary fervor occur when a popular eschatological framework directs the energy. When people clearly understand “where they are going and for what,” they can fully commit, and that commitment takes various forms depending on the imagination that gives it meaning. From the establishment of the Kairos in Christianity to the Jesuit millenarianism of the 16th century, praxis is always related to the Parousia.

In the case of General Congregation 32, the strength of its well-known formulation lay in its apparent connection to the eschatological imagination of the Kingdom, or reign of God. Liberation theologians, including Jesuits such as Jon Sobrino and Ignacio Ellacuría, systematically developed this model. Over time, they provided the necessary theoretical nuances to ensure dogmatic coherence, but unquestionably, its appeal was at the symbolic level. Decree 4 of GC 32 was summed up with the three-word catchphrase “faith and justice,” and its theological basis, “building the Kingdom,” inspired many, including Ellacuría himself, to dedicate their lives.

And that is precisely what has been lost.

What happened to the Kingdom? What caused it to stop bringing out the best in us? Maybe it was the brutal repression, both

inside and outside the Church. Perhaps it was the end of the Cold War and the rise of disillusionment with socialism; the external pressure and the promise of utopian fulfillment that once fueled it were no longer there. Perhaps, the Hegelian roots of its Marxist background — a background with its scheme of linear progress — became increasingly difficult to understand with the onset of postmodernity, also played a role.

The truth is that we need another symbol that better reflects the sociocultural realities of today’s Jesuits. I do not say symbols, despite our plurality, because here I mean something with the potential to become a universal language; of course, there could be other ways to approach unity in diversity, but I hope that those who read this will understand the value of what I am proposing, even if it is a partial and relative value.



*“There is no shared vision of what we are trying to achieve.”*



## The Paschal Mystery

Contemporary Jesuit theologian Christoph Theobald offers an alternative to the symbol of the Kingdom. It is an eschatological image rooted in the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection.

Just as Jesus did, Christians are called to love until the very end. This means that we must be willing to face violence without contributing to it; we should respond to violence by bearing witness to the radically gratuitous love of Christ.

Thus, the proclamation of the Gospel is fulfilled and injustice overturned.

Only those who have received the love of the Lamb dare to face death without fear; they do so because their self-realization is rooted in sharing their happiness with others. However, the ripple effect of selflessness remains on the margins of the main narratives, unlike the ongoing development of the Kingdom. Rather, in this postmodern view, God's promise is fully realized in each specific moment when a person, configured to the Paschal Mystery, succeeds in overcoming violence through an attitude of gratuitous love. For Theobald, Christian practice involves cultivating a style—a daily way of proceeding—in which selflessness or gratuitous love is expressed through the vulnerability of non-violence and unconditional hospitality, known as “holiness.”

On the one hand, it seems that Theobald has successfully articulated a proposal for an eschatological symbol linked to a model of practice that could speak to the heart of contemporary Jesuits. However, there is a problem. When “holiness” (gratuitousness-absolute vulnerability) is applied to loving enemies, it makes perfect sense. It is the clearest and most potentially transformative way to respond to the call for conversion. Those who love others selflessly as Christ

did—The Lamb and The Good Shepherd—show love for both their enemies and the poor, who are victims of others' enmities; this is where things get complicated. A person cannot expose himself in place of another. So, it does not make sense to allow oneself to be killed in order to save another person. In this situation, the logic of reconciliation is more appropriate than the logic of forgiveness. As Derrida rightly points out in his essay “On Forgiveness,” forgiveness relates to the logic of justice and its mediations. Although these mediations are non-violent, they still involve elements of pressure and coercion.

Therefore, the 32nd General Congregation felt it necessary to describe the mission in two related but distinct dimensions—“service of faith” and “promotion of justice”—and acknowledged the tension between them. For those who love both their enemies and the poor, the dilemma is that love pushes them toward two types of action—the gratuitous “excess” of vulnerability on one hand and the “coercion” of political mediation on the other—which respond to opposing logics. The total commitment to vulnerability that “holiness” demands can suddenly feel like a trap (*sub angelo lucis*); or at least “impossible,” in some cases. This tension has been the subject of many reflections throughout the history of Christianity, and the history of the Society of Jesus cannot be understood without reference to it.

If in 1975, the risk of the Kingdom [or Reign of God] in the interpretation of Decree 4 and liberation theology was to resolve this tension in favor of justice, the risk of the contemporary model of the Lamb in Theobald's interpretation is to resolve it in the opposite direction. In principle, Theobald does not deny the necessity of accepting our political condition as historical citizens. He considers the biblical tradition that inspires the Christian praxis of “promoting justice” to be legitimate within civil society through political mediation. However, he is always hesitant to

JUSTICE  
IS LOVE

fully engage with this perspective. For Theobald, the injustice of the modern world is so profound and complicated that it exceeds our ability to create a more just world, so the only suitable Christian response is an abundance of gratuitousness that goes beyond justice itself; this gratuitousness is expressed through vulnerability (“letting oneself be affected”).

Theobald recognizes the ethical problem of focusing solely on gratuitousness as a model of loving praxis: as something inherently personal, immediate, and respectful of freedom, a political system cannot be built on the logic of gratuitousness.

Apart from those specific situations where someone feels disarmed and transformed by hearing, “happy-are-you” from a vulnerable position, this praxis does not significantly affect the social structures that are important in most people’s lives. Theobald has attempted to downplay this issue, partly by accepting the sacrifice of political effectiveness in the name of a more radical magis, and, on the other hand, by maintaining the illusion that his choice of gratuitousness also encompasses political justice, thereby making sacrifice less significant. For instance, he suggests that the violence of Nazism was countered by the radical vulnerability demonstrated by martyrs like Bonhoeffer. This argument is unconvincing.

And people still suffer.

In *Gaudium et Spes*, the solution to the tension was to propose a division of responsibilities. The clergy and those in consecrated life should focus on serving the faith, while the laity should prioritize promoting justice. However, as the 32nd General Congregation recognized, this approach does not work for Jesuits because the Formula of our Institute assigns us to work on everything that benefits the common good.

So, if the models we have seen so far leave us unsatisfied, what could be an alternative?



*“The Lamb slain and standing: a symbol of love that endures violence and transforms it.”*

## Contemplation to Attain Love

If, for those of us who practice Ignatian spirituality, the Kingdom places us in the Second Week and the Paschal Mystery in the Third and Fourth Weeks, then it is no surprise that the journey now brings us to the Contemplation to Attain Love (Spiritual Exercises 230-237). Although it is not a biblical text, it is our very “own” exercises. It is a likely image worth taking seriously to help recover what we have lost: a shared symbol that serves as an inspiration and criterion for the discernment of our apostolic body’s mission.

The core of the Contemplation to Attain Love is the generosity that flows from gratitude in a mutual relationship with God. The repeated use of a simple dynamic expresses this gratitude and generosity: recognizing how much we have received in one area of our life and responding by offering ourselves completely with the words “Take, Lord, and receive.” This process is repeated “in the same way” in different areas, each touching on a different aspect of God’s first gift of himself to us. In this way, the Contemplation to Attain Love promotes a way of living that includes a wide range of actions. As

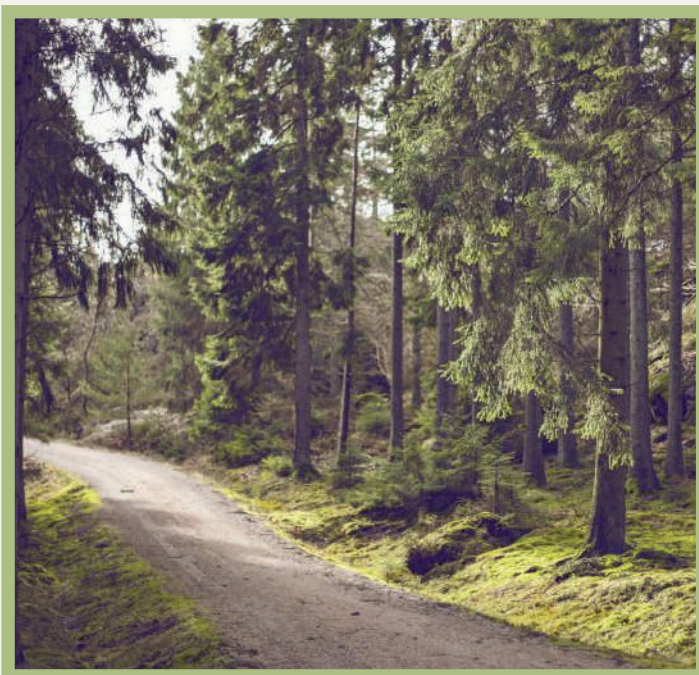
a symbol of mission, it can easily incorporate many expressions that complement the service of faith in our mission—whether promoting justice, engaging in intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, caring for the environment, promoting integral development, or exploring alternatives to development. One does not necessarily exclude the others; instead, these aspects should be harmonized or discerned to figure out what is most suitable for each situation, “according to times, persons, and places.” Because of its focus on the way of proceeding (i.e., the way we move our body while walking), it manages to integrate those different aspects without falling into dispersion. It has the power to inspire, motivate, and guide Jesuits who readily identify with the maxim, “in all things, love and serve.”

Its focus on interpersonal gratitude as the main driving force behind praxis, and on style (or way of proceeding) as its key tool, makes the model I propose similar to Theobald’s. However, it includes two subtle differences that directly address what left us unsatisfied with the latter. Let us see.

To better understand the first difference, it is helpful to examine the work of Godefroy Midy, a Haitian Jesuit. In 1976, a year after the



32nd General Congregation, he introduced liberation theology to his country. However, after experiencing disillusionment with the political movement that inspired it over the following decades, he shifted his approach. In recent years, Midy has proposed a model of praxis explicitly inspired by the Contemplation to Attain Love.



Like Theobald, Midy emphasizes hospitality, but an aspect of Haitian culture gives him a new perspective. In Haiti, when you arrive at someone's house, instead of ringing a bell, you shout, "Onè!" (meaning "honor"). The person inside responds, "Respè!" ("respect") to grant permission to enter or acknowledge their presence. The language of hospitality in Haiti is based on recognition, and this is how Midy develops his proposal.

This slight change in terminology alters the tone of the model. Recognition is essential; it is the key that fuels the surrender sought through the Contemplation to Attain Love. In this process, we request the grace for "inner knowledge of all the good we have received, so that, by fully recognizing it, I may love and serve in all things." Furthermore, "recognizing" implies a form of hospitality connected to the contemplation. In Ignatian terms, the [contemplative] gaze represents a way the subject allows himself to be affected internally by the suffering of another person, thus becoming vulnerable. This vulnerability appears in two ways: first, through the internal effect of empathy, and second, through a proactive commitment to assist others. It is the way the Trinity looks at the world: contemplation leading to the Incarnation. In practical terms, this concept can be understood as the hospitality that Jesuit James Keenan describes as inherent in the Jesuit charism. It reflects the hospitality of the Good Samaritan: not only does it involve preparing to receive others by being open, but it also means actively welcoming them by going out to meet them.

Recognition also carries significant implications for the theme of social justice, not just because it aligns with many modern socio-political demands (and theories). In the context of the Contemplation to Attain Love, the type of recognition involved is not a reciprocal exchange based on symmetry and proportionality but one of mutuality, where the starting point is asymmetry, and the gap

is bridged through generosity, "each giving what he has or can."

To the extent that we learn to turn this dynamic, started by God with us, into a way of engaging in our relationships amid socioeconomic asymmetry or diversity of identities, it can foster new bonds of solidarity and, therefore, mutual belonging. If we love one another as He has loved us, in a spirit of recognition, the social cohesion and harmony we desperately need may begin to emerge.

The second difference from Theobald's model concerns his eschatological imagery. This is an important detail because, as said, for a symbol to connect with our hearts and act as a criterion for discernment, it must address the question of the "ultimate" that gives meaning to our mission.

Ulpiano Vázquez, a Jesuit mystagogue, explains that the eschatology of the "Contemplation to Attain Love" involves the Trinitarian sanctification of messianic time. This is the period of the "birth pangs," which was definitively initiated by the Paschal Mystery but remains incomplete in its effects. This differs from the "holiness" in Theobald's Christological model, where "the end comes" each time someone becomes a martyr. Therefore, Vázquez encourages us to work with God, who "works and labors" [continually] for our redemption.

This way of relating to the "ultimate" greatly influences the meaning of the mission. While Theobald awaits the self-destruction of violence that puts an end to history, those who dwell on the Contemplation to Attain Love await a future that has yet to ripen. It involves active waiting; meanwhile, the necessary means for cultivating a style or daily way of proceeding are developed into a culture of transforming societal structures from the ground up. In this way, the historicity of salvation stays intact without assuming the linear progress that some, a few decades ago, might have seen as leading toward the "maximum construction" of the Kingdom or reign of God.

## Conclusion

Even "the crisis of utopias" is now outdated; many young people only know "crises." Faced with this reality, we need a new way to relate to the "ultimate," one that can heal wounds and help us refocus so we can recommit to a shared hope. I have proposed a model inspired by the Contemplation to Attain Love. I am unsure if my interpretation will resonate with my colleagues, but as long as we, Jesuits, continue to embrace the principle of "in everything, love and serve [the Lord]," our salt will not lose its flavor.

***"We need a new way to relate to the "ultimate," one that can heal wounds and help us refocus so we can recommit to a shared hope."***

# THE ARRUPE “STYLE”: A GOSPEL-INFORMED WAY OF PROCEEDING



Pedro Miguel Lamet, S.J. (ESP)

An anecdote can summarize a person's life. For six months, whenever Pedro Arrupe taught adults in Hiroshima, an elderly Japanese man would sit quietly and stare at him without speaking. Then one day, Arrupe dared to ask him, “What do you think of my explanations?” With a stoic face like a Samurai, the Japanese man replied, “I can't give my opinion because I haven't heard anything. I am deaf; you know? But it is enough to look into your eyes. You are who you say you are. Your faith is my faith.”

From his last trip to the Philippines, before returning to Rome, where he eventually suffered a stroke, he made a stopover in Thailand and spoke with some seminarians. He told them that when they go up to the pulpit to preach, “You will persuade not by what you say, but by what you are.” This was Father Arrupe's great secret: the integration of authenticity, harmony, and freedom with the lived truth of the Gospel in his person. The human person is the message. Some built bridges between ideologies, cultures, and inequalities in a world radicalized by partisanship and party politics. Examples include Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Oscar Romero, and our unforgettable Pedro Arrupe.

## “I saw everything clearly.”

When I visited him in Rome, time seemed to stand still, just as it had on August 6, 1945, at 8:15 a.m., outside Hiroshima. Then, Arrupe realized that the B-29 flying over the Japanese city was not the usual American cargo plane. He climbed the hill near his house, the Nagatsuka novitiate, and saw that the pika-don (“glow” and “blast” in Japanese) of the world's first atomic bomb had turned Hiroshima into a scene of smoke and ash. He then went down to the chapel, and in a moment that felt like eternity, prayed and asked God what he could do. He then understood that the immense energy developed for evil could be transformed into a creative force for good, and he dedicated himself to this cause. Today, as the world faces geopolitical and socioeconomic turmoil, Arrupe's insight remains—an awareness deeply rooted in his life.

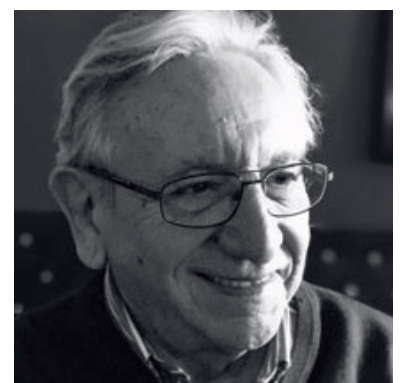
His way of proceeding emanates from his life story. He was born in 1907 in the industrial city of Bilbao, where he became an orphan after losing both his parents, one after

the other. His first encounter with inequality occurred in Madrid's suburbs while he was studying medicine, and his discovery of mystery took place at the Lourdes Grotto. He then decided to become a Jesuit and left a lasting impression at the Loyola novitiate. In Oña, Burgos, during his philosophy studies, he had a mystical experience, as he told me in Rome: “I heard a voice say to me, ‘You will be the first,’ and I felt an inner glow by which I saw everything clearly.” I believe this enlightenment led to the “Arrupe style.” Pedro Arrupe looked beyond preconceived notions. That's why, when he was with a Jesuit, he didn't see a “lackey,” but a human being first and foremost, beyond a ruler's utilitarian view.

***“You will persuade not by what you say, but by what you are.”***



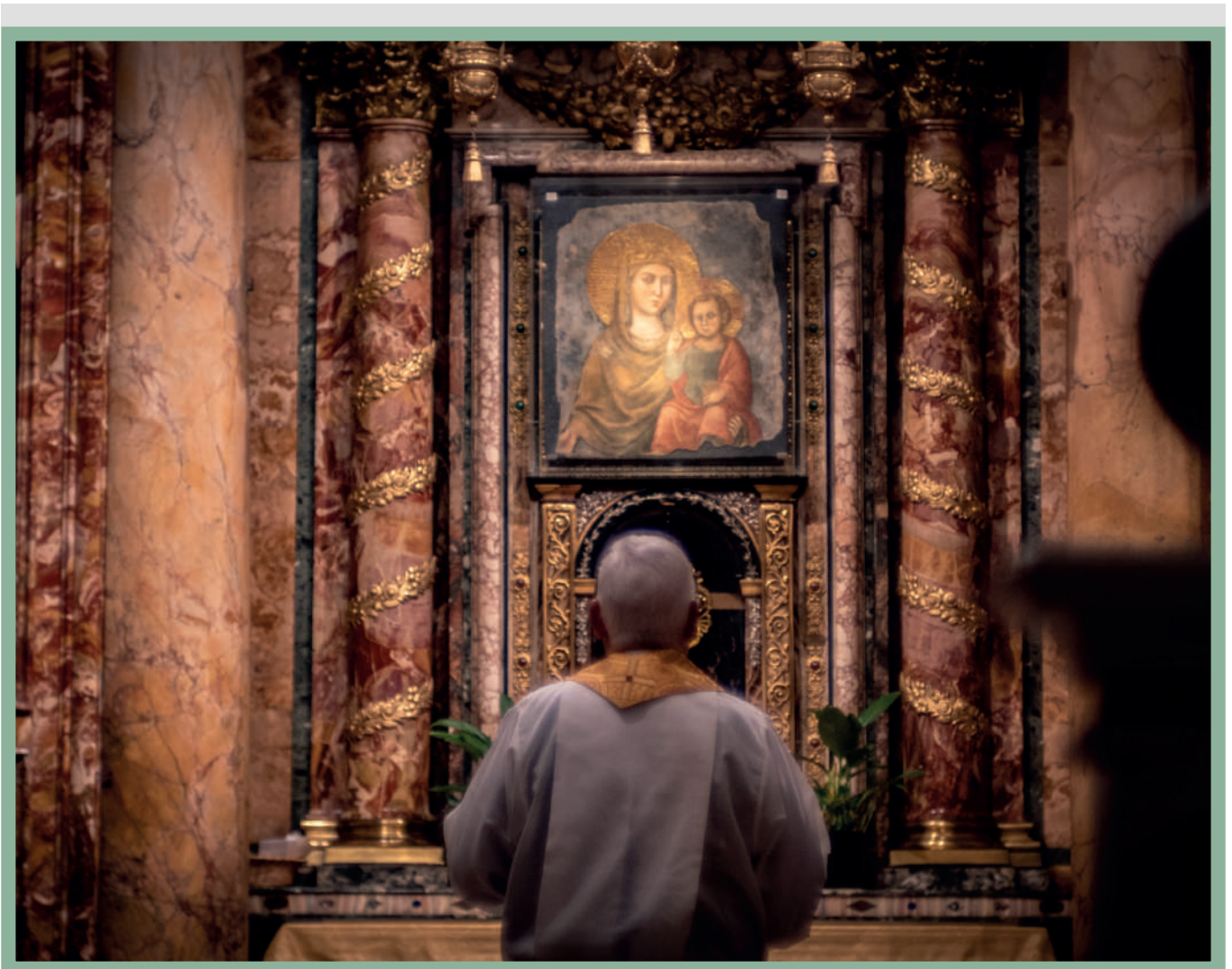
Pedro Miguel Lamet, S.J. is a Spanish Jesuit priest, writer, poet, and journalist known for his extensive literary work, including novels, biographies, essays, and poetry. He entered the Society of Jesus in 1959 and became a prominent cultural voice through his roles as editor, columnist, film critic, and author of more than forty books.



In this way, Pedro Arrupe entered the new post-Conciliar era with a unique contribution: inculturation, a term he coined within the context of pluralism. He believed that “no culture is perfect” and that “cultural values are not absolute.” A culture that closes in on itself becomes impoverished, stagnates, and dies. If faith is confined to a particular culture, it suffers from these limitations. Faith must sustain ongoing dialogue with all cultures. Faith and culture influence each other; faith purifies and enriches culture, and culture enriches and purifies faith... Pluralism in expressing faith

is inevitable and a goal to strive for... While unity is maintained through the oneness of human nature and the unity of the life-giving Spirit, which embraces life and all endeavors, the Holy Spirit brings about the humanly impossible (and yet most profound human) desire for “radical unity in the most radical diversity” (Synod 1977). What does this openness imply? In this life, the truth is not anyone’s absolute possession; everyone holds a piece of the truth. The “Arrupe style” always presupposes this humble attitude of learning from others.

As a novice master in Hiroshima, he constantly returned to the source of his life: Jesus in the Tabernacle. He stayed in the worst room of the house, a dingy tower; he cleaned the shoes of the young Jesuits and struggled hard to understand the complex psychology of the Japanese. One of the last testimonies from that time describes him as someone “always with a smile on his face and a heart ready to please and help others.”



## Visiting the future

As head of the Jesuit Vice-Province of Japan, and with this mission's international scope, Arrupe had the chance to see, as if in a test tube, what the future would hold for him in a more demanding role as Superior General of the Society of Jesus. All these foundations would produce great results, including shaping the post-Conciliar figure who motivated Jesuits to fight injustice on the frontiers of the Third World. "Don Pedro," as his colleagues affectionately called him, transformed the tough, "command and control" style of the Ignatian order into one of evangelical love, and his asceticism became a positive force for service, defining the Jesuits as "men for others." When Arrupe arrived in Rome in 1965, he was already 'a man of the Council before the Council' was even convened.

Arrupe's contributions were significant during a period of creativity and spiritual renewal within the Church. He was ahead of his time, providing insights into the future of the Church in Latin America, his stance against racism in the United States, and ideas on education [for justice], especially concerning the "schools for the rich." He met with worker-priests; he spoke out against dictators such as Franco and Stroessner. He visited imprisoned Daniel Berrigan, a Jesuit who burned the Vietnam archives. Arrupe actively participated in major ecclesial events.

His journeys to understand the Society made his humble and approachable figure closer to each Jesuit, who felt "personally cared for." He embodied the universal Church's commitment to openness and dialogue. He saw religious life through the lens of mission; he trusted people completely and traveled the world to see firsthand the diversity of times, places, and individuals. He was tolerant of the weak and hesitant. He encouraged young people, as his successor Adolfo Nicolas recounted, to "visit the future." His approach was apostolic, clear, daring, discerning, and highly participative—because GC 32 also became a means of consultation on issues that were heavily criticized by significant sectors of the Vatican, the Church, and the Society.

## In God's hands

Far from fleeing or retreating during times of crisis, in the turbulent 1960s and 1970s, Pedro Arrupe pushed forward in pursuit of new horizons. However, this attitude, his evolving concept of obedience, and his friendly leadership style ultimately proved costly for him. He faced misunderstanding and even betrayal within his ranks. He was wrongly accused, with some saying, "One Basque founded the Society of Jesus and another was destroying it." He had to confront the risk of division among those who adhered to "strict observance." Finally, during the General Congregation, he received an admonition from Paul VI, urging him to reconsider the suppression of the "grades" or categories of Jesuits and to choose justice. The Pope, whom he told me loved him "like a grandfather," and whom he kept in his personally composed breviary prayers, reprimanded him severely.

Nevertheless, the dark night [of the soul] would arrive during the time of St. John Paul II, who was hesitant to meet with the Jesuit General Superior. Arrupe only managed to speak with the Pope twice, each time for ten minutes. When he finally did, he offered his resignation because he felt he lacked the Holy See's confidence; however, the Pope refused to accept it, as he had other plans for reforming the Society.

***"He transformed the tough 'command and control' style of the Ignatian order into one of evangelical love... defining the Jesuits as men for others."***

The “white Pope” and the so-called “black Pope” appeared to speak different languages at that time. Arrupe, nevertheless, obeyed, smiling and encouraging his companions. Still, something was breaking inside him, deep within the dark, hidden night of his soul. After returning from his trip to the Far East on August 7, 1981, he fell seriously ill with cerebral thrombosis. The Secretary of State, Cardinal Casaroli, left him weeping in his infirmary room. The Cardinal delivered the Pope’s letter, which halted the constitutional process of the Society, ignoring the Vicar appointed by Arrupe, Father Vincent T. O’Keefe, and instead appointing a new Vicar for the Society. The Pope appointed an octogenarian Jesuit, who had been a confessor to two Popes and whose beliefs were significantly different from those of the then General of the Society. Fr. Paolo Dezza, later made a cardinal, was the Pope’s chosen representative in the Order, with Fr. Giuseppe Pittau as coadjutor.

Arrupe bowed his head, stunned, and obeyed once more. When I visited him in Rome to gather information for his biography, Arrupe, with a rosary in hand, looked like the Cristo de Mantegna—pale and translucent. Despite the hardship of living with paralysis, he stayed cheerful, smiling, and kissing the hands of those who tried to kiss him, never letting go of the gesture with which he seemed to ask for forgiveness just for existing.

Then, with hesitant words, the man—who had spoken seven languages and been recognized by the most prominent people of his time—opened his heart to me. His heart was torn between obedience and his dark night, between confusion and clarity. He stammered, “I don’t understand... I cannot figure it out.” He continued, “The Pope has said very little to me. I never tried to impose my will on anyone. I always talked with everyone. I was deeply convinced. I saw clearly. It was wonderful—a truly spiritual experience. Now, I feel broken. I am good for nothing. A poor man. In God’s hands.” The foundation of Arrupe’s style was a faith that always accepted God’s will.

After the Society resumed its regular activities and the new General, Peter Hans Kolvenbach, was elected, Arrupe stayed in silence for nearly nine more years in his small infirmary room. During this time, the Pope himself visited him three times. There were also visits from unknown individuals and people from around the world who felt privileged by his friendship.

Pedro Arrupe Gondra was not only a holy man of our time but also a pioneer of inculturation in the Church and a leader in adapting religious life following the Second Vatican Council. As a cultural bridge between East and West, he was the spiritual father to many Jesuit martyrs in Third World countries, a pioneer in engaging with the world and various ideologies, a friend to refugees and drug addicts—and above all—a man in love with Jesus of Nazareth who balanced faithfulness and prophecy in his life. Behind his extensive activities was a prayerful inner life: that of a simple man who thoughtfully gave his secretary a cake with candles for her birthday, who regarded a subject as a lifelong friend, and who even managed to laugh at his own shadow.

“Where is the Society going?” he was asked, and Arrupe replied with straightforward honesty: “Where God leads it.” Father Kolvenbach summarized this as “An absolute, joyful trust in the Lord, hope in the Crucified One who bore the terrible cross that broke his body but never broke his spirit.”

Arrupe’s ideas and style, far from aging, are more relevant than ever to the problems and challenges

of our time. Perhaps because he was ahead of his time, one of his favorite phrases was: “We cannot respond to today’s problems with yesterday’s solutions.”

He found it unacceptable that the Church and the Jesuits, bound by a rigid interpretation of orthodoxy, would retreat into winter quarters, abandoning their role in dialogue with the contemporary world and culture. He wanted men to “have the future in the marrow of their bones.”

He seemed to be discussing issues that trouble us today when referring to “the immense spiritual void today, which neither technical progress nor materialistic ideology can fill.” He sensed the frustration that comes with a consumerist society, often mistakenly referred to as a welfare society. He understood the feelings of a citizen who, after briefly experiencing the promise of freedom, sees that dream fade away. He observed this happening in a world divided, filled with envy and distrust toward each other, as the community—meant to be the primary source of security and support—threatens to take away one’s freedom and personal identity.

He saw culture as a human ideal, describing it as “the harmonious unfolding of the whole person and every person.” However, he noted the beginning of a significant crisis; by the 1970s, he observed that we were already experiencing a radical and rapid change, which was “not taking place in a straight and homogeneous way, but amid strong tensions and conflicts.”



“I don’t understand... I cannot figure it out. The Pope has said very little to me. I never tried to impose my will on anyone. I always talked with everyone. I was deeply convinced. I saw clearly. It was wonderful—a truly spiritual experience. Now, I feel broken. I am good for nothing. A poor man. In God’s hands.” (Pedro Arrupe).



## **“I am a poor man... In God’s hands”**

He believed the world was suffering from the effects of a widespread “disorder”: “Wealth, instead of serving the primary needs of most people, is often misused and wasted.”

Moreover, after learning about the spending on weapons of destruction, this privileged witness of the atomic bomb argued that the only solution couldn’t be achieved “by simply changing the structures and institutions, if the people who live in them are not also changed.” Such personal change is now viewed as essential through the solidarity of people and a global [social] revolution, supported by international organizations. Father Arrupe thought this was crucial for world transformation. These ideas align with Pope Francis’s stance against war, inequality, and the need for a Church “on the move” and “on the periphery.”

He also thought about the youth we see on our streets today. Arrupe strongly believed in young people and held an optimistic view, trusting in their power to create change. He rejected “conventionalism, etiquette, and pure form” and embraced “simplicity, naturalness, spontaneity, and solidarity.” He viewed young people as impatient and idealistic, characterized by genuine generosity through real service rather than hypocritical acts; they care for others, especially the most vulnerable, and possess a universal spirit as the world has become smaller. All of this occurred before the rise of the Internet, the expansion of information technology, digital platforms, mobile phones, and artificial intelligence. He felt a deep connection to the world as a global citizen. “I feel universal. Our role is to work for everyone, so I try to have as big a heart as possible to understand everyone,” he said in an interview on RAI [Italian Broadcasting Company]. He was a citizen of the world who supported a universal passport.

However, he also claimed that young people were “superficial and sensationalistic,” and history has proven him right.

“We live,” he said, “in an essentially sensory civilization, made up of images, of strong perceptions [...] A certain psychological weakness is sometimes observed in the new generations.” He pointed out “a contradiction that can sometimes be seen in them, and in the contrast between their good desires and the maturity needed to carry them out.” He used this as an example of what is often referred to as “weak critical thinking.”

He firmly believed that future society should be frugal, which he saw as essential for humanity’s survival. He spoke out against wastefulness and supported policies of austerity. For example, this paragraph could appear in a leading article in any serious media today: “The self-centered, selfish consumerist, obsessed more with the idea of possessing than with being, is a slave to the needs he creates for himself. He is unsatisfied, envious, and whose only goal is the accumulation of profit, as opposed to the steward, who does not seek to possess more but to be better, to develop his capacity to serve others in solidarity, and to be content with what is necessary.” This was how he was—heroic, even—since we know he had taken a personal vow of perfection.

The same applies to current issues, such as women’s rights. At a crowded press conference in Puebla, Mexico, he said that women’s participation in church decisions would eventually “come,” but it would require “patience,” which made the journalists laugh. That prediction is beginning to come true with some of Pope Francis’s appointments and views about women.

**“The immense spiritual void today, which neither technical progress nor materialistic ideology can fill.”**

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## Amen and Alleluia

Finally, regarding other contemporary issues such as refugees, immigration, disarmament, ecumenism, hunger, spirituality, religious life, and a humanism without borders, this 21st-century witness and prophet gradually matured and committed himself in a Christian way. Such a worldview also involves the European Union, which appears to be closed off in its self-satisfied and ambiguous welfare state. Arrupe envisioned a "humanism open to the whole world." He added, "Europe, insofar as it increases its possibilities by uniting, must increase its concern to distribute resources in a spirit of dialogue, respecting the value of others and in the conviction of having to receive as much as it can give. Thus, Europe could not view its development as separate from

that of the still less fortunate or less developed countries. Perhaps we could urge our governments to recognize their enormous responsibility in this regard fully. We often hear about the explosive situation in the Third World, but do we ask ourselves whether we Europeans do not share some of the responsibility for this situation?"

Regarding the Church, he deeply believed in respecting pluralism: "Pluralism in the expression of faith is not only not a necessary evil, but a good to be aspired to, which allows the manifestation and development of God's natural and supernatural gifts." He also believed that democratic values, currently scorned by new autocratic governments, are not foreign to the Gospel: "Today there is a crisis of obedience and authority. That is why ordinary people need to get involved. Moreover, this idea closely aligns with the teachings of St. Ignatius. Therefore, today, there is a shared responsibility in decisions that fall under the jurisdiction

of the Superior. In the Society founded by St. Ignatius, many democratic elements facilitate decision-making. He respected the freedom of his subjects so much that he learned from them while also being extremely demanding of himself. Luis Urbez, who had just finished his studies in Italy with a specialization in film, once asked Father General what he thought about the world of film and media as an apostolic endeavor. Arrupe replied, "It is not for us Superiors to say what should be done. You, who know the subject, tell me what I should do." When he asked me to write for him, as a "negro," a commentary on the Seven Words of Christ on the Cross for Latin America and to help him record it for Vatican Radio, he put his hand on my shoulder. Then, he said, "Forgive me for decorating myself with other people's feathers."

***"For the present, Amen; for the future, Alleluia!"***





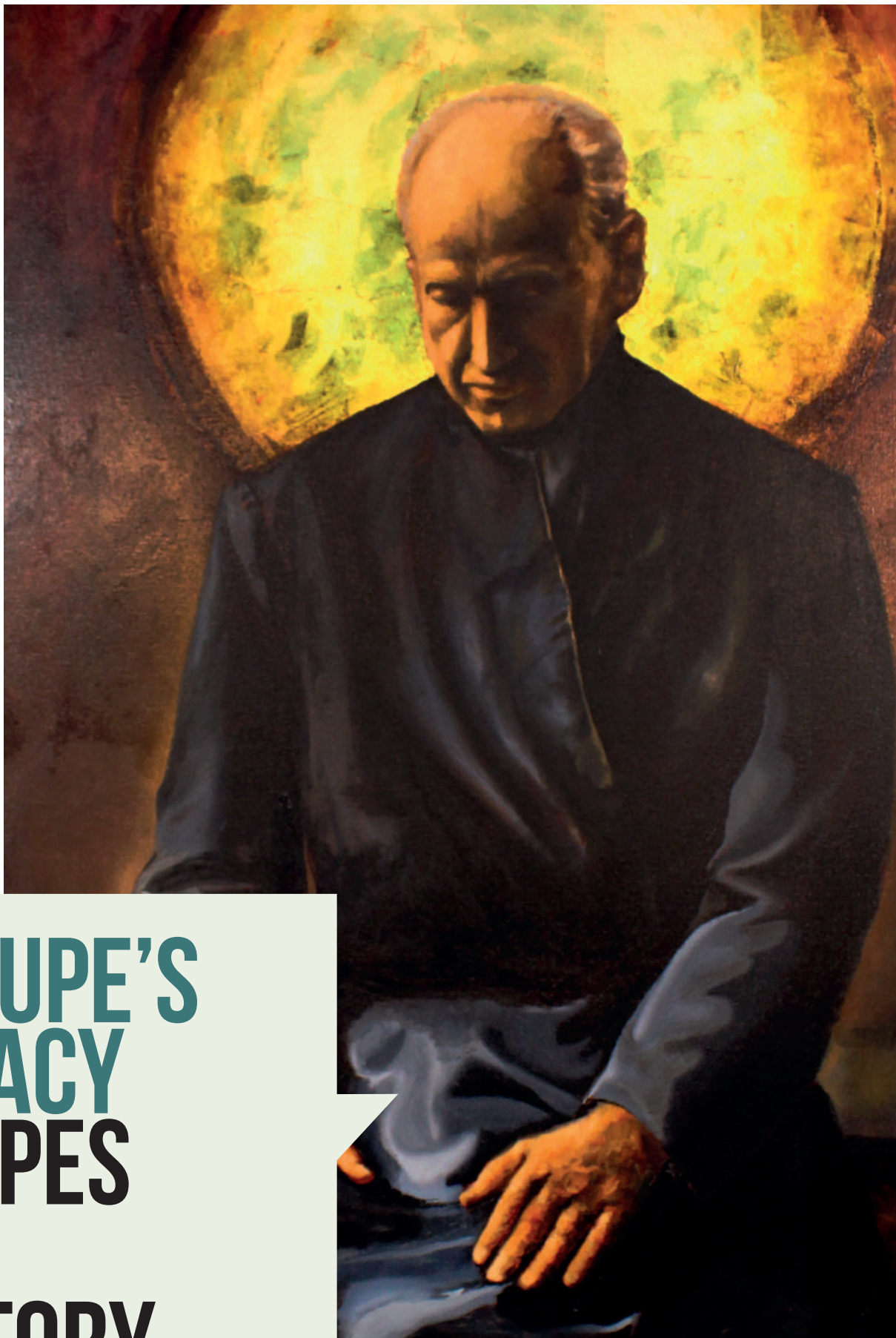
***“I am a poor man who tries to spoil as little as possible the work of God.”***



He was accused of secularizing the Society. His consistent response was, “I am not saying that the Society is secularizing, but that it is apostolically adapting itself to the secularizing world, which causes transformations that always have an apostolic meaning.” Now, the accusations suggest the opposite: that out of fear of secularization’s effects, the Church is losing contact with the world and its ability to engage with today’s culture. Pope Francis has repeatedly expressed this grievance.

The core of the “Arrupe style” was deep faith and spirituality, which kept him constantly optimistic: “They say I am an optimist, and I believe it. It seems to me that having an optimistic temperament is a blessing from God at this time. The reason for this optimism is that I have great confidence in God. We are in his hands.” Such confidence stemmed from his charming simplicity and humility: “I am a poor man who tries to spoil as little as possible the work of God.” He was unafraid of insecurity: “I still fully maintain today what I said then: Perhaps the Lord has never been so close to us, because we have never been so insecure.” Arrupe’s last words before his death, which he repeated throughout his life, summed up a way of life more necessary than ever in today’s world—a world that has fallen into a collective depression: “For the present, Amen; for the future, Alleluia!”





# ARRUPE'S LEGACY SHAPES OUR HISTORY

Federico Lombardi, S.J. (EUM)

Federico Lombardi, S.J. is an Italian Jesuit priest and one of the most influential Vatican communicators of the modern era. He served as Director of Vatican Radio, Director of the Vatican Television Centre, and later as Director of the Holy See Press Office from 2006 to 2016. Known for his steady, low-key leadership across decades of Church communications.



For those who joined the Society of Jesus between the late 1950s and early 1960s, Jean-Baptiste Janssens, then the Father General, was a highly respected figure, and his documents were studied carefully; however, it can also be said that he was somewhat distant and growing frail with age.

Fr. Pedro Arrupe entered our lives as a vibrant and inspiring figure, bringing his contagious enthusiasm and missionary spirit. He came from Japan, which was for most of us the other side of the world—the land of Saint Francis Xavier. He witnessed the atomic bombing [of Hiroshima], an event still relatively recent for us. We experienced the Second Vatican Council with significant engagement, embracing its strong push for renewal within the Church. Arrupe, who was elected General during the Council, became its interpreter and our inspired, courageous leader within the Society of Jesus. He delivered powerful speeches and sent many letters on current and debated topics related to apostolic and religious life. He also traveled extensively to allow us to see and hear him directly. In short, we had a leader guiding us in our mission in the modern world and sharing a deep spiritual foundation rooted in the Ignatian tradition. I was also fortunate to make my final

vows in his hands, in the Chapel of La Civiltà Cattolica in Rome, where I was working at the time. I still remember his homily, in which—since I had studied mathematics—he enthusiastically encouraged me to dedicate myself to the dialogue between faith and modern scientific culture.

A few years later, shortly after his resignation due to illness and Fr. Kolvenbach's election in 1984, I was appointed provincial of the Italian Province, which resulted from the merger of five previous provinces and was then the largest in the Society. I have very fond memories of those years, and I am grateful to remember them. Fr. Arrupe, although ill, was lively in the infirmary of the Curia, and we felt his spiritual and inspiring presence. The times we could visit him were always powerful experiences, even

when we were simply silent. Many of the initiatives and operational guidelines from that time were inspired or guided by him and by the 32nd General Congregation, which—as we well know—had been central to his governance of the Society. I can only recall a few of them.

***“A vibrant and inspiring figure, with contagious enthusiasm and missionary spirit.”***

***“A leader guiding us in our mission in the modern world.”***



## A Mission on the Frontiers of Society

During the 1970s, several Italian Jesuits dedicated themselves to engaging with the working-class community, working in factories or residing in working-class neighborhoods. Some small communities were established specifically for this mission, including those in Parma (Emilia), Pomigliano d'Arco (near Naples), Marina di Melilli (near Syracuse), and Follonica (Tuscany). The experience of the French Workers' Mission inspired this commitment, addressing an urgent and deeply felt need in Italy and many other countries to find new ways of evangelization and to bridge the gap between the Church and social communities. I would not say that the origin of this apostolic effort was the 32nd Congregation. Still, indeed, the Congregation, with its Decree 4, understood the situation well and urged the Society to respond to these needs with determination.

For this reason, the “worker and popular mission” of the Jesuits in Italy—unlike other church situations marked by strong tensions—progressed smoothly, always maintaining a positive relationship between the Jesuits working there and the Society’s leaders. The “worker Jesuits” and those living with them always felt inspired and fully supported by the Society’s leadership and by Fr. Arrupe. Their experience, although limited in numbers, continually involved thoughtful reflection on the social and political context, as well as friendship and dialogue with Jesuits engaged in cultural activities. It also included a deep sharing of spiritual and pastoral experiences, and constructive church relationships with non-Jesuit religious and priests working in similar settings. It is only right to recall a significant speech by Fr. Arrupe, prompted by a meeting with them, and communicated to the entire Society (10 February 1980).

This capacity for spiritual and cultural reflection enabled us to continue engaging in the same spirit even as the social situation evolved and the factory and the “working-class conditions” lost their “centrality.” Over time, without pause, other forms of engagement also became significant for the Jesuits, such as those with refugees, migrants, and various situations of marginalization and social hardship, including drug addiction.

It was during this period that Father Arrupe’s call for commitment to refugees was issued. This was concretely realized in the heart of Rome. In the early 1980s, many Ethiopian refugees fled to Italy to escape Colonel Mengistu’s oppressive regime and wandered through the city without support or guidance. The Christian Life Communities of Rome initially responded by welcoming them into a building owned by the Society behind the Church of the Gesù, on Via degli Astalli. This effort led to the creation of the “Centro Astalli,” which remains the leading refugee assistance center provided by the Italian Jesuits



in partnership with JRS. The Centro Astalli has steadily grown for over 40 years, staying true to Arrupe's teachings to "serve, accompany, defend." Jesuits and their collaborators actively participate and engage with authorities in public and political debates on the rights of refugees and migrants. Over time, different sections of the Astalli Center were established in various Italian cities. Refugee populations have constantly shifted in response to political, economic, and environmental crises. They have come from Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia, as well as from the Balkans, Liberia, Angola, Sudan, Kurdistan, Congo, Syria, other Middle Eastern countries, Palestine, and Ukraine. Anyone who believes these are temporary problems is entirely mistaken. Arrupe's prophetic insight remains highly relevant today, as it addresses one of the most pressing issues in today's global disorder. Pope Francis personally visited the Astalli Center in 2013, during the early months of his papacy. As we know, migrants have been a defining aspect of his mission: he, too, was inspired by Arrupe and has often visited the Church of the Gesù to pray at Arrupe's tomb.

Since the 1950s, Italian Jesuits have shown a strong dedication to engaging in the country's social and political debates. They did this through their magazines, such as *La Civiltà Cattolica*, and social studies centers, notably two: one in Milan with the magazine *Aggiornamenti Sociali* and another in Palermo.

During the 1970s and 1980s, Italians believed that Catholics—and Italians in general—needed to renew their moral and political commitment, which had weakened over time. This commitment had been very strong in the early decades after World War II. As a result, they aimed to promote "political education" using methods suited to the needs of the period. Sicily, in particular, with its Mafia presence and

the destructive power of corruption and violence—marked by many murders, such as in 1980 when P. Mattarella, the Region's President and brother of the current President of the Republic, was killed—deserved special attention. Consequently, the idea of a "School of Political Formation" was developed in Palermo, entrusted to Father Bartolomeo Sorge, who was then concluding his long and influential tenure as editor of *La Civiltà Cattolica* and was highly respected among Italian church and political circles. This was 1984. Father Sorge immediately proposed dedicating the new school to Father Arrupe. Named "Centro Arrupe," the initiative quickly gained recognition and made a significant impact, inspiring similar efforts across Italy and strengthening bold renewal initiatives in Palermo, known as the "Palermo Spring." Due to the frequent mafia murders at the time, our Center and Father Sorge, in particular, were under constant police protection, day and night. Sorge had to move constantly under escort, driven by police cars with sirens. This was a time of open and courageous dedication, which also faced criticism and opposition. Still, it stood as a powerful public statement of the Jesuits' willingness to confront the Mafia and corruption directly.

The fact that they risked their lives for their commitment to faith and justice was, and still is, a rare occurrence for Jesuits in Italy. However, since the 32nd Congregation and under Arrupe's leadership, we have recognized this as a situation that the Society's apostolic body must address. For many of our confreres, this is their reality—giving their lives for faith and justice through violent death has happened and continues to happen. In a sense, this is the seal, the proof of the Society's authentic service to the Lord Jesus. Fr. Arrupe wrote about it in an unforgettable letter on March 3, 1977, right after the assassination of Fr. Rutilio Grande, who was the fifth Jesuit killed in just a few months, after Burnier in Brazil and three others in Rhodesia. Arrupe described these martyrs as eloquent witnesses to the Society's direction established by GC 32, emphasizing service of faith and promotion of justice: "If we walk in the footsteps of Christ, persecution cannot be lacking." Many others have followed and are following this path. I remember Fr. André Masse, whom I met during meetings of Jesuits involved with European cultural magazines, when he was a young director of *Études*, and who one evening shared his desire to go to Lebanon, where he was killed in 1987. I also think of Fr. Ellacuría, known at GC 33, who was killed in the UCA massacre in 1989, from which Fr. Jon Sobrino, my former theology companion, narrowly escaped by chance. We are companions of martyrs, and as believers, we cannot help but feel grateful and proud. When the UCA massacre happened, I was Provincial, and I remember with deep emotion the wave of sincere participation and the many invitations to celebrations and prayer meetings in spiritual solidarity, which we received in many Italian cities where our communities are located, even in the cathedrals.

Arrupe was a saint, and the Society hopes the Church will recognize this. He guided us to the most advanced frontiers of the mission, constantly reminding us until the end of his life that we must be "rooted and founded in charity."

# FATHER PEDRO ARRUPE: AN EMBRACE BETWEEN FAITH AND JUSTICE



Manuel Morujão, S.J. (POR)

## My encounters with a bridge builder

When I studied theology in Rome from 1971 to 1976, Father Arrupe visited us once a year at the College of the Gesù. He discussed the state of the Society of Jesus and its challenges and was happy to answer our questions. I remember feeling something similar to the disciples at Emmaus (cf. Luke 24:32): his words ignited a fire in my heart. It was clear, direct, and familiar—unmistakable and universal in the Catholic sense—as if he thought of the world as his own home.

I later met Father Arrupe, who was visiting my Province of Portugal, and he was always a source of encouragement and inspiration. I was also with him at the 33rd General Congregation, when he announced his resignation and warmly embraced his successor, Father Peter-Hans Kolvenbach. Also participating in this Congregation was Father Jorge Mario Bergoglio, our beloved Pope Francis, who celebrated his final Easter on April 21st [2025].

I was in Rome attending Father Arrupe's funeral, or rather, his transition to live in the Heavenly Curia of the Most Holy Trinity. I was especially moved by the warm and extended applause after the celebration [of the Eucharist] in the Church of the Gesù, as a group of Jesuits carried him on their shoulders.

Three years ago, I was summoned by the Diocesan Tribunal of Rome to give my testimony for his canonization process. Thankfully, he is a Servant of God, and we hope that his heroic virtue will soon be officially recognized. The image that stays most vivid in my memory is that of a bridge-builder linking the Ignatian tradition with future challenges, connecting being "rooted and grounded in charity" to a commitment to social justice, uniting fraternal life in community with apostolic dynamism. Always evangelically inclusive.

## A realistic optimist

Pedro Arrupe has been described as the "man of utopia," and as a "mystic and prophet for our time." This portrayal accurately reflects his lifestyle and leadership style.

The figure of Father Arrupe stands out from the crowd because of his innovative and creative approach. Just as Pope Paul VI was tasked with leading the implementation of the Second Vatican Council for the entire Church, Father Arrupe—recently elected Superior General—was responsible for applying the Council to the life and mission of the Society of Jesus. For him, the Ignatian charism and fidelity to the Church were dynamic forces, not stagnant waters but a living fire. As composer Gustav Mahler said, "Tradition is not the worship of ashes, but the preservation of fire."

Father Arrupe's style as a promoter of the letter and spirit of the Second Vatican Council can be summed up in this paragraph that begins the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*: "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts.

For theirs is a community composed of men. United in Christ, they are led by the Holy Spirit in their journey to the Kingdom of their Father, and they have welcomed the news of salvation which is meant for every man. That is why this community realizes that it is truly linked with mankind and its history by the deepest of bonds." I have not found a more fitting description of the human and spiritual figure of Father Arrupe.

In a lecture given by Father Kolvenbach on November 13, 2007, at the University of Deusto in Bilbao, Spain, the city where Pedro Arrupe was born a hundred years earlier, he emphasized the strength of Arrupe's soul in the face of difficulties and problems: "When Father Arrupe visited Lebanon and I showed him the ruins of downtown Beirut, I told him that after a terrible night of destructive bombing, the next morning the birds were singing from the trees. He replied that in Hiroshima, too, the Lord of Life did not allow the incredible power of death to have the last word. As the Song of Songs says, For love is strong as death. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it" (Song 8:6-7). Arrupe's hope, rooted in faith and human optimism, was stronger than all tragedies and disappointments.

## Promoter of faith that is realized in justice

The second General Congregation led by Father Arrupe was the 32nd, held from December 1974 to March 1975—three intense months of seeking what the Spirit of God wanted to communicate to the Society of Jesus. Decree 4 of GC 32 is regarded as the most significant framework, serving as the benchmark for the Society's life and mission even today. It is titled: "Our Mission Today: The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice."

The fundamental idea of GC 32 is that the service of faith is inseparable from the promotion of justice. It is not a combination of alternative parts: more pastoral Jesuits or Jesuits with a more social profile. Our faith must always be more just, and our justice always more faithful, inspired by the Gospel of Jesus. The body of a Jesuit has two arms, distinct but inseparable: faith and justice. We cannot amputate one of

Manuel Morujão, S.J. is a Portugal Jesuit priest known for his pastoral and spiritual writings and his long service in the Church. He has published numerous works on Christian life and spirituality and has served prominently in roles such as spokesperson for the Portuguese Bishops' Conference and leader within the Apostolado da Oração.



the arms, but instead promote their union and complementarity.

Father General Arrupe concluded his homily at the closing Eucharist of the 32nd General Congregation (6-04-1975) in St. Peter's Basilica: "So, whether we consider the needs and aspirations of the people of our time, whether we think about the particular charism that founded the Society, or whether we seek to learn what Jesus has in his Heart for each and every one of us, we arrive at the same conclusion, namely, that the Jesuit of today is a man whose mission is to dedicate himself entirely to the service of faith and the promotion of justice, in a community of life, work and sacrifice with his companions who gather around the same banner of the Cross, and in fidelity to the Vicar of Christ, in order to build a more human and, at the same time, more divine world."

In this General Congregation, faith and justice came together in a strong fraternal spirit. The inseparable pairing of serving faith and promoting justice is not a new trend but stems from Christ's way of being and acting, as well as the Ignatian charism lived today to meet the challenges of our times. To use an image: the train of the Society's mission needs two tracks—faith and justice—to keep moving forward in seeking the greater glory of God and the best service to others, for "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" (Decree 4, no. 2).

The founding of the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) by Father General Arrupe in November 1980 is a concrete way of responding—in the name of the Faith—to the plight of Vietnamese refugees fleeing their war-ravaged homeland. JRS's field

of action today extends to five continents, assisting millions of refugees. As its founder emphasized: "The help expected of us is not merely material; the Society is especially called to provide human, educational, and spiritual assistance."

I am confident that our beloved Father Arrupe rejoiced before God when he saw the publication of the "Universal Apostolic Preferences of the Society of Jesus, 2019-2029" by his successor, Father Arturo Sosa. This document emphasizes the apostolic preference for the least: "We reaffirm our commitment to caring for migrants, displaced persons, refugees, victims of war and human trafficking; to defending the culture and dignified existence of indigenous peoples. We intend to continue contributing to creating the conditions for their human welcome, accompanying them in their process of integration into society, and promoting the defense of their rights." (Letter from Father General, February 19, 2019). Pope Francis, whom God already has in His Glory, confirmed the apostolic preferences as a concrete expression of the Society's life-mission and affirmed that they are the result of "dynamic discernment, not that of a library or laboratory."

Now we are celebrating, along with the entire Church, the Jubilee of Hope. In this regard, I recall Father Arrupe's exhortation: "While we cannot demand the same degree of optimism from everyone... we must at least demand of everyone the requirement of never accepting pessimism." The Church and the world need us as prophets of hope.

"MYSTIC  
AND  
PROPHET  
OF OUR  
TIME"

# COMMUNITAS AD DISPERSIONEM — IN MISSION AND FOR THE MISSION



Michael Lewis, S.J. (SAP)

The Society of Jesus proclaims itself as ‘one apostolic body’, united in mission and service to a faith that does justice. Yet fifty years after *communitas ad dispersionem* became part of its official language, Jesuits worldwide struggle to embody this vision. The Four Universal Apostolic Preferences, meant to guide and renew Jesuit mission globally, have often been met with limited understanding and growing frustration among younger members, who find them abstract and difficult to apply in practice. These random thoughts are entirely my own, based on my experience. I realise that many of the thoughts and ideas have been addressed by many before now.

The Society of Jesus describes itself as “one apostolic body” — priestly, religious, and bound by a special vow to the Roman Pontiff — “at the service of a faith that does justice.” We repeat these words with conviction. We print them in our documents. We nod solemnly when they are read aloud. But do we genuinely live by them? Fifty years after the phrase *communitas ad dispersionem* (D2, n.17-18, CG32) entered our official vocabulary, can we honestly say we have embraced its meaning, let alone embodied it? Or has it become just another pious slogan — an elegant relic of past decrees — while the reality of our life drifts further from the bold vision of Ignatius and his first companions?

## Encounter with Jesuits in Formation

I hold a privileged and fascinating place in the Society of Jesus. My work puts me in touch with middle-aged Jesuits from around the world—men nearing their final vows, ready to dedicate themselves to our mission. I am consistently impressed by their caliber and enthusiasm. However, alongside my admiration, I also hear a broad range of candid opinions—sometimes uncomfortably honest—about the Society and the experiences of younger members trying to serve the *Missio Dei* in an increasingly complex and divided world.

When I first saw the title of this article, my heart sank. It felt like a string of earnest but lifeless phrases lifted straight from a General Congregation decree – the kind of Jesuit language we all nod at, as if in full agreement, before going back to business as usual. The phrase itself is more than fifty years old. During that time, four General Congregations have paid tribute to it. But have we truly examined it? Have we honestly

tried to put it into practice in a Society of Jesus whose numbers are shrinking, and internal unity is under pressure?

## Returning to the Sources

The world, the Church, and the Society of Jesus have undergone transformation since the Second Vatican Council. We are encouraged in *Perfectae Caritatis* to return to our sources while remaining fully committed to serving the Church and the world. But have we truly re-imagined “mission” and “community in dispersion,” as Ignatius and the original companions envisioned? Most of them left Rome to work in distant places but found creative ways to stay connected. They were not afraid to adapt the mission or approach (for example, entering the education sector). Are we as flexible and disciplined as they were?

Every religious institute, over time, becomes institutionalized. Structures become rigid. Charisms fade. Unless actively challenged, this process suppresses the original spirit. We Jesuits are not immune, and I see little evidence that we have successfully fought back. We know we have too many institutional commitments and are afraid to let go of them.

Michael Lewis, S.J. is a South African Jesuit priest who served as President of the Jesuit Conference of Africa and Madagascar, based in Nairobi. In this role, he oversaw Jesuit ministries across the continent and frequently highlighted the dynamism of the African Church, especially its growing youth population and strong vocations.



## **Apostolate, Community, and Formation**

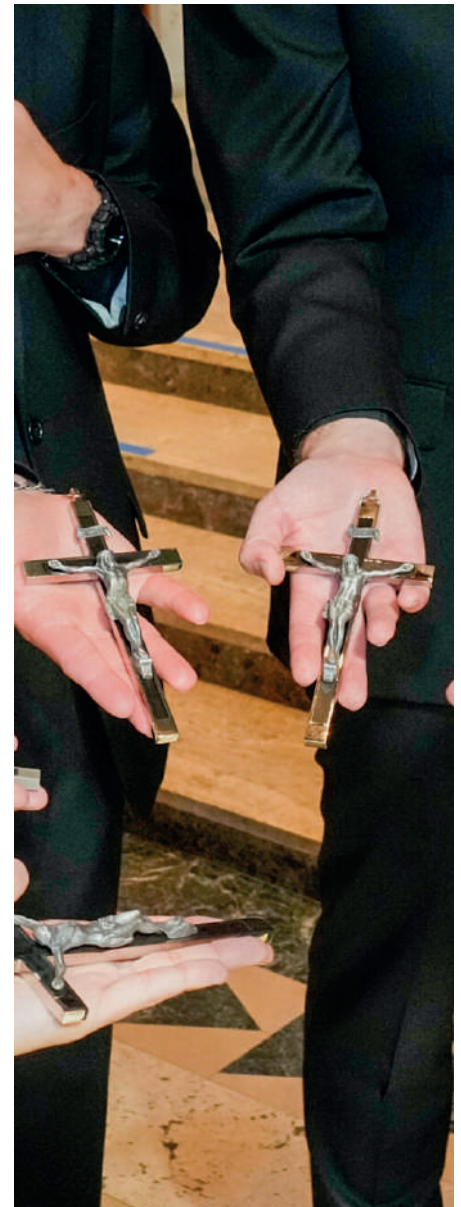
The vitality of our mission directly depends on our understanding of apostolate and community. These are not abstract ideas; they are embodied in real men—their formation, character, and the conditions under which they live and work. This requires that candidates for the Society of Jesus be carefully selected and suited for community and mission. We have excellent criteria for choosing such men in our Constitutions and documents. Still, we can easily be misled by falling vocations and the desire to meet our current commitments, instead of having the foresight to determine which apostolates are most valuable to the Church and which ones we should relinquish for the greater good of the Society and the Church.

## **Culture and the Society of Jesus**

The Society of Jesus's life and apostolic style are shaped, for better or worse, by the social environments in which we operate. Our congregation started in a Eurocentric world and has grown into a worldwide organization, made up of men from diverse and varied cultures. This rich element has been present since the times of the co-founders of the Society, who came from different and often opposing cultures.

The challenge for modern Jesuits is to realize that when we join the Society of Jesus, we freely and consciously adopt a new culture — that of the Society — which supersedes our native culture in everything we do. So, whether we serve among the desperately poor or in affluent communities, our

primary culture and values are those of the Society of Jesus. Naturally, we are tempted to be more influenced by the societies we come from or live in than to influence them. In the environments where we dwell, which are often wealthy, and even in middle-class and poorer areas, we tend to live slightly better than the people we serve, a fact we can easily explain if questioned.



## The Universal Apostolic Preferences (UAPs)

The risk of becoming too embedded in the dominant culture is that we may lose sight of our community life and mission. In previous years, the mission was always seen as more important than the community; it was given priority, so less effort was directed toward the community compared to the mission. Our community should mirror that of the early Fathers, who drew strength and inspiration from one another no matter where they were in the world. Their bond as followers of Jesus supported and energized their apostolic work.

In 2019, the Society of Jesus, attempting to respond to the needs of the times has formally committed itself to the Four Universal Apostolic Preferences (UAPs), which call us to:

- Show the way to God through the Spiritual Exercises and discernment,
- Walk with the poor, the outcasts of the world, those whose dignity has been violated, in a mission of reconciliation and justice,
- Accompany young people in the creation of a hope-filled future,
- Collaborate in the care of our Common Home.

These preferences, meant to guide apostolic renewal worldwide, have sometimes unfortunately been misunderstood. Many Jesuits, especially younger ones, feel exhausted by hearing these preferences without clear ways to implement them. For some, the UAPs may seem like vague ideals disconnected from everyday mission and community life. This gap between goals and actions leads to frustration and can cause disengagement.

## Generational Differences and Vatican II

Generational differences within the Society of Jesus are significant and require more thorough consideration than in the past. We now identify distinct generations: Baby Boomers, known for post-war prosperity, a strong work ethic, and leading major social and cultural changes; Generation X, which adapted to economic shifts and personal computers; Millennials, who grew up with the internet and globalization; and Generation Z, the first truly digital-native generation, growing up with smartphones and social media. These men are now part of the Society of Jesus or will be soon.

How will they implement the Second Vatican Council? They will do so differently from previous generations. We know that the Council will take decades to be fully realized. Many inspiring parts of the Council need to be interpreted for the modern world. The Constitutions on Liturgy, the Church, and Revelation, not to mention *Gaudium et Spes*, present a unique challenge to the Society of Jesus today and for years to come. Meanwhile, we must recognize and address the fact that modern generations are looking back with some blame and seeking a clearer identity and purpose in both the Church and the Society of Jesus.

Since the first companions decided to stay together under one elected superior, the Society of Jesus has struggled to strike a balance between community life and its mission. This tension is natural. What is less acceptable is our lack of awareness of the cultural and ideological forces now shaping our shared life.





***“This gap between goals and actions leads to frustration and can cause disengagement.”***

Over the past fifty years, two influential social concepts have entered the Society of Jesus. Both ideas might be justifiable elsewhere, but neither promotes the unity of the Society of Jesus in mission or community.

1. The first insidious idea is that the individual has a “right” to have his needs met above the needs of the community, combined with the belief that we are an egalitarian organization. However, when we join the Society of Jesus, we become part of a universal body where our individual needs are subordinate to the common good of the community and the apostolate.

2. The second sinister concept is that our governance should be somewhat democratic. We know that consultation is broader in the Society of Jesus than it used to be, but our only truly democratic gathering is the Congregation of Procurators. Unfortunately, the “democratic” mindset has spread to community life, where members now believe they should be consulted on every decision of the superior. This weakens our form of governance, undermines the community, and disrupts effective apostolic work.

These ideas may originate from the Enlightenment and its development in the global North. As the global South influences the Society of Jesus more and new generations assume leadership roles, these values could weaken.



***“Governance has been slowed down by consultation fatigue and endless processes, as if no mission can move forward until everyone has been consulted on everything.”***

## Consultation and Governance Challenges

The level of consultation has become excessive. For instance, when choosing a new Provincial for a province, the Fr. General's regional assistant travels there, meets with as many Jesuits as possible, and an “extended consult” takes place. All communities are asked to share ideas for the next Provincial — often leading to an unrealistic wish list. Besides wasting time, money, and energy — not to mention the ecological cost — this process disregards the fact that we already have mechanisms for selecting a Major Superior: the annual letters to the General, those from the departing Provincial and his consultors, and the advice of the Regional Assistant. These should suffice for the General, with his counselors' help, to make a straightforward decision. We do not elect our superiors. Has the Society of Jesus lost faith in the system derived from the scattered companions of the early Society?

From the beginning, our structures were created to help us understand God's will, both personally and communally. The hierarchical system of authority — starting from the General Congregation and flowing down through Fr. General to Provincials and local superiors — aims to serve this purpose. However, over the years, we have changed these structures by adding layers, such as “Conference Presidents,” “Vice-Superiors,” and “Delegates of Superiors.” The result is a form of governance slowed down by consultation fatigue and endless processes, as if no mission can move forward until everyone has been consulted on everything.

## The Role of the Provincial and Local Superior

The truth is clear: we are trying to govern a global apostolic body using methods from another era, when the Provincial was solely responsible for the province, its members, and its apostolates. Today, that approach is impossible because of the complexity of our societies. It's not that we lack managerial or corporate experience; many governance experts are within the Society of Jesus and among our collaborators. The current General has been open to new proposals, but few have been offered.

A key dysfunction is the tendency of Provincials to act as if their province were an independent entity they alone are responsible for. Micromanagement is common. Subsidiarity is rarely understood or practiced. The Provincial's primary responsibility — cura

apostolica — is not to micromanage details but to know his people well through the account of conscience, to understand their strengths and weaknesses, and to assign them where they can serve best. This is the Provincial's cura personalis. This is not control; it is stewardship of the mission.

The cura personalis primarily belongs to the local superior. His responsibility is to ensure that each Jesuit has what he needs—materially, spiritually, and communally—to fulfill the mission assigned by the Provincial. The tendency of Provincials to interfere in the daily operations of communities and apostolates has weakened the authority of the local superior. His role is not minor; it is his main responsibility. Yet many local superiors either misunderstand this or see governance as a distraction from their “real” apostolic work. Few realize that their governance takes precedence over any other task, because without strong local leadership, our mission suffers.

## The Need for Structural Reform

We need to reform our governance with new and effective structures. If we see the office of Provincial as a problem in modern-day governance, we must have the courage to change it. A General Congregation must lead this effort — but since it is mainly made up of Provincials (and future provincials), reforming the structures they are deeply invested in seems unlikely. It appears we need to rethink how the General Congregation functions and practices.

## Inequalities and Provincialism

Our disparities in lifestyle and resources — including financial assets and personnel — need to be addressed. The global North currently possesses financial resources, while the global South has personnel. In theory, removing regional boundaries and sharing finances through the central government of the Society could lead to a more equal distribution of resources for the Mission of Christ.

Yet resistance remains strong. We have too long identified ourselves as “a Jesuit of a province” rather than “a Jesuit of the universal Society.” This psychological identity limits our sense of community and our apostolic availability. It is time to spread novices across different novitiates and internationalize our theologates and philosophates. Isn't it time we radically reduce the number of formation houses? Men joining the Society of Jesus should understand that they are joining a universal body, not just a provincial one.

It is said that as small communities grew within the Society of Jesus, Fr. Arrupe joked that perhaps the Society of the future would rediscover the mystique of the larger community.

***“We need to re-examine our structures, regain the discipline and flexibility of the early Society of Jesus, and resist the creeping individualism and managerial drift that weaken our unity.”***



## Facing Hard Truths

If “communities in dispersion” are to be apostolically effective, we must face these realities honestly. Pious language and citations from the General Congregation won’t be enough. We need to re-examine our structures, regain the discipline and flexibility of the early Society of Jesus, and resist the creeping individualism and managerial drift that weaken our unity. Otherwise, “one apostolic body” won’t be a true lived experience but just a phrase we politely acknowledge and dismiss.

Living *communitas ad dispersionem* means choosing a way of life that sometimes frustrates our personal ambitions, limits our preferences, and demands obedience for the sake of a greater good. Without that costly loyalty, our promises become empty, and our mission becomes a loosely connected set of private efforts.

## The Future of the Society of Jesus

The question isn’t whether the Society of Jesus has a future — it does. The real question is whether that future will live up to our origins and calling. If we keep hiding behind pious words while avoiding necessary structural and spiritual changes, then the phrase “one apostolic body” will be remembered as a rhetorical flourish of a complacent era.

We must recognize the unfortunate tendency to produce endless articles, discussions, and interpretations of our documents and decrees without following through on what they call us to do. But if we take it seriously — if we dare to rethink governance, rediscover disciplined community, and recommit ourselves

to a mission that genuinely unites us — then the words of our decrees may once again become reality, as they did in the restless, determined lives of our first companions.

## Formation, Governance, and Spirituality in Need of Renewal

We don’t need more meetings, conferences, or consultations if we want to implement the changes the Society of Jesus requires. GC 36 calls for radical reformation through conversion. Courageous leaders who can embody what Ignatius and the early Fathers envisioned when they founded the Society of Jesus.

Formation requires revision and transformation. It is unacceptable to continue training priests as the Church currently does. We must take the lead. *Pastores dabo vobis* outlines the requirements. The four areas of academic, spiritual, human, and pastoral formation need updating, and training in social and political sciences should be included.

Each stage of formation, especially tertianship, calls for new adaptations. Novices should gain experience of the broader society. We must substantially reduce the number and scope of our formation houses.

Governance requires a complete overhaul to ensure Provincials are required to delegate responsibility to capable Jesuits. A much clearer understanding of *cura apostolica* and *cura personalis* is essential. A new governance system that reflects the universality of the Society is crucial.

Spirituality needs renewal throughout the Society of Jesus. In some settings, the Spiritual Exercises are shared; in

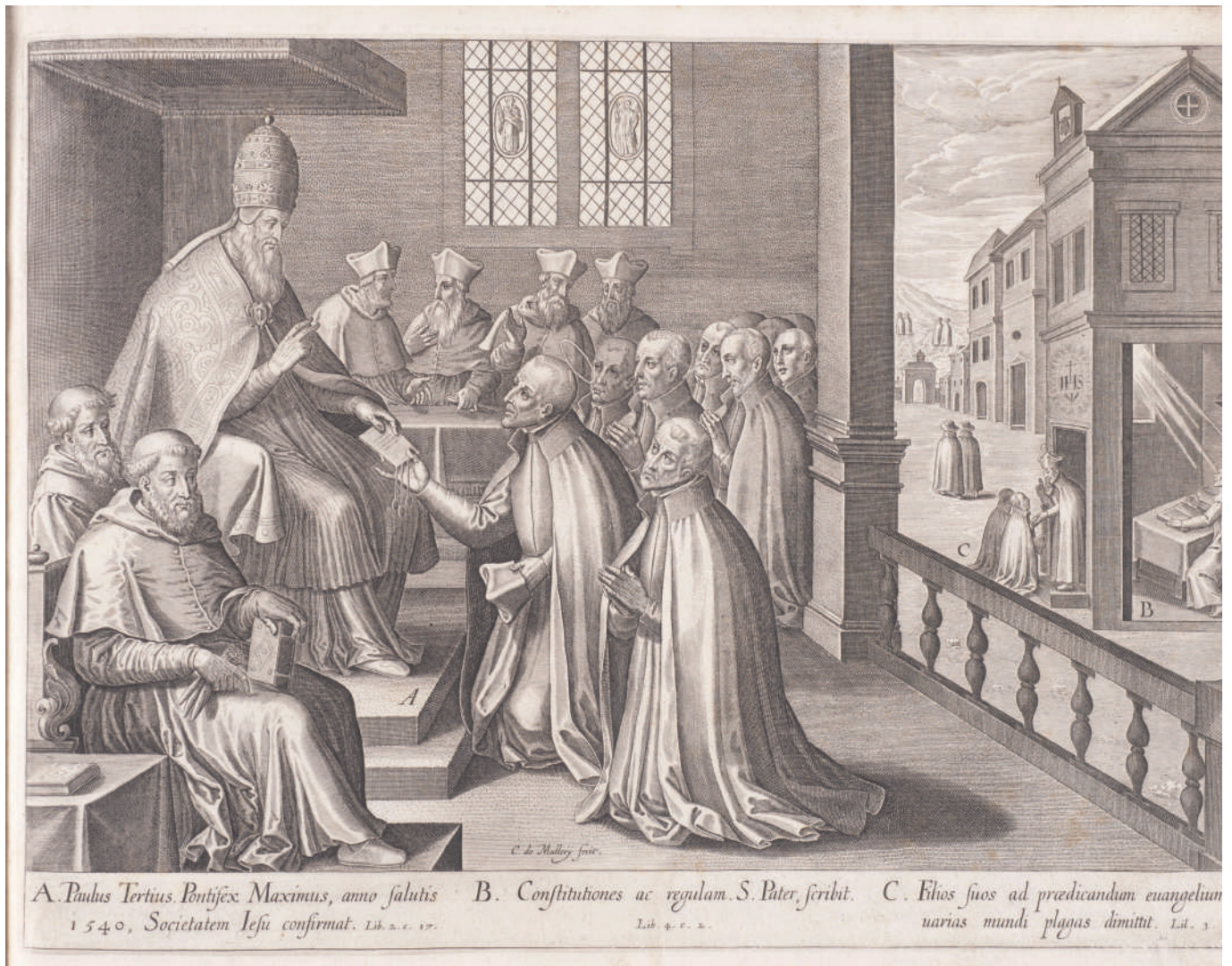
***“We have too long identified ourselves as ‘a Jesuit of a province’ rather than ‘a Jesuit of the universal Society.’ This psychological identity limits our sense of community and our apostolic availability.”***

others, the individual-directed retreat is seen as the only way to experience the Exercises. We must find new and diverse ways to stay true to our charism while addressing the needs of the Church and those we serve. We need fresh, creative approaches to integrate our efforts. Additionally, our personal prayer lives should be adapted to different stages of our lives.

## Final note. The Danger of Endless Words

Is this article destined to be added to the pile of documents that some (but by no means all) read and then place on a dusty shelf in the community library? Are we using the right methods when we publish reflections in traditional print or on social media?

We need to find ways to modernize and implement the extensive ideas and concepts in the Constitutions, Decrees of the General Congregations, and guidelines for the Society of Jesus as a community serving the Church of Christ in the modern world.



# COMMUNITAS AD DISPERSIONEM: A CREATIVE TENSION



Francisco José Ruiz Pérez, S.J. (ESP)

Since 1981, when I entered the novitiate in Spain, I have observed the community aspect developing among the Jesuits in various ways. I have engaged with the Society of Jesus, exploring each of these ways as they were introduced and evolved. I sense that this process continues. Practicing the community aspect in our Jesuit environment depends on factors both within and outside the Society, which are constantly changing: church and secular contexts, new and unique theological and ecclesiological emphases, input from General Congregations, influences from other spiritualities, and so on. Community life and its concrete expression have always been shaped this way and still are.

*Communitas ad dispersionem* was the motto given by General Congregation 32; the watchword which described the peculiarity of our life together since my initial formation. Looking back, I must admit that we did not always interpret *ad dispersionem* coherently and that we were not entirely attentive to the implicit balance it required. To put it simply, in adopting that motto, two processes took place at the beginning:

- On one hand, for many years, we prioritized *ad dispersionem* over *communitas*, justifying it with a strong sense of apostolic urgency. As a result, community life lost significance amid unquestioned activism.
- On the other hand, since the start of this century, I feel that the community aspect has been valued for its own sake, and undoubtedly its own charismatic significance has grown.

After these processes, we are now at a later point in time. The General Congregation 36 introduced a new synthesis between community and dispersion. Since then, discernment and synodality have been and continue to be the channels toward a challenging yet better understanding that we are *communitas ad dispersionem*. By discerning together, within our apostolic *ad dispersionem*, we can become more of a true *communitas*. As we grow in our sense of belonging to a 'global' and networked apostolic body, we can better embrace our *ad dispersionem*.

I will now dwell on each of these three stages.

## Ad dispersionem, first stage

We all know our history: immediately after the Second Vatican Council, community life in the Society began an arduous journey toward a different setup. This was clear in formation, from the novitiate to the third probation. In Spain, the large formation communities that existed or were being formed had to be drastically reduced. We left behind large buildings designed for many students in formation. Many students were moved to urban areas. From big, isolated houses, they moved to apartments in apartment buildings. Community life adjusted to the city's pace. The goal was to promote inculturation as much as possible amid increasing secularity.

When I joined the Society of Jesus, that model had already been tested for over a decade. Its benefits

were clear. Community life became less formal but more meaningful. The smaller communities allowed for better interaction among those in formation. The process of joining the Society could be much more personalized, despite the mass departures at the end of the 60s and the beginning of the 70s. The formation stages were adjusted to meet the real needs of the Jesuits and their more specific apostolic vocations. The Jesuits' pastoral activities in formation were strengthened to better connect their training processes with the apostolic realities of the provinces.

In that model, the '*ad dispersionem*' part of the GC formula was accepted without much fuss for the sake of the mission. If this aspect was explained clearly enough, it was possible to wholly or partly omit '*communitas*' events for the sake of apostolic activities. This showed the importance of apostolic life, preventing the community from seeing itself in a self-focused way. It was the mission, with this element of *ad dispersionem*, that provided a structure for the apostolic religious life. Our formation confirmed that, essentially, we were apostles and, depending on the situation, we were members of this or that community.

However, this process also faced challenges. The improvements it brought to community life—such as individuation, strengthening of



Francisco José Ruiz Pérez, S.J. is a Spanish Jesuit priest and theologian. He is a specialist in Dogmatic Theology, he has served as Provincial of the Bética Province and later as Provincial of the unified Province of Spain. He has also been dean and vice-chancellor at the University of Deusto.



***“Our formation confirmed that, essentially, we were apostles and, depending on the situation, we were members of this or that community.”***

community bonds, and greater integration into the environment—weren't enough to outweigh the fact that the community was undervalued. The lengthy initial formation process within the Society of Jesus, which lasts 10 to 15 years, tends to focus too much on the Jesuit's personal and spiritual journey. In my view (even in communities of Jesuits already formed), there were still signs that something was missing within the community. Personal agendas often led to ministries that hadn't been properly discerned. To some degree, community meetings seemed like mere formalities, lacking spontaneity and depth. As if that weren't enough, community life was often conflated with purely social life, and the emotional climate within the communities was taken as a measure of its quality. The community became more like a space for mental relaxation than a framework for apostolic innovation.

In that situation, local community membership played only a subtle role. Our generation failed to break free from the deep-rooted inertia within the Society of Jesus: a Jesuit was always more recognized for his mission and apostolic work than for his presence in a community or team. Personal names (not group names) were associated with cases of apostolic success. In short, our ad dispersionem was actively present during this period, but perhaps the unintended consequence was that less attention was given to communitas.

## Changing perspective: balancing identity, community, and mission

It is only now that I realize the significance of how we commemorated the fifth centenary of the birth of St. Ignatius, St. Francis Xavier, and the then Blessed Peter Faber in 2005-2006. The anniversary was planned not as a celebration of each one, but as a celebration of all three together. It was not so important to remember and praise the founders separately; the goal was to highlight their shared connection. The three founders lived what Hélder Câmara expresses so well: "When you dream alone, it is only a dream. When you dream with others, it's the beginning of reality." St. Ignatius, St. Francis Xavier, and St. Peter Faber dreamed that together they could give the world something that would help it receive what God deeply desired. Their shared dream was to establish the Society of Jesus to serve the Church.

By then, the slogan *communitas ad dispersionem* had lost its relevance and was giving way to three elements: identity, community, and mission. GC 35 embraced these, doing justice to Fr. Kolvenbach's contributions to community life after GC 34. The idea was simple: mission cannot hijack either the life in the Spirit or the community; the community must not weaken apostolic zeal or diminish the necessary personalization when embracing the charism; finally, inner life cannot confine apostolic and community dynamism to an inward dimension.

In my experience, those three elements highlighted the gaps caused by the excessive emphasis on the 'ad dispersionem' aspect in our understanding of our religious community life. Then, it became more widely accepted that being a Jesuit is defined by the mission of the Society of Jesus, but it is also something more than that. Spiritual and religious life, both personal and in community, are at the core of apostolic life, not on its margins. Without support, it is seriously undermined. We then began to see that community life is also a mission. The focus on our identity was not solely on mission, but on its complementarity with inner/religious life and community.

This increased awareness of the balance between personal life, community, and apostolic action enabled the inclusion of two significant contributions on the value of community.

One contribution helped better match *communitas* and *ad dispersionem*. It emerged in the 70s and influenced later times. I'm referring to the re-emphasis on the expression 'friendship in the Lord,' as Saint Ignatius described his fraternal bond with his early companions. I was fortunate to see how this vision, both charismatic and kind, was positively reused to build community among us. More than once, I wondered whether the dominance of *ad dispersionem* over *communitas* in our Jesuit identity

stemmed from the difficulty of fully understanding the nature of our community. "Friends in the Lord" helped me overcome that challenge somewhat. Since we are centered on the Lord, our community ties are not threatened by the *ad dispersionem* element. Our ongoing participation in communities and apostolic works throughout our lives in the Society fosters relationships strong enough to sustain coexistence amid incredible diversity. It's rare to find yourself in an international organization that combines economic and missionary cohesion, crosses cultural and political boundaries, and shares a common spiritual homeland. Friendship in the Lord offers a compelling way to explain this. I believe this expression has succeeded, even though for some Jesuits, the call to be friends in the Lord sounded vague, more emotional than practical.

When we started feeling the effects of the sharp decline in apostolic religious life, the distinction between mission and tasks became more evident. It became clear that we could not judge a mission that arises from a specific charism of religious life solely by a set of tasks. For a community overwhelmed by urgent apostolic needs and unable to attend to them all effectively, rescuing the concept of mission and contrasting it with that of tasks helped ease our stress. It also allowed us to see the challenging situation of decreasing numbers from a different angle. Conversely, tasks do not fully encompass the mission potential inherent in charism. Putting tasks into perspective helped set boundaries and renew the meaning of 'ad dispersionem,' emphasizing the community aspect. It was unhelpful to be identified solely through actions; instead, a reconciliation with the sense of belonging to a community was necessary. We understood that community exists not just for functional benefits to the mission, but that *communitas* in itself is not the mission. We focused more on the identity of the Jesuit, which is not just as a vocation but as a convocation. In other words, we rediscovered the image of Jesus with his disciples as that initial visual impact experienced by those who first began to know them.

***"We are called to be more communitas and, at the same time, more ad dispersionem, to carry out a more complex mission."***



## A road ahead

My impression, along with that of other brothers, is that with GCs 35 and 36, there was a shift in the Society toward the community aspect of Ignatian spirituality. This was evident in both spirituality and governance. The Society of Jesus became more horizontal, involving a broader range of actors and connecting them to pursue a more complex mission. The reasons for this change vary. It is partly due to the reorganization of the provinces, which led to new forms of governance, and partly because we now have a much more global understanding of missions.

Today, at least on paper, a community must see itself as connected to apostolic platforms and sectors; linked to other communities and apostolic works within the same mission territory; as well as in relation to the laity who collaborate in the mission; and to the supra-provincial levels of assistance, conferences, and networks. Community life has expanded and become more dispersed, adopting new and broader frames of reference and internalizing the different expressions of the universal apostolic body that the Society embodies. In a sense, and using analogies, we can say that we are *communitas ad dispersionem* in another way: more *communitas*, with a greater need for interaction at various levels of the Society of Jesus, and, at the same time, more *ad dispersionem*, because we aim to carry out a more complex mission.

There have been two accelerators in that process:

- a. One is the impulse that common discernment has received. There is nothing new in this; discernment has always been practiced in society. But it is also true that the real practice of communal discernment has been uneven over time. It was weakened at the local community level when the unity between the community and apostolic work was broken, while it was strengthened in the governing bodies. A brother who has a great sense of humor, ironically, confessed to me that he could not understand how he could be a Jesuit until now, without having discerned in common. My personal experience, however, is that the current emphasis on discernment in common, with remarkable results such as the Universal Apostolic Preferences (UAP), has also strengthened communities. And that is, to a certain extent, a novelty. When a group of Jesuits discerns a critical issue, their discernment solidifies their fraternal relationship. The collective community memory is a record of experiences of discernment. In each of these experiences, a community, or a similar version of it, was forged. By discerning in common, co-responsibility emerges. When discernment is properly planned, it is possible to go beyond common character traits and the ideological and affective affinities that hinder the free search for God's will. Discernment grants citizenship to those who take part in it. It allows everyone to express themselves and listen to others. Therefore, it dignifies them.

It renews the laws of the community game by neutralizing implicit leadership. Through discernment, a community deepens its commitment to its core mission and, at the same time, sees itself as more of a community.

- b. GC 36 did not issue a decree on the community, but its decree on the government was, in fact, a new declaration of community intentions. Discernment, collaboration, and networking were the main focuses of reimagining the apostolic body. In essence, these were not new missions; they were new ways of leaving *communitas*. The proverbial dispersion of our lifestyle was thus encouraged to evolve into a community connection at another level. We still must learn to live with this renewed sense of community. We need to understand better what it means to belong to supra-community bodies or to be present in a network, and how to carry out the mission alongside many other actors in the Church.

All this means continuing to move toward a concept of community that embraces our initial dispersion so that we can ultimately become what we are: *communitas ad dispersionem*.



# THE NEW HUMANISM: AN EDUCATION AT THE SERVICE OF FAITH AND THE PROMOTION OF JUSTICE

José Alberto Mesa, S.J. (COL)

*"In short: 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." (GC. XXXII, D.4, No. 2)*

The first Jesuits understood that the Society of Jesus was founded "for the glory of God and the common good" (Formula of the Institute, 1550, No. 1). As O'Malley explains in his book "The First Jesuits," this led the Jesuits to conceive of schools as "works of charity," as described in the Constitutions (No. 440) (See, The First Jesuits, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1993, p. 208). Schools provided a privileged opportunity for the "help to souls" that so inspired the early Jesuits in their work. The humanist educational philosophy they adopted precisely reinforced the conviction that the ultimate meaning of education was to help people orient their lives toward God and the service of the common good. The Jesuits coined the term "perfect eloquence" to describe their educational purpose: a formation that combined good rhetoric with wisdom and virtue. This was their conception of what we would call today an integral formation. For these Jesuits, an educated person was someone who knew how to speak and write, and whose words were consistent with their ethical and spiritual behavior within a context of service to the common good. In this sense, it is clear that from the very beginning, the Society's education had a social dimension, from the humanist perspective of the 16th century.

Another important element of the first schools was their free education. Saint Ignatius and the first Generals only agreed to open schools that could offer free education to ensure that the schools could serve all without distinction of financial means. This changed when the Society was restored in 1814, and the model of foundations made by large benefactors could no longer be maintained given the new political and economic contexts. In many places, nonetheless, great efforts were made to ensure that not only those with financial means could attend our schools.

However, in 1973, Father General Pedro Arrupe, responding to the call of the Second Vatican Council and the new contexts of the Church and the world, launched his famous challenge, speaking at the Congress of European Ex-Alumni in Valencia:

*"Have we educated you for justice? Are you educated for justice? ... I believe we Jesuits must respond with all humility that we have not; that we have not educated you for justice, as God demands of us today." — Fr. Pedro Arrupe, Valencia, Spain.*





José Alberto Mesa, S.J. is a Colombian Jesuit priest. He studied philosophy and theology in Colombia and later earned a Ph.D. in education from the University of California. He has significantly influenced Jesuit education worldwide by promoting global collaboration, holistic formation, and Ignatian pedagogy. Mesa also serves as a visiting professor at Loyola University Chicago, teaching philosophy of education and Jesuit pedagogy.

Arrupe recognized that changing times called for a concept of service to the common good that went beyond the humanism of the 16th century. As Arrupe explained:

*“Action in favor of justice and participation in the transformation of the world clearly presents itself to us as a new constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, that is, the mission of the Church for the redemption of the human race and liberation from every oppressive situation” — Fr. Pedro Arrupe, Valencia, Spain.*

A new humanism was therefore needed in which the concept of service to the common good implied the promotion of justice, that is, liberation from oppression and the transformation of the social structures that make it possible. Arrupe then proposes a new interpretation of the Society's humanism and, therefore, a new way of understanding its education:

*“Our educational goal and objective is to form men who live not for themselves, but for God and for his Christ; for Him who died and rose again for us: men for others, that is, who cannot conceive of love for God without love for humanity; an effective love that has justice as its first principle and that is the only guarantee that our love for God is not a sham, or even a pharisaical cloak that hides our selfishness. All of Scripture calls us to this union between love for God and effective love for our brothers and sisters” — Fr. Pedro Arrupe, Valencia, Spain.*



Forming people for others is now the motto that embodies the Church's new calling and expresses the ideal of service to faith and justice as called for by the Pope and the bishops: "the kind of man we must form, the kind of man we must become, if we wish to serve that evangelical ideal of justice: the man for others, the new, spiritual man, that is, led by the Spirit, who transforms the face of the earth" (No. 18).

Therefore, when the 32nd General Congregation declared that "the mission of the Society of Jesus today is the service of faith, of which the promotion of justice is an absolute requirement," it was understood as a confirmation of Arrupe's call. Like Arrupe, this declaration by the Congregation generated controversy in the schools, and many thought it went too far and that, in the context of the Cold War and the ideological struggles of the time, it was forming a dangerous alignment with communist ideology. However, the Congregation, like Arrupe, only reaffirmed what the Church had declared in its documents.

Beyond the controversies, the call of Arrupe and the Congregation opened a path of reflection and renewal in the schools that continues to this day. Little by little, in many cases overcoming great resistance, schools began to embrace the new perspective, affirming that it was not enough to educate people of academic excellence, but rather people whose excellence was placed at the service of faith and the promotion of justice. The decision of the United States provincials in 1975 clearly speaks to the impact on schools: "Following the mandate of General Congregation XXXII, the provincials affirm

that the service of faith and the promotion of justice, as a single guiding principle, must be fundamental to the secondary educational apostolate" (Project 1. Agreements and Decisions, October 1975, p. 4)."

Schools incorporated important changes to their curricula, including themes of social justice, political analysis, and critical thinking. At the level of social formation, apostolic groups were renewed from the perspective of social service, awareness of reality, and analysis of structures of injustice through experiences such as mission camps, work in working-class neighborhoods, and volunteer work with marginalized populations. For example, since this time, Colombian schools have adopted a Social Action Formation (SAF) Program, which encompasses all grade levels offered in schools and seeks to awaken social awareness and lead to the transformation of social injustices to achieve a more just and participatory society. Many other schools in the Society have similar programs integrated into their educational offerings.

Within this context, the Society published important documents for schools that adopted this new vision. In 1986, it published *Characteristics of the Education of the Society of Jesus*, which states:

1. The treatment of justice issues in the curriculum.
2. The lines of action and programs of a Jesuit school bear concrete witness to the faith that brings about justice.
3. "There is no authentic conversion to justice if works of justice are lacking" (Nos. 77-80).

A few years later, the Society published a document that delves deeper into the pedagogy that should be practiced in our schools, *Ignatian Pedagogy: A Practical Approach* (1993). In presenting the new document, Father General Kolvenbach reaffirmed the new orientation: "Christian humanism at the end of the twentieth century necessarily includes social humanism... Service to the faith and the promotion of justice that it entails are the foundation of contemporary Christian humanism" (No. 124). The document proposes an action-oriented pedagogy that always takes into account the analysis of the reality of the context, seeking a transformation of people and the world.

***"The central orientation of a Jesuit school is education for justice. Adequate information, combined with rigorous and critical thinking, will make the commitment to work for justice more effective in adult life..."***

*In its most recent document, "Jesuit Schools: A Living Tradition in the 21st Century," the Society reaffirms its commitment to justice, citing the text already taken from GC XXXII and confirms that "the commitment to social justice is not marginal to the mission: it is at its center" (No. 201). The document also includes a commitment to caring for creation as part of promoting justice today, as explained by Pope Francis in his encyclical Laudato Si: "We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather one complex crisis which is both social and environmental." (No. 139).*



**“The mission of the Society of Jesus today is the service of faith, of which the promotion of justice is an absolute requirement.”**

**“Our educational goal and objective is to form men who live not for themselves, but for God and for his Christ... men for others.”**



It is also important to note that Father General Kolvenbach emphasized that the service of faith and the promotion of justice imply the preferential option for the poor, as explained in Church documents, and proposed an important criterion for our schools:

*“We should require all our students to use the option for the poor as a criterion, never making an important decision without first considering how it might affect those who occupy the lowest place in society” (The Challenges of Christian Education at the Doorstep of the Third Millennium, in Father Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., and Education 1983-2007, ACOEESI, Bogotá, 2009, 291).*

Father General Sosa recently acknowledged the progress these calls have made in our schools:

*“Our apostolic works in general and our educational institutions in particular have made enormous progress on this path of educating for justice that is born of faith and is illuminated by it, and in inviting our students to be agents of change in building more just and fraternal societies. Today, many identify Jesuit education with its clear commitment to justice. Our educational works have developed numerous programs, projects, and action groups so that our students acquire a critical sense of reality, understand the deep and structural roots of our social and political problems, and can act accordingly. Undoubtedly, we still have much to do in this area; we will have to continue discerning how to respond to the ever-new challenges that education for justice and reconciliation demands” (Alumni of the Society of Jesus invited to be companions in the mission of reconciliation and justice in our contemporary world, AR, 2023, 7).*

The progress and challenges are great. However, the area where the Society's education has shown the greatest creativity in responding to the challenge of justice today is in the models of education for the most excluded populations in our societies. Some of these models began before Vatican II but quickly aligned with the desire to contribute to the promotion of justice as an element of quality education in the contexts of the most excluded populations.

In 1940, what we know today as the Holy Family Professional Schools Foundation (SAFA) began in Spain. It currently has 26 centers that seek to train “men and women for others, who are conscientious, competent, compassionate, and committed” (<https://www.safa.edu/fundacion-safa/conocer-safa>) with a professional orientation for work, with an emphasis on the mentoring dimension, among the most impoverished populations in southern Spain.

Another important model is that of the Fe y Alegría schools. This movement was born in 1955 in Caracas, offering quality education “where the asphalt ends.” Currently, in collaboration with many religious leaders from many religious congregations and laypeople, it has built a popular education network with a significant impact in Latin America and now in Africa and Asia, bringing quality education to the poorest and promoting the right to quality education for all in international forums. It currently has more than 1,700 educational centers in more than 22 countries and many other programs serving the world's poorest. Fe y Alegría conceives its education within the lens of popular education and social advancement that seek to build a more just and fraternal society.

Other models have developed within the context of the call to promote justice and the option for the poor. Worthy of note among these is the Cristo Rey model, which emerged in Chicago in 1996 as a response to the needs of the poorest Hispanic immigrants and now constitutes a network of 40 secondary schools in the United States serving the poorest in urban areas. One of its most innovative elements is the integration, through its Corporate Work Study Program (CWSP), of a rigorous academic program preparing for higher education with professional work experience. Also in the United States, another important model for primary schools, known as the "Nativity" model, emerged in 1971 in New York City in one of the most marginalized areas of the city with the goal of offering quality education that would give Hispanic children the opportunity to access a good secondary education and thus break the cycle of poverty for themselves and their families. It is a model that has shown astonishing results and has achieved what it promises. To this end, it has developed an extended academic year with long days, small groups, and summer activities.

In India, the Society has also developed educational proposals for the most excluded, especially for Adivasis and Dalits, with numerous schools offering our educational tradition so that members of these most marginalized groups can benefit from a quality education. In many of these schools, the Jesuits have developed innovative pedagogical proposals that respect the cultures and customs of these groups while providing them with an education that helps them emerge from their marginalization and assert their rights and human dignity. Finally, it is also important to recognize the educational service that the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) offers to people living in refugee camps fleeing situations of violence and persecution. It was precisely Father Arrupe who called the Society in 1980 to care for those fleeing the Vietnam War. Thus began what is today an important apostolate of the Society with a significant educational dimension. It currently has more than 350 primary schools and many other non-formal education projects to offer an education of hope to those who can undoubtedly be counted among the poorest of the poor.

The challenge of educating for a faith that promotes ongoing justice continues. Schools today, more than ever, are aware of this challenge and of the need to fully integrate the two fundamental dimensions of service to the faith and the promotion of justice. It is true, as Father General Sosa recognizes, that much progress has been made, but it is also true that it is necessary to continue discernment so that Arrupe's challenging words continue to guide us:

*"the type of man we must form, the type of man we must become, if we want to serve that evangelical ideal of justice: man for others, the new man, spiritual, that is, led by the Spirit, who transforms the face of the earth" (Arrupe, No. 18).*



# THE FAITH-JUSTICE MISSION AND PILGRIMAGE TO RIGHT RELATIONS WITH INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN CANADA



Peter Bisson, S.J. (CAN)

The unity of the faith-justice mission flows from its underlying spiritual reality. That reality is the presence and activity of the Crucified and Risen Lord in our midst. This in turn includes how He is inviting us to join Him in His labours, and how we are being transformed by meeting Him.

GC 32's Decree 4, "Our Mission Today: The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice" had a huge impact on the Jesuit Province of Canada and on me. While it changed us in many ways, I would like to discuss how it transformed our relationship with Indigenous People especially through the dark consolations of the Spiritual Exercises' Third Week. GC 32's recognition that social justice is a constitutive part of

the service of faith gradually changed our understanding of traditional "Native Missions" in Canada. It helped us realize that we are here not only to give but also to receive and learn, especially about the value of Indigenous spiritualities. It also prepared us to accept our own contribution to colonization and its devastating impacts on Indigenous Peoples. This change did not happen by simply reading Decree 4 then reflecting on our work. Rather, Decree 4 helped us navigate confusing currents and a complex story with many turns and much turbulence.

An important context of our story is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), which worked from 2008 to 2015. Its mission was to receive and document the testimonies of Indigenous People who had attended Indian Residential Schools in Canada as children, and to provide a safe forum to discuss their experiences in order to recognize publicly the harmful experiences of the children and the ongoing consequences of these harms. The hope was that this acknowledgement could be part of their healing and could promote reconciliation between them and the people of Canada, the government of Canada, which owned the schools, and the Christian churches that managed them.



Peter Bisson, S.J. is a Canadian Jesuit priest and former Provincial of the Jesuits in English Canada. He has served in leadership roles including socius to the provincial and director of the Jesuit Forum for Social Faith and Justice. His ministry has included prison and hospital chaplaincy, refugee advocacy, and academic work as an assistant professor of religious studies. He holds advanced degrees in theology, divinity, philosophy, and religion.

The Indian Residential Schools operated from the early nineteenth century until the 1990's. The Jesuits ran one, which closed in 1958. It was on the north shore of Lake Huron, part of a region where Jesuits had been ministering since the 1840's. These schools were part of the Canadian government's strategy to consolidate the colonization of the territory. It intended to extinguish Indigenous cultures through "re-educating" their children into Euro-Canadian ways. To this end, the schools separated the children from their families, communities, cultures, languages and spiritualities. Many schools also became places of abuse, including physical and sexual. By cooperating with the government through the management and staffing of residential schools, the churches mixed evangelization with colonization. While many church people were good and sincere teachers, most staff nevertheless shared to some degree the dominant colonizing attitudes of much of the Canadian population.

On May 31, 2012, I began my service as provincial of the Jesuits in English Canada. This was also the first day of a large, regional assembly of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Toronto. I had been advised that few official representatives of the Catholic Church would be present, so it would be important for me to attend as the Jesuit provincial, and to be visibly present as a Catholic priest. When I entered the downtown convention centre in my clergy suit, I



realized I had made a terrible mistake. Indigenous participants seemed visibly uncomfortable with me. Instead of my Roman collar being a symbol of peace, solidarity and reconciliation, I felt that it became a trigger for traumatic memories of abuse in residential schools. I tried to "dress down" by removing the tab from my collar and taking off my jacket, but it was still obvious that I was a priest.

I felt self-conscious, ashamed and vulnerable. I also felt confused that what was so important to me, my vocation and mission, seemed to threaten Indigenous People. My holiest desires felt somehow corrupted by my blind spots that masked the historical links between evangelization and colonization. Despite wanting to retreat to the comfort of other church people at the gathering, I felt it was important for me to be with Indigenous People and to experience shame and vulnerability for our collective responsibility for their suffering. While I felt uncomfortable, I also recognized that my discomfort did not compare to the disruption and violence that Indigenous People have experienced for generations.

Once I accepted my own discomfort and stopped focusing on myself, I noticed that no Indigenous person was being rude to me. Indeed, some even tried to make me feel welcome. Here I was, a potential trigger for traumatic memories, and some who had such memories were reaching out to me. This broke my heart. My ability to shoulder the humiliating collective responsibility for damage done to Indigenous People did not come only from my personal spiritual resources. It had a larger history.

When allegations of Jesuit sexual abuse of Indigenous children first appeared in the late 1980's, we did not believe them. The victims then sued us. We were indignant and replied in kind, using the law as a weapon. Upon much reflection and discernment, we realized we were treating old friends like enemies. We also started to notice patterns in the allegations and found that our own records supported many things we were hearing. We began to listen less judgmentally, to act less defensively, and to take the allegations more seriously. Eventually we came to acknowledge the harm we had done by participating in the residential school system and contributing to colonization in general. As we recognized our responsibility for harm done, we also sought to compensate for it.

The change in how we listened to Indigenous People and the admission that colonization had shaped our evangelization allowed me to walk with Indigenous People with sincerity and more purpose. It allowed me to accept the shame and confusion that came with being a trigger for traumatic memories during the TRC's 2012 regional gathering in Toronto. Subsequent changes moved us further down this path of conversion and decolonization.

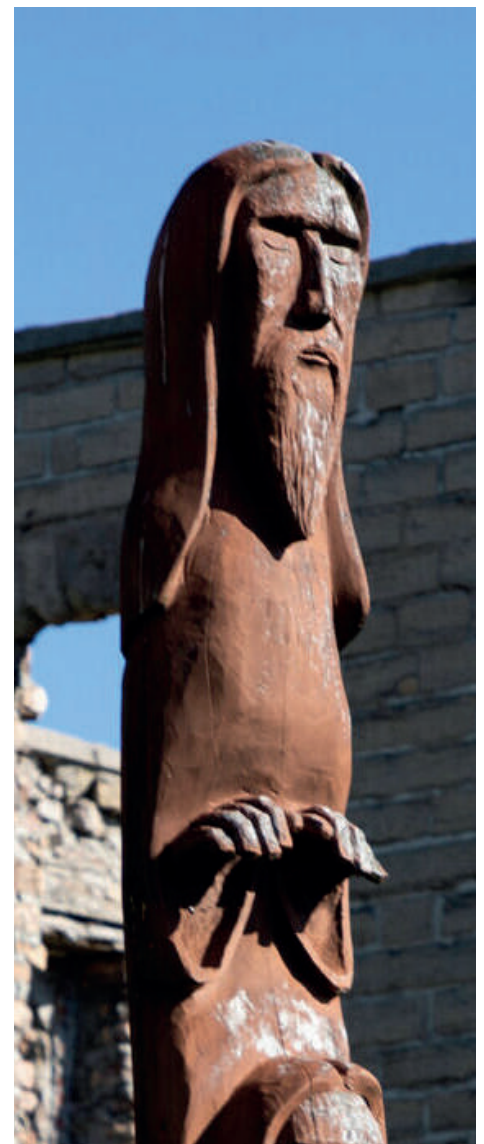
The most important such change was a 2015 province-wide communal discernment about our priorities. The first priority to emerge was Ignatian spirituality, which was not surprising. The second priority, however, was surprising: Indigenous relations. This expression did not mean ministry to Indigenous People (what we used to mean by "Native missions"), but ministry with Indigenous People, especially Indigenous Catholics. It also meant that such partnership should influence our other ministries and was not the business of only one apostolic sector. This new priority developed from the insight that throughout the history of Jesuits in Canada, we were our best selves when we were in right relations with Indigenous People. At the end of this exercise an Indigenous Elder, who had been working with us for 40 years, said, "At last I feel recognized. At last, I feel like a friend."

It took many humiliations to move us from a paternalistic attitude to one of partnership and mutual learning. The acknowledgement of our own responsibility was an important First Week grace that enabled us to embrace the truth of how Indigenous People saw our history, and which also opened us to subsequent graces. Staying faithful to a challenging relationship with Indigenous People, with the humiliations of facing our truth and being willing to suffer for the sake of staying in relationship has been a long and transformative Third Week grace for us. We could not have stayed in these relationships without admitting that we had allowed colonization to affect our evangelization. This admission, moreover, could not have happened without the critical self-awareness that came with GC 32's faith-justice commitment and its desire to be with marginalized people. Nor could it have come without the friendship of Indigenous People and the freedom to have difficult conversations with them.

It was the Third Degree of Humility of the Second Week of the Exercises and the long, painful consolations of the Third Week that finally began to transform the imbalanced power dynamics between us and Indigenous People, especially Indigenous Catholics. We went from being "above" Indigenous People who we served to being partners, friends and allies, and even being helped by them as the Elder pointed out. We were less agents of colonization but instead novices learning from Indigenous partners, working towards decolonization.

***"Here I was... a potential trigger for traumatic memories, and some who had such memories were reaching out to me. This broke my heart."***

***"At last I feel recognized. At last, I feel like a friend."***





## From Mission to Encounter

I would now like to invoke GC 34 (1995) to deepen my interpretation of our experience. GC 34's mission decrees (Servants of Christ's Mission, Our Mission and Justice, Our Mission and Culture, Our Mission and Interreligious Dialogue) confirmed GC 32's faith-justice mission not with moral argument or theological justification but with religious experience. They pointed out how the Society encountered and was transformed by the Crucified and Risen Christ as He was at work in those aspects of mission in the world. GC 34 confirmed the faith-justice mission by showing how the Society met Jesus through that mission. In this way, the decrees recognized the spiritual realities operating beneath our mission activities.

The Jesuits in Canada have met the Lord in Indigenous People, especially by remaining with them even with their justified critiques and our feelings of humiliation and repentance. The Lord was already there and was inviting us to be with Him there. But if we have really met the Crucified and Risen Christ, then we should have been transformed. How?

We have experienced two kinds of transformation, one in how we saw ourselves, the other in how we saw Indigenous People. We used to see ourselves the way some old Canadian history books did: as self-sacrificing missionaries and teachers who, with other missionaries, helped bring the Gospel and civilization to what later became Canada. We have since learned from Indigenous People that these ideas did not tell the full story. Furthermore, these ideas acted as blind spots masking how evangelization efforts contributed to colonization and its damaging legacies, which included cases of abuse. The Indigenous People we were closest to knew all this, yet they did not chase us away. At a certain point in our shared story, we realized that these same Indigenous People were ministering to us. So, our view of ourselves became more humble, more realistic, and we started to see ourselves less as "superior" people with something to offer and more

like companions with Indigenous People, sharing gifts and working toward the common good.

Our view of Indigenous People has also changed. We saw them less as people with terrible traumas who needed our help, and more like human beings with amazing spiritual gifts with whom we should be partners and allies in working toward the Kingdom of God. Let me point out two of their gifts. One is the centrality of spirituality to every kind of work and to a healthy society. It would be very rare to find things of the Spirit marginalized or privatized in Indigenous cultures. The other spiritual gift is the centrality of Creation to spirituality. A right relationship with the earth is a fundamental part of a right relationship with the Creator and is part of the pathway to God. It seems to me that Indigenous spiritualities can help us learn what integral ecological conversion means and help us embrace a life of reconciliation in three dimensions: with God, with each other, and with Creation.

The Society of Jesus in Canada has been transformed for the better through the difficulties and challenges of trying to find right relations with Indigenous People. This is where we have met the Crucified and Risen Christ. Our path to the Lord has been a path of seeking justice, much of which has meant our own transformation. He is the principal agent of mission here, not us. The faith-justice grace may be complex, but it is one thing because He is one and so is His mission.

***"We started to see ourselves less as 'superior' people and more like companions sharing gifts toward the common good."***

# A UNIVERSAL SPIRITUALITY FOR OUR TIMES

**Soosai E. Lawrence, S.J. (PAT)**

The Society of Jesus has been listening to God's voice through different decades and has expressed its Identity and Mission during and after the conclusion of its successive General Congregations.

The GC 32 declared that Faith and Justice must go hand in hand and that promoting Justice is essential to growing in authentic and genuine Faith. Fighting for the poor and marginalized, a theme repeated by many GCs, is a commitment that every Jesuit inherits from Jesus, their leader, who always stood with the poor. GC 36 (or 34?) emphasized the comprehensive nature of our Mission, connecting Faith, Justice, Inculturation, and Dialogue with other religions and cultures. Furthermore, GC 36 called every Jesuit to Spiritual Conversion by reconciling with God, Humanity, and Creation to promote Justice, Peace, and Care for our common home.

As a Jesuit working in the field of Inter-religious Dialogue for Peace and Harmony, the documents of GC 32, and the succeeding congregations have inspired and motivated me to have a comprehensive view of our Jesuit Life and Mission. My grassroots-level involvement and the spirit of the succeeding General Congregations have opened my mind and heart to move forward in union with our brothers and sisters from other religions and cultures practicing a Universal Spirituality to promote Justice, Peace, Joy, and Hope in the modern world.





In the modern world, we observe that each religious, cultural, or national group often promotes its own sectarian, divisive, specific, and fundamentalist spirituality to strengthen its own dominance over others. This tendency can lead to conflicts. In contrast, a Universal Spirituality is one that is shared and beneficial for all groups, religions, nations, races, cultures, and traditions. It promotes justice, peace, harmony, friendship, collaboration, and the collective progress of all groups and nations around the world. Therefore, such a Universal Spirituality (US) would be truly agreeable and acceptable to everyone, and it is certainly the need of the hour for our modern world, which faces wars and suffering. What would be the key features of such a Universal Spirituality?

Before exploring the key features of a Universal Spirituality, we first need to define the meaning of the word 'Spirituality'. We can describe it simply like this: True Spirituality is a dynamic, living process—more of a psychological or immaterial process in action—that emanates from an individual and extends beyond that person to reach all realities that surround or are connected to them. While 'Ego' is an inward, self-centred, centripetal psychological force that confines a person's heart to their own material body and pride, 'Spirituality' is an outward, other-oriented, centrifugal psychological force that expands the heart to the infinite universe, beings, eternity, and the Super-being (God). As a result, Spirituality always fosters harmonious relationships between a person and all the beings and realities around them. The driving force behind a person's spirituality is their belief system, worldview, values, and attitudes. Based on these various belief and value systems, we can identify different kinds of Spiritualities such as Catholic Spirituality, Buddhist Spirituality, Islamic Spirituality, Tribal Spirituality, and others.



Soosai E. Lawrence, S.J. is an Indian Jesuit priest of the Patna Province. He entered the Society of Jesus in 1983 and has become known for his pioneering work in interreligious dialogue, especially in Buddhist–Christian relations. His years of ministry in Bodhgaya deepened his engagement with Buddhism and inspired his focus on Buddhist psycho-spirituality. He has developed educational and spiritual programs—such as a Mind Development Program implemented in schools in northern India—aimed at fostering psycho-spiritual growth and interreligious harmony.

Although spiritualities from all religions and traditions are centrifugal in nature—transcending oneself and reaching out to other realities—and share many common features, a particular religious spirituality may not resonate with someone from a different faith. Therefore, forcing one's value system and spirituality on others can lead to hatred, conflicts, and violence. This is evident in the modern world today. As a result, the urgent need is to discover a Universal Spirituality that appeals to and is acceptable by people of all religions and traditions. Such a Universal Spirituality would promote mutual respect, care, cooperation, sharing, justice, peace, trust, joy, mercy, and happiness among people of diverse cultures, nations, and religions. We must promote this Universal Spirituality everywhere in the world. How can we accomplish this? What values, attitudes, and guiding principles will inspire and sustain such a Universal Spirituality?

That leads me to reflect on the values, attitudes, and guiding principles that would ignite a Universal Spirituality in humans, which in turn would foster peaceful coexistence, a healthy ecology, and sustainability in the world. In my opinion, the first guiding principle of a Universal Spirituality, without a doubt, would be:

## 1. "Care for our common home, Mother Earth (eco-spirituality)"

This concern for ecology and Mother Earth has been emphasized today by scientists, environmentalists, and spiritual leaders like the late His Holiness Pope Francis and His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Many religions also emphasize the importance of caring for Mother Earth. There is no other physical phenomenon in our existence that connects us so closely as our dear Mother Earth. The Earth, as our mother, provides all the essentials that sustain us—humanity—and the biosphere: air, water, fire, food, clothing, shelter, minerals, technology, medicine, life, happiness, hope, and spiritual experiences. The shortage, pollution, and imbalance of any of these necessities in any part of the world impact the well-being of all humanity. A prime example is the global outbreak of the

Coronavirus, which started in one corner of the world but quickly affected every corner. This experience clearly demonstrates that caring for Mother Earth and its elements (eco-spirituality) should be the primary focus of universal spirituality as its guiding principle.

## 2. "Care for human solidarity and morality"

To effectively care for Mother Earth and the environment, we need solidarity, collaboration, and cooperation among all nations to protect and preserve Mother Earth from various dangers. Even if one nation pursues unscientific industrialization, it can affect the entire ecosystem because we are all interconnected. Therefore, human solidarity and collective efforts among nations are essential to safeguard Mother Earth.

To strengthen this human solidarity, we must address the issue of human morality, since a lack of morality leads to division, oppression, exploitation, and harm to both one another and the Earth. Today, worldwide problems like ecological imbalance, deforestation, poverty, and violence result from humanity's failure to uphold moral values, attitudes, and behaviors. Human morality reminds us of our dignity, honor, responsibility, duties, and the imperatives we must follow for a just and peaceful coexistence. Thus, Universal Spirituality—aiming for a just and peaceful social order—must foster a universal morality that promotes human solidarity. The question is, what can ensure the growth of solidarity and morality among humans? This leads us to the third guiding principle of Universal Spirituality.

## 3. Interreligious relations, building, and spiritual development

A true religion aims to unite people with the Supreme Power (understood as God in many religions, but as Dharma in Buddhism) and promote morality and spirituality among humanity. However, as we have previously seen, sometimes individual religion can become triumphalist, sectarian, and divisive. Therefore, Universal Spirituality must always encourage INTER-RELIGIOUS ENGAGEMENT AND ENRICHMENT so that all world religions work together for cooperation, collaboration, unity, and solidarity among humans, rather than fostering comparison, competition, division, and domination. Thus, inter-religious engagement and enrichment are among the best ways to promote human solidarity. Additionally, the pursuit of

moral and spiritual growth across religions helps us identify the universal human moral and spiritual values that benefit all people, regardless of their religion or nation. Many spiritual Gurus from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds have identified Greed (born of Craving), Hatred (born of Pride), and Falsehood (Ignorance) as the roots of evil and immorality in the world. They explain that from Greed springs the evil of avarice, attachments, and the desire to amass unlimited wealth, pleasures, and resources, leading to inequality, poverty, environmental exploitation, and social unrest. Pride (ego) gives rise to all evils such as anger, revenge, conflicts, violence, arms races, wars, and destruction, resulting in immense suffering, ecological disasters, insecurity, and hopelessness. Both Greed and Hatred originate from Falsehood, or adherence to untruth. The key question then becomes: how can we free humanity from Greed, Hatred, Pride, and Falsehood that cause all forms of suffering and evil? The answer to this question points to the fourth principle of Universal Spirituality.

## 4. Common search for truth

What is the importance of Truth in our lives? When we examine different religions and their views on Truth, certain facts become clear. The Hindu Vedic traditions declare that "The Truth will Triumph." Lord Buddha stated that "Knowing things as they truly are and behaving accordingly will liberate one from all sufferings. So, attain Wisdom which is the Truth of all things to liberate you."

***"There is no other physical phenomenon in our existence that connects us so closely as our dear Mother Earth."***

Lord Jesus Christ preached that “The Truth will set you free,” and further he said that “I came to bear witness to the Truth.” Atheists also agree that “We are ready to accept the Truth of any matter but not the belief of any religion.” And Mahatma Gandhi, who became a global leader in the 20th century, summarized the core of all religions as: “All religions are different paths that seek the same Truth. There is no religion higher than Truth and Righteousness.” From the discussion above, we understand that nearly all religions emphasize Truth as the foundation of our freedom, liberation, and happiness. But why is Truth so vital in our lives? It's because following the truth helps us recognize evil and sin in our lives, and it encourages reconciliation with all beings in our existence. This leads to forgiveness, justice, and harmony at all levels. Therefore, a shared search for Truth through inter-religious dialogue is essential for promoting morality in humanity via Reconciliation. Reconciliation then becomes our next crucial guiding principle in Universal Spirituality.

## 5. Promotion of reconciliation through compassion and mercy

As we all experience in our lives, only when we accept the hard truths (both positive and negative qualities) about ourselves do we become humble, honest, repentant, purified, transformed, and authentic. Individually, once a person becomes truthful and honest with himself or herself, he or she humbly accepts his or her faults, mistakes, wrongdoings, and virtues, and goes through a process of self-realization, repentance, reconciliation, transformation, self-acceptance, and attains inner peace and happiness.

The meaning of the word ‘reconciliation’ is to ‘make peace with,’ ‘to make friends with,’ or ‘to get re-united with’ oneself and other beings and persons. In the four-way reconciliation, a person begins with a) reconciliation with oneself and proceeds through b) reconciliation with the Supreme Power (God or Dharma), c) reconciliation with other human beings, and d) reconciliation with Nature, along with its elements and creatures. This four-way reconciliation motivates a person to give up greed, attachments, pride, and hatred, and to grow in simplicity, sharing, humility, and

compassion. It thus enables him or her to attain personal credibility, authenticity, integrity, and harmony with all beings in our existence, which in turn fosters joy, happiness, security, and hope in his or her life.

Thus, we see that promoting the search for Truths through Inter-religious dialogue in Universal Spirituality fosters overall reconciliation, leading to integrity, authenticity, simplicity, generosity, humility, compassion, purity, and peace in individuals. Additionally, it encourages reconciliation, justice, equality, fraternity, peace, and harmony within a nation or society. Therefore, in Universal Spirituality, the promotion of Reconciliation is a fundamental guiding principle. The spirit of Reconciliation will certainly seek justice and empowerment for the weakest and the poorest in our societies and nations. Consequently, this will be our following guiding principle in Universal Spirituality.

## 6. Empowerment of the weakest through justice

Truth-based reconciliation will surely motivate us to deliver justice to the most vulnerable and marginalized groups in our nations and societies who have suffered for a long time. The materially poor, the physically and mentally challenged, girl children, women, the sick, and the elderly in our community need special attention to ensure their safety, well-being, empowerment, and peaceful living. Supporting and empowering them will promote peace, happiness, hope, mercy, and harmony within them, among us, and throughout society as a whole.

## 7. Promoting the spirit of seeking the meaning and purpose of life

Humans’ pursuit of meaning and purpose in life is a fundamental aspect of every person. This quest for meaning is essential to the spiritual dimension and life of each individual. Therefore, in Universal Spirituality as well, the spirit of searching for life’s meaning and purpose must be a core guiding principle. To foster this quest in everyone, spiritual practices such as Introspection, Constant Union with the Supreme Power (God), Meditation, Self-evaluation, Self-purification, and Self-realization— which lead to Inner Freedom, Compassion, and Service-mindedness— should be ingrained in each person. It is this spiritual effort within

Universal Spirituality that will enlighten and empower individuals to sincerely practice all the other six guiding principles mentioned above.

## Conclusion

Although everyone longs for ‘Justice, Peace, Reconciliation, Harmony, Love, Compassion, Mercy, and Hope’ in their lives, the path to achieving them remains a mystery for many. The Universal Spirituality presented here offers hope as the most effective pathway for people to attain these deeply desired virtues.

May the guiding principles of this Universal Spirituality, namely,

1. care for our common home, Mother Earth (eco-spirituality)
2. care for human solidarity and morality
3. inter-religious relations building and spiritual development
4. common search for truth
5. promotion of reconciliation through compassion and mercy
6. empowerment of the weakest through justice
7. promoting the spirit of seeking the meaning and purpose of life,

enlighten, empower, inspire, and impel us to become torch bearers in the modern world as shining stars of justice, peace, reconciliation, harmony, joy, mercy, hope, **and happiness** on earth.





# A JESUIT'S JOURNEY THROUGH MARGINS, DIALOGUE AND HOPE

Ignatius Ismartono, S.J. (IDO)

*“That sense of difference was not always hostile, but it constantly brought an awareness of being watched, scrutinized, or misunderstood.”*

Now, at eighty years old, I find myself reflecting not only on the years I have lived but also on the many lives I have been privileged to walk alongside. My journey as a Jesuit has taken me through remote villages, university campuses, interfaith gatherings, and crisis centers. For the past fifteen years, I have been deeply involved in work with a humanitarian organization focused on victims of forced migration and human trafficking—those displaced by deception, violence, or poverty and often overlooked by society.

But my formation started much earlier. As a young Jesuit, I was assigned to serve as a parish priest in a remote, underdeveloped village, a place that was very isolated at the time. There, I learned what it meant to be part of a community with limited resources but great dignity. After two years, I moved to an urban setting, where I worked as a university chaplain and lecturer in Catholic theology at a state university for thirteen years. It was a new kind of mission field—one of ideas, academic discussion, and students searching for meaning. Later, I was entrusted with the role of Executive Secretary for Interreligious Dialogue at the Bishops' Conference of Indonesia, a position I held for nine years. Finally, for six years, I worked at the Crisis Centre of the same Conference, addressing social and pastoral emergencies, both sudden and structural.

A significant turning point in my self-awareness happened at age twenty, when I began to understand what it truly meant to live as a member of a minority group among the Muslim majority. Until then, I had taken many things for granted. But once I entered broader society, especially within academic and political settings, I started to experience firsthand what it was

like to be “the other.” That sense of difference was not always hostile, but it constantly brought an awareness of being watched, scrutinized, or misunderstood.

Over the years, I have recognized certain recurring patterns—behaviors, perceptions, and structures—that have shaped my experiences across very different contexts. While the stories and settings may vary, the underlying dynamics often resemble each other. I have identified at least four such patterns that continue to resonate in my memory and reflections.

## 1. Stigmatization, Marginalization, Victimization

Time and again, I saw people labeled and pushed aside, eventually reduced to objects of pity or scorn. For example, when I worked with migrant workers, I met many women who had been trafficked under the guise of domestic labor, only to end up abused and undocumented abroad. Upon their return, instead of being welcomed, they were often blamed for their suffering or, worse, treated as moral failures. Their trauma was not only physical but also deeply social. Society often turns victims into the guilty.

A particularly tragic and political example is the experience of those accused of being communists during



Ignatius Ismartono, S.J. is an Indonesian Jesuit priest known for his long commitment to social justice, interreligious dialogue, and accompaniment of vulnerable communities. His ministry has taken him from remote villages to areas marked by conflict, where he has worked closely with marginalized and wounded populations, developing a deep understanding of human suffering and resilience.

the anti-communist purges in Indonesia after 1965. Many were imprisoned without trial, and their identities were marked with the label “eks tapol” (former political prisoner), printed on their identity cards. This label led to lifelong marginalization. They were not allowed to enter the civil service, their children were barred from military academies and often from public universities, and they were socially shunned. A simple accusation resulted in detention, surveillance, and public suspicion. Stigmatized by the label, marginalized by policy, and victimized by exclusion, they were forced to live in silence and fear long after their prison sentences ended.

I have also observed similar patterns among people living with HIV/AIDS, members of minority religious groups, or those from impoverished backgrounds. What begins as a stigma, a label, or a stereotype often evolves into marginalization in policies, access to services, and public perception. Over time, these groups face victimization not only from individuals but also from the very structures meant to protect them.



## 2. Conflict, Tolerance, Dialogue, Collaboration

I have observed this pattern in many forms, from violent interreligious conflict to institutional injustice. A long-standing example is the case of GKI Yasmin in Bogor [West Java, Indonesia], where a Protestant congregation, despite having a legal permit and a Supreme Court ruling in their favor, was barred from using their church building. Local authorities, pressured by intolerant groups, sealed the church, forcing the community to worship on sidewalks for years. This act of intolerance was not a random incident but reflected deeper structural resistance to religious diversity.

On a more tragic scale, I witnessed firsthand the interreligious violence in Ambon (1999–2002), where decades of peaceful coexistence between Muslims and Christians were shattered almost overnight. Churches and mosques were burned, entire neighborhoods destroyed, and people killed in the name of religion. The pain of Ambon remains etched in my memory, not only because of the suffering but also because of the resilience and courage that emerged afterward.

In both situations, the path to healing started with tolerance, not just passive coexistence, but an active effort to make room for each other's presence. This led to dialogue: in Ambon, interfaith groups began organizing community conversations, peace education for youth, and joint memorials. I was privileged to participate in forums where Muslim and Christian leaders shared their grief and hopes together.

From dialogue, collaboration developed. In Ambon, Muslims and Christians together rebuilt schools, revived shared markets, and hosted cultural events celebrating both traditions. In Bogor, although the GKI Yasmin church remained sealed for years, interfaith solidarity grew stronger as Muslims joined Christians in public worship, acting as a form of resistance and witness.

## 3. Exclusivity, Openness, Exchange of Perspectives, Mutual Enrichment

In religious and cultural encounters, I noticed a pattern that started with exclusivity—a belief that only one worldview is valid. But through pastoral work and academic dialogue, I saw hearts and minds open. I remember a series of seminars between Muslim and Catholic students, initially marked by suspicion. But as we moved from formal debates to shared meals and stories, the exclusivism began to soften. What emerged was not syncretism but a respectful exchange—a willingness to listen deeply and be changed.

In several encounters, I saw how genuine openness helped people learn from other traditions without losing their own. A Muslim professor once told me that Catholic social teaching influenced how he thought about justice in his faith. I have also been deeply enriched by the values of patience, submission, and hospitality found in Islamic spirituality.

## 4. Tension – Strain: Between Institutional Religion and Lived Spirituality; Between Continuity and Discontinuity; Between Charity and Structural Empowerment

Throughout my life, I have sensed the inevitable tensions within religious life and mission. There is a creative yet fragile space between the institutional Church and the spontaneous movements of lived spirituality. I have witnessed the fire of the Spirit moving in places where institutional structures were either absent or unresponsive. I have also experienced how structures are essential to support mission and prevent harm.

A particularly sensitive tension is that between continuity and discontinuity. That is, how we preserve the integrity of our faith tradition while also allowing for the changes required by new cultural, historical, and generational contexts.

One example of this is the cultural shift in ritual practices among young Catholics in Indonesia. In many regions, particularly in Eastern Indonesia, Catholicism has been deeply enculturated through local customs, with liturgies often featuring traditional dances, chants, and attire. These expressions carry deep meaning and spiritual significance, especially for older generations and rural communities. However, many young Catholics, particularly those studying or working in cities, find such expressions less accessible or relevant. Instead, they are more drawn to contemporary forms of worship, personal reflection, or digital expressions of spirituality.

This presents a pastoral dilemma. Should we prioritize preserving traditional forms to maintain cultural continuity, or should we embrace new expressions that might erode the richness of communal and symbolic heritage?

Both options have merit and risk. Rigid continuity can alienate the young; sudden discontinuity can unmoor tradition. The pastoral path, I have found, is to build bridges: create opportunities where old and new can meet. Allow young people to reinterpret traditional forms in their own voice. Encourage liturgical creativity that remains rooted in the sacraments. In this way, we do not abandon the past but allow it to live and breathe in the present.

*“Tolerance leads to dialogue, dialogue to collaboration.”*



## Final Reflection

These patterns of marginalization, conflict, dialogue, openness, and tension have not only shaped my work but have also formed my soul. They have taught me that ministry is not just about preaching or programs but about walking alongside people in their most vulnerable moments, and being willing to let their pain, wisdom, and resilience transform me.

Now in the twilight of my years, I remain deeply convinced that the mission of faith is not to dominate, but to serve the world's wounded dignity. It is in walking with the marginalized, speaking truth amid conflict, opening our hearts to the faith of others, and embracing the tensions of our time that we live the Gospel most fully.

***"In both situations, the path to healing started with tolerance, not just passive coexistence, but an active effort to make room for each other's presence."***



# ACCEPTING A SECULARIZED WORLD

Renzo De Luca, S.J. (JPN)

When we started discussing secularization, we never imagined we would have to experience the current situation. After a period in which we “fought against secularization,” we are beginning to see that there are also positive sides to it. Still, it remains challenging for us to adjust to a culture where it seems that everything spiritual holds little value.

In Nagasaki, where I have lived for more than 20 years, there is an interfaith dialogue group I am part of, with representatives from many local religions participating. Among the members, the largest group is Buddhists, who belong to various factions. The Shinto community makes up the majority of the population, but is less active in interfaith dialogue. There are several Protestant groups and some of the “New Religions” like Sokka Gakkai, Risshoko Sekai, and others. We meet several times a year and organize activities that address all religions, such as peace, disarmament, and more.

During these meetings, talking to Buddhist and Shinto monks, I learned that secularization affects these two religions more than Christianity in Japan.

They also lament that families traditionally linked to a temple no longer participate in activities, ask for prayers, funerals, blessings, etc., as they did not long ago. They are also closing, tearing down, and selling temples, dissolving communities on a much larger scale than the Catholic Church. This helped me see our Church’s problem from a different perspective. It is not only a

problem of the Church; it affects society as a whole and, consequently, the Catholic Church as well. Certainly, knowing this does not solve the problem, but it helps us understand it within a larger context. If it is not solely a Church problem, then a solution only within the Church is unlikely, especially considering that our preaching in Japan mainly targets non-Christians.

Seeing this deviation from anything that seems religious in a broad sense, it’s important to work with people beyond beliefs or affiliations to build a more open, compassionate, and spiritual society.

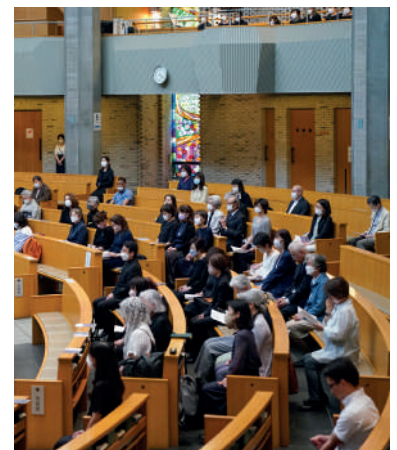
## Latent spirituality

Although it isn’t visible outwardly, I believe that spirituality, in a broad sense, is still present. I’ll share some experiences with you.

Personally, I noticed a change in attitude during the major disasters that affected Japan the most—the tsunami and the pandemic. Maybe because it became clear that material things weren’t enough at that time, there was a brief shift toward the spiritual. Suddenly, people showed solidarity with each other, even without any prior connection. Volunteer work, which isn’t common in Japan, suddenly increased (and continues in various forms today). The children, who usually stay in their rooms playing electronic games, now play together in open spaces. However, to my disappointment and that of many others, once the situation returned to normal, coldness and skepticism toward all things religious came back. I realized that deep inside Japanese society—and in others as well—there is something that resonates with the spiritual and the religious; however,

most of the time, that aspect doesn’t surface and isn’t part of society.

Most adult conversions in Japan stem from this type of experience, as if it were necessary to endure a violent clash that dismantles the life they’ve built up until then and reveals a spiritual dimension they hadn’t recognized before. As Fr. Arrupe recounts, after the Second World War, with the experiences of the atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, people endured a brutal, violent shock. It suddenly became clear that the imperialist Japan, which they believed would continue to grow, no longer existed. People felt that any day could be their last—whether due to radiation, severe injuries, or lack of food and work. In that environment, people were compelled to reconsider their relationships with others, with God, and with themselves. At that time, many conversions to Christianity occurred, and I guess other religions were also flourishing.





Renzo De Luca, S.J. is an Argentinian Jesuit priest and missionary who has served in Japan since 1985. He later became curator of the 26 Martyrs Museum in Nagasaki and held leadership roles including Superior of the Nagasaki and Fukuoka–Nagasaki Jesuit communities. In 2017 he was appointed Provincial of the Jesuits in Japan, bringing decades of experience in mission, history, and cultural dialogue.

## Looking at Japan's past

Since I am engaged in historical research, I often observe that Christian documents from around 450 years ago in Japan reveal similar patterns.

When St. Francis Xavier, S.J. (1506-52) and his two companions (Father Torres and Brother Fernandez) arrived in Japan (1549), the situation was similar. Japanese feudalism had destroyed much of Japan's culture and material heritage. What was a stable kingdom today could become a fiend enslaved by a stronger enemy tomorrow. The Emperor had lost all power; military leaders ruled if they had people and weapons, and at any moment, a revolution could cost them their lives.

In this social context, the arrival of the missionaries was undoubtedly a memorable event for the Japanese people. It signaled something new and hopeful. The missionaries preached about salvation and eternal life, emphasizing that before God, we are all equal. Christians stated that neither the founder of Buddhism nor the emperor or shogun (military leader) was divine. To us, it might seem logical, even vulgar, but I believe that for Japan at the time, it was revolutionary. Of course, Japan's existing religions also preached charity and salvation, but at that time, their messages didn't reach people—either because Japanese religions were highly politicized or militarized, or because each faction was formed to support the people they represented.

Xavier and his companions demonstrated apostolic courage that impressed the Japanese of the time. First, they attempted to gain the emperor's permission. Since that was neither feasible nor practical, they quickly adapted to the feudal system of the period. In Yamaguchi, a prosperous city at the time, they received permission from the local lord (Yoshitaka Ouchi, 1507-1551) to

preach. Many people were drawn in. There were debates with several Buddhist sects. However, what impressed people the most was the charity and genuine interest that Javier and his companions showed.

Soon, other missionaries began social service efforts, helping the needy regardless of whether they were Christians or non-Christians. Charitable acts, such as burying the dead without relatives—a common practice at the time—had a significant impact. Brother Luis de Almeida, S.J. (c. 1525-1584), who came to Japan as a merchant and later became a Jesuit, used his medical knowledge to treat the sick, who had no one to care for them. His actions also served as a sign to the people of that era. This attitude drew many to the new religion, which did good without discrimination. Many of those who faced discrimination converted and later became outstanding missionaries and collaborators. Among them was the Japanese Brother Lorenzo Ryosai, S.J. (1526-92), who, despite being nearly blind, used his musical skills to translate and interpret what the missionaries said. Some disabled individuals or those with Hansen's disease even achieved martyrdom and are now saints, such as St. Lazarus of Kyoto, one of the 16 Martyrs canonized by Pope St. John Paul II. Many other men and women, who were discriminated against by society, also contributed to shaping the Church of that time.

## Missionaries Return to Japan

After a 250-year absence of missionaries in Japan, the Foreign Missions of Paris (M.E.P.) missionaries rebuilt and regularized the church that had remained hidden for more than two centuries.

The Jesuits returned in 1908 with the goal of establishing a higher education institution, which eventually became the University of Sofia. Fr. Arrupe was closely involved in both the development of the university and the

Province of Japan, which, when he arrived, was still under the jurisdiction of a German province. One of the legacies Fr. Arrupe left was the creation of an international province. To this day, both provincials and superiors are equally Japanese or foreign, without conflict based on nationality or origin. As Fr. Arrupe desired, it remains the Province of Japan, not the Japanese Province. This internationality—though not without challenges—is a source of richness and a symbol for the Church in Japan, which today faces the challenge of welcoming and integrating many foreign Christians.

Another of Arrupe's legacies was the School of Languages. Before his time, missionaries studied Japanese briefly to be able to speak and understand it, based on their available resources. From experience, he saw that this approach resulted in missionaries who could not use the language effectively, which had negative effects on the Mission. Therefore, Fr. Arrupe decreed that all missionaries arriving in Japan must study the language for two years. This rule still applies today and has produced good results. An important point is that language isn't just a way to convey the Gospel clearly, but also a tool to listen to and learn from the locals about their needs and feelings, so we can work together in the Mission.

***To listen,  
learn, and  
work together  
in the Mission.  
Before God, we  
are all equal.***



## Too much Information, lack of Communication

I think we're currently facing a communication crisis. Although we have more information than we can process, we're unable to share the gospel or understand what the current generation needs. With modern learning tools, we may speak Japanese better than those before us, but that doesn't improve our communication. In fact, I believe we communicate less effectively than they did.

Saying that the media create dependence and ignore moral or emotional aspects does not help evangelization. On the contrary, denying how young people communicate today is to dismiss the possibility of sharing the Gospel in that environment. Whether we like it or not, most young people rely heavily on today's media, including the internet, smartphones, anime, manga, artificial intelligence, and more.

It has been over 400 years since Fr. A. Valignano, S.J. (1539-1606) wrote about the mission in Japan:

*"in such a way that the Gospel is promulgated that together they do not want to introduce with it the laws and customs of Europe, which are not simpliciter necessary for salvation and on the other hand are contrary to the customs and laws of Japan and therefore unwelcome and make the Gospel odious" ("Obediences" of Valignano and Pasio. I use here the transcription of A. Taladriz in his edition of the book "Sumario", p.167)*

Valignano's insight can be very helpful to us. Despite his sixteenth-century European mindset, he recognized that the way we transmit the Gospel can become a barrier to evangelization. The Gospel itself remains unchanged, but we need to find a way to communicate it that is

"not hateful" to the culture and people we aim to reach.

Reflecting on this, we could say that we have lost contact with today's people and that we do not know what language or method we should follow. Recognizing this is not easy. But if we look at the history of the Church throughout the world, we will see that it has always been and will always be an important theme, in constant development. What was effective years ago is no longer effective; We must be in constant adaptation. Certainly, it does not seem something within our reach. But that is precisely what leads us to trust in God.

The one who told us "go into all the world" and "I will always be with you to the end of the age" (Mt 28:20) is surely waiting for us in every culture, in every heart that feels touched by His infinite mercy. And, without a doubt, He will give us, when He sees fit, the way to better reach and transmit His message. In the meantime, even if we do not yet see the fruits, our work will be to keep sowing, with hope placed in Him.

***"The Gospel remains unchanged, but we must find ways to communicate it in a language that people understand today, so that it is not a barrier but a bridge to every culture and every heart."***

# THE SOCIETY OF JESUS AND ITS MISSION TO STRUGGLE AGAINST ATHEISM



Thomas Massaro, S.J. (UEA)

*Jesuits of the most recent generations probably do not think very often of our corporate mission to engage in efforts to counter atheism. I, for one, entered the novitiate a week before the start of the Thirty-third General Congregation (September-October 1983), at which Peter-Hans Kolvenbach was elected Superior General.*



In the four decades since, the collective memory of GC 31 and 32, the two preceding congregations that dealt most fully and explicitly with the call to combat atheism, has naturally faded somewhat. It is, of course, beneficial to look back, as this brief treatment below endeavors to do, to review how the Society of Jesus responded to this challenge, for the cultural and theological issues surrounding the reality of atheism remain as relevant today as they were in the more immediate aftermath of the Second Vatican Council.

It was Pope Paul VI who addressed the newly assembled delegates of GC 31 and placed the struggle against modern atheism on the agenda of the Society. Even before Pope Francis made a habit of seeking out opportunities to meet with his Jesuit confreres gathered in Rome and many other locations around the world, we were accustomed to the sight of Supreme Pontiffs addressing Jesuit gatherings (as well as solemn deliberations of other religious congregations, especially when they convene in Rome). The most recent occasion was 24 October 2025, when Pope Leo XIV spoke to the assembly of Jesuit Provincials, Regional Superiors, General Counsellors, and Secretaries at the start of a scheduled meeting of Major Superiors held in Rome. We have come to expect popes to offer words of encouragement and affirmation for Jesuit leaders as they supervise so many impressive ministries around the world.

But on May 7, 1965, Paul VI was eager to lay out a rather pointed agenda and to specify a mission for the years ahead. Halfway through Paul's address on the opening day of GC 31, the assembled delegates heard a papal summons to "resist atheism with all force," as he lauded the Society of Jesus as "a champion of the church and holy religion in adversity." The Pope referred to atheism with a variety of descriptors: he called it a "fearful danger," a "frightening peril," an "anti-God movement" and "militant godlessness," even providing a compact taxonomy of the varieties of modern atheism, including philosophical atheism, hedonistic atheism, and other types.

***"The cultural and theological challenges surrounding atheism remain as relevant today as ever, calling us to respond with clarity, faith, and a renewed sense of mission."***



Thomas Massaro, S.J. is an American Jesuit priest and leading scholar of Catholic social ethics. A professor of moral theology at Fordham University, he previously taught at Weston Jesuit School of Theology, Boston College, and the Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University, where he also served as dean. He holds a doctorate in Christian social ethics from Emory University and is the author of numerous books and over one hundred articles on Catholic social teaching, social justice, public policy, and the moral leadership of Pope Francis.

## The Challenge of Paul VI

Before we move on to ponder the Society's response to this call to mission, it is helpful to consider at least these three aspects of the pope's challenge. First, it is hardly surprising that Paul VI would broach this particular topic, as atheism had been a longstanding concern of his, for he viewed it as a serious threat to faith in his time. The urgency of countering atheism occasionally made appearances in the documents of Vatican II, which were promulgated with his signature and over which the sitting pontiff exerted considerable influence. After ascending to the papacy on June 21, 1963, between the first and second sessions of the Council, Paul placed his personal stamp on the deliberations of the assembled bishops and, of course, the shape of the momentous documents they voted upon and approved. Perhaps the best example is *Gaudium et Spes* (the Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World, the contents of which were being debated while GC 31 was underway), which devoted several sections (see nos. 19-21) to the reality of modern atheism and the importance of opposing it.

Second, it is worth noting the distinctly martial language (such as the commonly employed phrase "combating atheism") with which Pope Paul couched his call to the Society of Jesus to take up this ecclesial challenge as part of its particular mission. Paul's choice of words and phrases in his opening address to GC 31 includes an ample dose of military terminology, beginning with this sentence that summarizes the entire mandate: "We bid the companions of Ignatius to muster all their courage and fight this good fight, making all the necessary plans for a well-organized



and successful campaign." Before quoting at some length the sixteenth-century Formula of the Institute (which itself famously employs the analogy of soldiers for Christ), Paul VI refers to the Society of Jesus as "a legion" and "an army of proven valor." He proceeds to employ phrases such as "making a stout united stand against atheism" and "the solid bulwark of the Church, the pledged protector of the Holy See, the militia trained in the practice of virtue." Military metaphors may not be everyone's preferred way of referring to any feature of the Society's apostolic operations or governance, but it is an undeniable feature of this chapter of Jesuit history.

It is also worth noting that Pope Paul returned to address the same gathered Jesuits at the conclusion of GC 31, seemingly quite satisfied that they had taken up his mandate with due seriousness and thoroughness. Most prominently, the delegates had adopted an entire document (Decree 3 is titled "The Task of the Society Regarding Atheism," encompassing 17 paragraphs of text) that

expressed a firm intention to reorient Jesuit apostolates around this mission to oppose atheism. The decree outlined a markedly ambitious agenda to understand and to address the cultural conditions that give rise to nonbelief, pledging that "the mandate of resisting atheism should permeate all the accepted forms of our apostolates" (no. 11). The pope's November 16, 1966, closing address to the delegates, although nearly twice the length of his opening address eighteen months earlier, contains only a few traces of martial language or military metaphors. Instead, the pope's text on that occasion favored the idiom of virtue ("ardor" and "zeal" are invoked here as laudable Jesuit qualities—admittedly somewhat military-adjacent in cast) in the effort to exhort the Society to continue its strenuous efforts in this regard. Third, it is prudent to acknowledge from the outset what kind of challenge contemporary atheism amounts to. While academics (including the thousands of Jesuits who then and now identify as such) might have a predilection to approach atheism primarily

as a variety of intellectual puzzle to be solved, a more holistic understanding is more appropriate. The denial of God is ultimately a pastoral challenge that taps into the most profound mysteries of human persons in their freedom and conscience. Seen through the eyes of faith, sharing a relationship with our Creator is a defining characteristic of the human condition. In the words of the Vatican II document *Gaudium et Spes* (no. 19), “many of our contemporaries have never recognized this intimate and vital link with God or have explicitly rejected it.” When speaking of relationships, even the special and solemn ones that involve the divine, we enter a realm that transcends any one human faculty, such as intelligence in isolation. We are engaging in a matter of the heart, not merely the head. While there is a place for rational argument (as often featured in the genre of Christian apologetics), we must also acknowledge the salience of broadly emotional responses to the reality of atheism in our times. In taking up the challenge of atheism, we have entered the realm of meaning-making, of human affect, of the deepest wellspring of human hope (or alternatively, despair).

These latter observations turn a spotlight not just on atheists but also on believers, including the members of the Society of Jesus who respond to the papal call to mission. On this weighty and visceral level, atheism, the rejection of a relationship with God (or even sheer acknowledgment of the divine), may be perceived by believers as something of a betrayal and affront to faith, even an abomination. The committed theist sees the atheist as suffering from a blind spot, a self-imposed alienation, or perhaps a type of obstinate amnesia that indulges in forgetfulness regarding our dependence upon God. One can detect this perspective in the recurring expression of concern on the part of Pope Paul on this topic, as he clearly considers atheism as something sinister in nature, threatening not only the state of one’s own soul but also the wellbeing of humankind in general, for example, concerning prospects for the proper training of youth. The church’s vehement and longstanding opposition to totalitarian governments, which often adopt and even enforce systemic atheism as a policy of the state, also springs from such perceptions. In shaping efforts to counter atheism, Jesuits (or any believers for that matter) do well to consider these broader parameters regarding the portrayal of the challenge, as effective responses to atheism cannot be reduced to a single strategy, orientation, or human faculty.

## General Congregation 32

Less than a decade later, another set of Jesuit delegates descended upon Rome for the convening of GC 32, called by Pedro Arrupe not to elect a new Superior General but to discern the apostolic way forward for the Society under rapidly evolving circumstances in the church and secular society. While consciousness of and commitment to the struggle against atheism is far from absent from the deliberations of general congregation 32 (which met from December 2, 1974, to March 7, 1975), none of its 16 decrees displays an exclusive focus on this topic. Some may well express initial surprise or even disappointment that the delegates neglected to continue the solid and explicit focus of the previous congregation on this momentous topic. However, the keen observer will detect in a handful of the most prominent and creative of the decrees a merging of several apostolic priorities and themes that certainly include efforts against atheism, but which also incorporate such signature themes as the promotion of social justice and inculturation.

This is especially evident in Decree 2 (the Declaration “Jesuit Today”), Decree 4 (“Our Mission Today: The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice”), and Decree 5 (“The Work of Inculturation of the Faith and Promotion of Christian Life”). It is by no means the case that a novel set of concerns (e.g., social justice, inculturation) somehow came to eclipse previous foci such as the struggle against atheism; rather, the preparatory committee and the delegates followed the prudent path of synthesizing a large number of priorities within a constellation of social concerns (expressed in postulata submitted in advance of the congregation, as well as in other preparatory documents) into a compact list of actionable items. The official minutes of GC 32 attest to this process of sifting and coalescing, by which the many disparate concerns were grouped thematically under ten headings, three of which (the most relevant to confronting atheism) were “the criteria of our apostolate today,” “mission and apostolic obedience,” and “the promotion of justice.”

Supporting this interpretation of the historical record is a most illuminating account of a highly perceptive delegate to GC 32, the church historian John W. Padberg (1926-2021) of the Missouri Province. In an essay of over 100 pages published as a double issue of the U.S.A.-based journal *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* (vol. xv, nos. 3-4 for May and September 1983), Father Padberg confirms that the concerns of many hundreds of postulata focused upon Jesuit apostolates were amalgamated to group “extremely important material on the promotion of justice and on the service of faith, the latter especially in the light of Pope Paul VI’s request at the 31st congregation that the

***“The challenge of atheism is not merely an intellectual problem, but a deeply human and pastoral reality that calls us to engage both the mind and the heart in the search for meaning, faith, and hope.”***

Society occupy itself with the question of atheism” (p. 8 of his extended essay “The Society True to Itself: A Brief History of the 32nd General Congregation of the Society of Jesus”). It is not that atheism somehow “failed to make the short list” of items that would inspire entire decrees, but rather that Jesuits were increasingly perceiving profound interconnections among a bundle of related cultural challenges, of which atheism emerged as one thread closely woven among others.

## Practical atheism

People of any culture suffering because of deep structural injustice also often experience despair and alienation from God as well as from their neighbors. The apostolic works of the Society of Jesus rightly strive to benefit all such people through responses of compassion, reconciliation, and empowerment. It is no exaggeration to claim that the relative absence of these qualities accounts for much of the “practical atheism,” characterized by nihilism, pessimism, and moral relativism, that plagues our times. An attentive reading of nos. 9-12 and 18-23 of Decree 2 (“Jesuits Today”) make crystal clear this felicitous overlapping of apostolic themes, even when no explicit mention of countering atheism is present. One high point in this regard is in the sixth paragraph of Decree 2, which notes:

"Ignorance of the Gospel on the part of some, and rejection of it by others, are intimately related to the many grave injustices prevalent in the world today." The delegates complete the conceptual loop three paragraphs later with this assertion: "The service of faith and the promotion of justice cannot be for us simply one ministry among others. It must be the integrating factor of all our ministries."

The broadest category encompassing all these concerns regarding the Jesuit mission is, of course, evangelization. It is no coincidence that Father Jorge Bergoglio, who attended GC 32 as Provincial of Argentina, continued to emphasize these rich connections in his eventual Petrine ministry. Indeed, effective evangelization emerged as a key leitmotif of his papacy. Incidentally, Pope Francis frequently expressed his great esteem for an apostolic exhortation (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*) published the same year (1975) that GC 32 concluded its momentous work in defining how Jesuits would understand their mission and reshape their apostolates, with a proactive approach to evangelization. The author of that document on evangelization was, of course, Pope Paul VI himself.

When future generations interpret the history of the Society of Jesus through the post-Vatican II era, their accounts will surely include several important elements. One central theme will, of course, be the Society's response to the call, contained in the Vatican II document on religious life, *Perfectae Caritatis*, for each religious institute to undertake the renewal of its original charism. The ongoing revival of Ignatian spirituality in Jesuit circles worldwide testifies eloquently to these efforts. Another theme will be the renewal of Jesuit apostolates, and the materials treated above (regarding the work of successive General Congregations in reshaping Jesuit missions) will rightly be cited and assessed. The Jesuit response to the summons of Pope Paul VI to struggle against the multiple forms of contemporary atheism will naturally loom large in any future historical assessment.

What a worthy project it would be to conduct a comprehensive inventory of Jesuit efforts to combat atheism in the six decades since the Society received this mission! This would indeed constitute an ambitious research agenda. Since many of the principal agents in these developments have already gone to God, and since memories of many



remaining witnesses of that era have faded, we would naturally seek valuable recorded evidence of what initiatives unfolded in various Jesuit works and circles in the decades since 1965. Were new study institutes started? Were curricula adopted or catechetical efforts sparked in the effort to counter atheism? Perhaps province archives across the globe could be scoured to turn up long-forgotten evidence of efforts, bold or modest in scope, to counter the roots and effects of modern atheism. And perhaps younger Jesuits and close colleagues around the globe might even continue to participate in efforts to counter atheism today that proceed with no specific reference to (or even awareness of) the call of Pope Paul (six decades ago now) to engage in such efforts. We wonder: Would it be accurate to claim that the Society has followed through on the pledge that the struggle against atheism will "permeate our apostolates," as Decree 3 of GC 31 directs? Future issues of *Promotio Justitiae* may well provide promising directions for answering these fascinating questions about Jesuit efforts past and present.

As a North American Jesuit, I would hasten to identify at least one impressive contribution from my own assistancy to the understanding and response

to contemporary atheism. The late Michael J. Buckley, S.J. (1931-2019) was widely recognized as a luminary of towering intellect. While holding important positions at Jesuit institutions of higher learning on both coasts of the U.S., Buckley published two highly respected volumes on atheism, both published by Yale University Press. The first (1987) is *At the Origins of Modern Atheism*, a tour de force of historical scholarship (with over 60 pages of detailed endnotes) documenting the intellectual history (much of it emanating from France in the early modern period) that set the landscape for the various forms of atheism we encounter today. The second (2004) is *Denying and Disclosing God: The Ambiguous Progress of Modern Atheism*, a work with a markedly broader palette of times and places, but no less depth of analysis.

One can only wish that Michael Buckley were still with us and that he could offer the cogent analysis that is typical of his many written works, but this time focused on the early twenty-first-century public controversies revolving around the "New Atheists." This loosely coordinated cohort of philosophers, scientists, journalists and other public intellectuals (mostly of the North Atlantic countries) long reveled in provocative public appearances and debates aimed at debunking religious belief (often employing the dismissive epithet "the Sky Daddy" for the deity). The New Atheists promoted the so-called "rational case for atheism," expressing skepticism regarding

any elements of supernaturalism, with decidedly mixed results and likely having ebbed by now. Figures such as Richard Dawkins, the late Daniel Dennett, and the late Christopher Hitchens never truly achieved household-name status but did continue a centuries-old tradition of criticizing those who pointed to evidence of divine intervention in nature and challenging the influence of religious belief in society. It has often been quite instructive to observe the exchange of opinions, especially on those occasions when neither the public atheists nor their opponents summarily dismiss the other side as mere opportunists or victims of false consciousness, but instead take their interlocutors' arguments with due seriousness, in a spirit of respectful dialogue. While opposition to the New Atheists was broad-based and pursued a wide variety of strategies, it was rare for any Jesuit to play a prominent role in efforts to coordinate responses. While this lacuna may be regarded as a missed opportunity to further the Jesuit mission, perhaps the most encouraging aspect of this observation is that Jesuits are not the only ones equipped and eager to conduct this work, even though they comprise the corporate body with a specific papal mandate to do so.

## Conclusion

It remains well worth the effort to ponder, in a continuing way, whether the Society of Jesus has lived up to the call of Paul VI, who laid out his vision of a fulsome Jesuit response to atheism. His precise words on May 7, 1965, are worth citing at some length as we close. Projecting a future of Jesuit efforts concentrated on countering the many varieties of atheism, he declared: "It will be their task to do research, to gather information of all kinds, to publish material, to hold discussions among themselves, to prepare specialists in the field, to pray, to be shining examples of justice and holiness, skilled and well-versed in an eloquence of word and example made bright by heavenly grace..."

Going forward, we might now be moved to ask: What part remains for current and future generations of Jesuits to play in responding to this papal call to action in the mission to oppose contemporary atheism?



***"The challenge of atheism is not merely an intellectual problem, but a deeply human and pastoral reality that calls us to engage both the mind and the heart in the search for meaning, faith, and hope."***

# WHERE IT SEEMS THAT GOD IS NOT PRESENT



Manuel Hurtado, S.J. (BOL)

I have never been able to separate my vocation from the land where I was born. Bolivia is not a country that is easily understood: it is a tapestry of contradictions, of multiple peoples, of breathtaking heights and jungles overflowing with life. It is also a place where faith is breathed almost like the air: in endless processions, in the embroidery of a 'saya', in a peasant's prayer before sowing, in the gaze of an Amazonian woman who contemplates the river as if it were a sacred book.

But at the same time—and I say this with pain and hope—it is a country where too often we live as if God did not exist. Where one can light a candle with deep devotion, and the next day accept corruption as part of the system. Where patron saints are celebrated with enthusiasm, but the creation that is their home is destroyed. Where dignity is venerated, but the lives of the poor are exploited.

Over time, I have come to understand that this phenomenon is not unique to Bolivia or Latin America. It is what tradition calls practical atheism: not denying God with words, but erasing him from the fundamental decisions of life. This is the field in which I work every day as a Jesuit: a world that claims to believe in God but does not allow God to transform existence. And it is precisely this fracture that GC 32 lucidly named, reminding us that serving the faith requires promoting justice, not as two separate tasks, but as one and the same mission entrusted to us by the Lord. Along the same lines, Gustavo Gutiérrez reminds us that it is not possible to speak of God without taking into account the cry of the poor, because it is there that faith is tested and fulfilled.

What I share here is not an analysis or an academic study. It is something simpler and more fragile: my own testimony, as taught to me by the life of the Bolivian people, Ignatian spirituality, and the Gospel.

## The cracks where I learned to see

At the beginning of my academic service at the University, I thought that lack of faith would be seen in outright rejection, intellectual denial, or explicit indifference. I was wrong.

The true absence of God—the one that really hurts—I found in other places: in the normalization of lies, in the silent renunciation of hope, in the resigned acceptance of injustice, in the cover-up of abuses, in the indifference to the devastated land, and in the accumulated sadness of so many young people without a future.

Bolivia taught me that faith does not die from external attacks, but from internal erosion. And that erosion is noticeable when no one expects God to transform what really weighs heavily.

I have seen it in university classrooms, where almost everyone says they believe, but feel that faith is "useless" for professional decisions; in communities where religious festivals coexist with patronage mechanisms; in rivers that no longer have fish, in forests reduced to ashes; in villages where exploitation becomes an accepted routine.

And within grew a question that continues to accompany me: How can we proclaim the living God in places where life itself seems to have shrunk?

## When GC 32 ceased to be a document and became a path

I knew GC 32 as a revered text within the Society of Jesus. But it was not a text of a decree that convinced me. It was the people's faces.

In a workshop with young university students in Cochabamba, a girl said to me with disarming sincerity: "Father, I believe in God. But when I look for work, when I must decide what to do with my life, when I see that the corrupt prosper... God doesn't count. Not because he doesn't exist, but because he's useless."

I felt a blow to my chest. It was like hearing GC 32 backwards: injustice not only contradicts faith but renders it ineffective. I understood, in a new way, that the call to unite faith and justice is not an ideological program, but the condition of possibility for a faith that wants to be credible. In Gutiérrez's language, we could say that a faith that does not take on the history of the poor ends up speaking of God "with its back turned" on reality and therefore ceases to be Good News.





Manuel Gilberto Hurtado Durán, S.J. is a Bolivian Jesuit priest and theologian whose work centers on systematic theology, theology of religions, and intercultural dialogue. He holds a doctorate from Centre Sèvres in Paris and teaches at the Catholic University of Cochabamba, where he serves as President of the Faculty of Theology San Pablo. His research focuses on Amerindian comparative theology and Indigenous spiritualities.

## The highlands taught me that faith is tested in small things

One cold morning in El Alto (a city next to La Paz, at an altitude of 4300 meters), we were working with students from an Academic Peasant Unit of the Bolivian Catholic University on issues of public ethics. One of them said to me, “Father, I am devout. But to get something done, you have to pay; otherwise, it doesn’t happen. What does God want here?”

I didn’t know how to respond right away. But that question stayed with me for a long time. I discovered that practical atheism is not about denying God, but about accepting that evil has the last word, that there is no alternative, that it is not worth trying anything different.

However, two years later, I saw small acts of resistance among those same young people, such as environmental audits on campus, solidarity support for neighborhood fairs, and proposals for transparency in their own careers. They were small glimmers, but enough to remind me of an Ignatian intuition that continues to sustain me: when faith becomes practice—even in the smallest way—it opens cracks through which God’s light enters.

## The Amazon taught me that faith is defended by caring for life

The most powerful experience I had in the Amazon occurred many years ago, when I was a novice and was sent to Moxos for a few months. I was in a village called San José, accompanied by a Jesuit student. There was a logging company cutting down trees. After a celebration of the word that we had organized in the community, an elderly man approached me and said, “You spoke at Mass (sic) about praying. That’s fine. But praying also means stopping destruction. What good is it to ask God for life if we cut down what gives us life?”. He said it without confrontation, almost as if he were stating the obvious. Today, that phrase has become for me a living parable of *Laudato si’*.

I understood that praying, for them, was learning to look at the forest again as a gift, not as booty. The Amazonian faith is deep, but it is not disembodied. It does not separate God from the river, nor the Creator from his creation. There, evangelization was done by reforestation, sowing in community, measuring water turbidity, caring for what sustains life, and educating with values. And I understood clearly that, in the Amazon region, ecological destruction is a form of practical atheism, and that proclaiming the Gospel necessarily involves defending threatened life.

## The Chaco taught me that faith becomes dignity

In the Guaraní Chaco, I experienced one of the most profound lessons of my mission. It was in the heart of the Bolivian region called Isono, at a community assembly discussing problems of exploitation of some community members who went to work in the sugar cane harvest. Marta, a normally quiet young woman, spoke up and said, “We believe in God. But if we accept being treated as if we are worthless... then we are denying the God who made us.”

That day I understood that faith is not defended first in temples, but in bodies that refuse to continue being humiliated. Evangelization consists of recovering the language, demanding fair contracts, organizing to denounce abuses, and calling each person by their name in Guaraní and not by a number on a work list.

The *ñande reko*—the Guaraní way of being—and the Gospel illuminated each other. We responded to practical atheism not with speeches, but by accompanying the recovery of dignity where it had been denied.

## What does Ignatian spirituality do?

I will put it simply. Ignatian spirituality has taught me not to despair. To trust that God is at work even where I see only weariness or disorder. To look for signs—residues under the ashes—that indicate where life is making its way.

I have found those embers, for example, in a student who decides not to accept a “small” bribe; in an Amazonian woman who teaches her children to care for water; in a young Guaraní man who speaks for the first time in front of his community; in a teacher who resigns from a position for the sake of consistency; in a neighborhood that organizes a soup kitchen during a crisis.

Ignatius invites us to “...in all things seek and find God our Lord” (Constitutions 288). Over the years, I have come to understand that “all things” also includes what seems contrary to God, even on the downside of life: corruption, violence, pollution, indifference, cover — ups. Not because God desires these realities, but because there he struggles to make his way through conscience, solidarity, and the small courageous decisions that no one sees but that sustain the world.

Practical atheism as a wound... and as an opportunity  
I have learned not to see practical atheism only as a threat, but as an open question. It does not necessarily mean rejection of God; often it expresses a hunger for meaning, disenchantment, historical weariness, skepticism toward a faith that does not seem to transform anything.

Many young people say they believe, but they live divided lives. Many adults pray but feel that God does not intervene. Many communities venerate religious symbols but cannot find ways to embody the justice that those symbols proclaim.

And at this point, a conviction deeply rooted in the spirituality and witness of Luis Espinal SJ, forged in a context of violence that seemed to stifle all hope, always comes back to my mind: God is not absent or distant, but present in the concrete lives of those who struggle not to be denied their dignity. As he himself pleaded in one of his prayers: “Present in our brothers and sisters, especially the poorest and most oppressed, may we know how to find You, Lord” (Prayers at Point Blank

Range). Espinal's intuition—so simple and so profound—accompanies me every time I come into contact with practical atheism, because it helps me recognize that every gesture of human dignity is already a theological place, even when no one names it as such. The wound of practical atheism is real, but it can become an opportunity to proclaim a God greater than our inconsistencies: a God who is not offended by being forgotten, but who strives to return by discreet, often invisible paths.

***“Practical atheism is not about denying God, but about accepting that evil has the last word.”***



## What GC 32 taught me in the flesh

GC 32 has become a silent compass for me. It is not a text that I quote, but a perspective that I have taken on: faith becomes real when it touches justice; justice becomes evangelical when it is born of faith; and both become mission when they are lived in community and through discernment.

Subsequent Congregations spoke of inculturation, dialogue, reconciliation. But the intuition is the same: to allow Christ, the reconciler, to link our faith with the real history of our people, our devotions with our public life, our words with our practices. In the words of St. Irenaeus and Gustavo Gutiérrez, it is a matter of confessing that the glory of God is that the poor live, and that any reflection on God that forgets this fact runs the risk of becoming irrelevant.

Sometimes I imagine Fr. Pedro Arrupe visiting Bolivia today. I think he would smile to see that his intuition continues to be embodied in humble places: in the hands that sow where there was fire, in the eyes of young people who discover their vocation as service, in the indigenous languages that are regaining strength, in communities that pray with their feet on the ground.

## The slaughtered lamb standing upright: symbol of a country that insists on rising up

Emilio Travieso's proposal about the Lamb slain and standing (Promotio Iustitiae article from the first week of September 2025) touches me deeply. I feel that this symbol describes Bolivia better than any other. The oracle of the Apocalypse says: "Then I saw, in the midst of the throne and of the four Living Creatures and in the midst of the Elders, a Lamb standing, as if it had been slain" (Rev 5:6). That image encapsulates the Christian paradox: the victim who remains standing, the wound that does not disappear and yet is a place of life.

In many ways, we are a country slaughtered by corruption, violence, inequality, latent racism, the loss of creation, and lack of opportunities. But we are also a country that remains standing because of the faith that resists, the creativity of the people, the strength of the community, the hope that springs forth again, and the dignity that no one can extinguish.

The standing Lamb reminds me that Christ is revealed not only in triumphs, but also in wounds. His resurrection does not erase the scars: it transforms them into a source of life for others. And I sincerely believe that the mission of faith and justice today consists in accompanying that process: helping the scars of the people become places of reconciliation.

## Where I thought God was not, there I found him

If someone asked me where I have found God most in my mission, I would have to respond with very specific scenes: a student who decided to speak the truth when no one else did; a woman who defended her river as if she were defending her children; a young Guaraní man who regained his word; an elderly man who taught me that to pray is to care; a mother who continued to fight for her children's education when she no longer had the strength.

I have discovered that, where I thought God was absent, He had already arrived before me, working silently in the hearts of individuals and peoples.

That is my testimony. That is my hope. And that is the greatest gift Bolivia has given me: to believe again in a God who lives where life seems impossible, a God who, like the Lamb that was slain and stands, never ceases to rise and lift us up.

Perhaps I could say, in closing, that practical atheism is not only a problem to be denounced, but also a theological challenge that calls us to action. GC 32 had the clarity to understand that a faith that does not translate into justice ends up being irrelevant, and Liberation

*"Then I saw, in the midst of the throne and of the four Living Creatures and in the midst of the Elders, a Lamb standing, as if it had been slain" (Rev 5:6)*

Theology was able to name this fracture by showing that God can be found in the concrete history of the poor. Where God seems absent—in normalized injustice, in resignation, in the destruction of life—we are paradoxically entrusted with a spiritual task: to make God credible again through practices of justice, dignity, and care. Perhaps today, in secularized contexts or those tired of religious discourse, the proclamation of the Gospel is less about affirming God and more about making life possible, trusting that, as GC 32 believed, faith is reborn when it is lived where it is most questioned.



# PEDRO ARRUPE AND DISCERNMENT IN COMMON: THE FOUNDING OF THE JESUIT REFUGEE SERVICE

Mark Raper, S.J. (ASL)

*“Reality is superior to ideas... Ideas are discussed, reality is discerned. Discernment is the charisma of the Society.”*

— Pope Francis

Fr Pedro Arrupe gave a master class in communal discernment in Bangkok on 6 August 1981. His impromptu talk to Jesuits from the Thai Region and those working with refugees in Thailand was his last talk as General. Later that night he took the flight to Rome and on arrival had the cerebral stroke that incapacitated him.

Days earlier, at the beginning of August 1981, Fr Arrupe had met me in Manila. He was there for a celebration of the arrival of the first Jesuits to the Philippines, four hundred years earlier. There he asked me to coordinate the new Jesuit Refugee Service in Asia Pacific. Although I could not then travel to be with the other refugee workers in the gathering in Bangkok, his instructions in that talk, which he referred to as his ‘swan song’, and his letter that founded JRS, would guide me during the next twenty years with JRS, and indeed for twenty years following that in successive postings as a major superior.

Fr General Pedro Arrupe had founded the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) the previous year, after an extensive consultation and discernment on the refugee problem. His letter, issued in November 1980 on the feast of St Joseph Pignatelli, gave six clear points on how JRS would facilitate the Society’s response to the refugee problem. But that letter gave no detail about the precise services JRS would offer to refugees. Although he prophesied that JRS would bring tangible healing to refugees, deeper acknowledgement of their plight, and a beneficial impact on the Society,

he gave no instructions on what, precisely, the JRS field personnel should do. That was for discernment on the ground.

## **Pray much: instructions for discernment in Arrupe’s swan song**

Fr Arrupe’s ‘swan song’ was full of rich insights for how to engage constantly in communal discernment on the realities that created the refugee situation and the ways in which the Society and JRS could respond – thus enabling them to live the prophetic character of Ignatian ministry. This is especially apparent in a seemingly strange diversion he made towards the end of his talk, as if he were thinking aloud. “I will tell you something I ask myself very often. Should we give spiritual help to the guerrillas in Latin America? No, you say? Well, I cannot say no.” On later reflection I realised that it was not a diversion at all. Almost a decade after GC 32 Decree 4, *Our Mission Today: The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice*, the Society was facing immense difficulties, both because of the Vatican’s clear antipathy towards



Mark Raper, S.J. is an Australian Jesuit priest known internationally for his leadership in humanitarian and ecclesial service. He was the first director of the Asia-Pacific arm of the Jesuit Refugee Service beginning in 1982 and later became its global director, shaping its mission of accompanying and defending refugees. In recognition of his extensive human rights work in East Timor, Indonesia, Bosnia, Burma, and Thailand, he received the 2004 Australian Council for International Development Human Rights Award.



Fr Arrupe and his authority, and because of apostolic choices on the ground that were sometimes interpreted in ideological terms. As Philip Endean put it, "Arrupe's Ignatian spirituality and sensitivity to his own experience leads him to question the orthodoxies of Cold War politics." Fr Arrupe was proposing that the way of JRS, rooted in what JRS would learn from accompanying refugees, was another way of seeking justice, and that it would bring great benefit to the Society.

The day of 6th August commemorates both Hiroshima Day and the Feast of the Transfiguration. That day, Don Pedro met Jesuits who had come to Thailand to accompany the refugees in response to his appeal when he founded JRS. Typically, he first listened to them. "I can see that you are happy. But I can also see that your work is burdensome," he said. He did not tell them how to do their work, but encouraged them to plan together what they were to do. "The situation is changing greatly," he said. Therefore, they were to discern together and choose prudently the way in which they engaged in accompanying refugees. He insisted that communal discernment would shape this new apostolate, even if it must suffer birth pangs as it is born. "For this reason, a fortiori, great risks have to be taken," Fr Arrupe reasoned. His advice was practical as well as spiritual:

*"The situation all across the world is changing greatly. It is difficult, then, to have a fixed plan... and you are experimenting...this is where prudence comes in ... what this means is that we make a communal discernment as a group, then set a policy ... In all this you have to think and pray as a group. The 'elasticity' of this experimentation ... should be all in one direction – the direction pointed out by the Holy Spirit."*

Fr Arrupe envisaged that, given the demanding situations in which JRS would work, this discernment would involve robust discussions.

*Everybody has to express his opinion and his experiences clearly. And at the end there has to be a conclusion of some kind. Perhaps someone will have to change his opinion or at least act according to the opinion of someone else. That is the price we have to pay.*

He explained the need for a coordinator who would enable them to gather, reflect on their experiences, and ensure implementation:

*It is necessary to have somebody full-time to consider all the things we have discussed ... (a person) who can hear opinions ... (who has) an ear for every one of you...and for everything that is going on... who executes the policy.*

Fr Arrupe went on to insist: "Pray. Pray much. Problems such as these are not solved by human efforts."

Given his own experience, starting with the relief he offered to survivors of the nuclear explosion in Hiroshima, Fr Arrupe was well qualified to give advice to the JRS workers. He had spoken on this topic in a widely distributed lecture entitled 'Rooted in Charity.' In that talk, he criticised forms of 'emergency relief that ignore the rights of those being served. He said: "There is an apparent charity that is a disguised injustice, whereby we give to a human being out of 'benevolence' what is his due in justice. The almsgiving becomes but a subterfuge." Fr Arrupe knew that precisely where there are urgent needs, assistance given generously and with good intention, may delay or impede justice. In Thailand, Don Pedro warned: "Situations such as these are very difficult and complicated. Everything must be done with great discernment. It is not enough to have a great idea one day and go straight ahead and act on it. No, that could be very bad ... The mixture of prophecy and prudence, security and risk, makes for complex situations."

## Presence, conversation and enhancing capacity: the early years in JRS Asia Pacific

As is well known, Fr Arrupe took the flight to Rome on the evening of 6th August and suffered a cerebral stroke on arrival at Fiumicino Airport on the 7th morning. With the confusion in Rome following his stroke and the eventual appointment of Fr Paolo Dezza, it was a year before I was formally assigned to the role of regional director for JRS Asia Pacific. My first action was to convene JRS workers for a discernment about how to proceed. An early account describes our first meeting. Though we did not use the terms so much, it was a 'communal apostolic discernment.'

*Each of us spoke of our own work, sharing what we had learnt from our time with the refugees. We spoke of the deep human anguish of refugees who had lost homeland, close family members, their freedom to choose, their works and their dignity. Perhaps the most pervasive problem was the sense of powerlessness. ... We asked how JRS workers can be companions of our refugee people. Again and again, we turned to prayerful discernment of this question. We saw our first service as to share, even in some small measure, the lives and sufferings of the refugees, to be able to love and respect them, to be a sign of solidarity and hope.*

Our early, regular discernment together led to adoption of clear ways for JRS workers to be close to the refugees and, on examining the needs in each place, to decide what

services to bring. The projects undertaken were those that fostered presence, conversation, and enhanced the capacity of the refugees. The discernment by field workers should in turn help the Society and its members discern how to face contemporary needs.

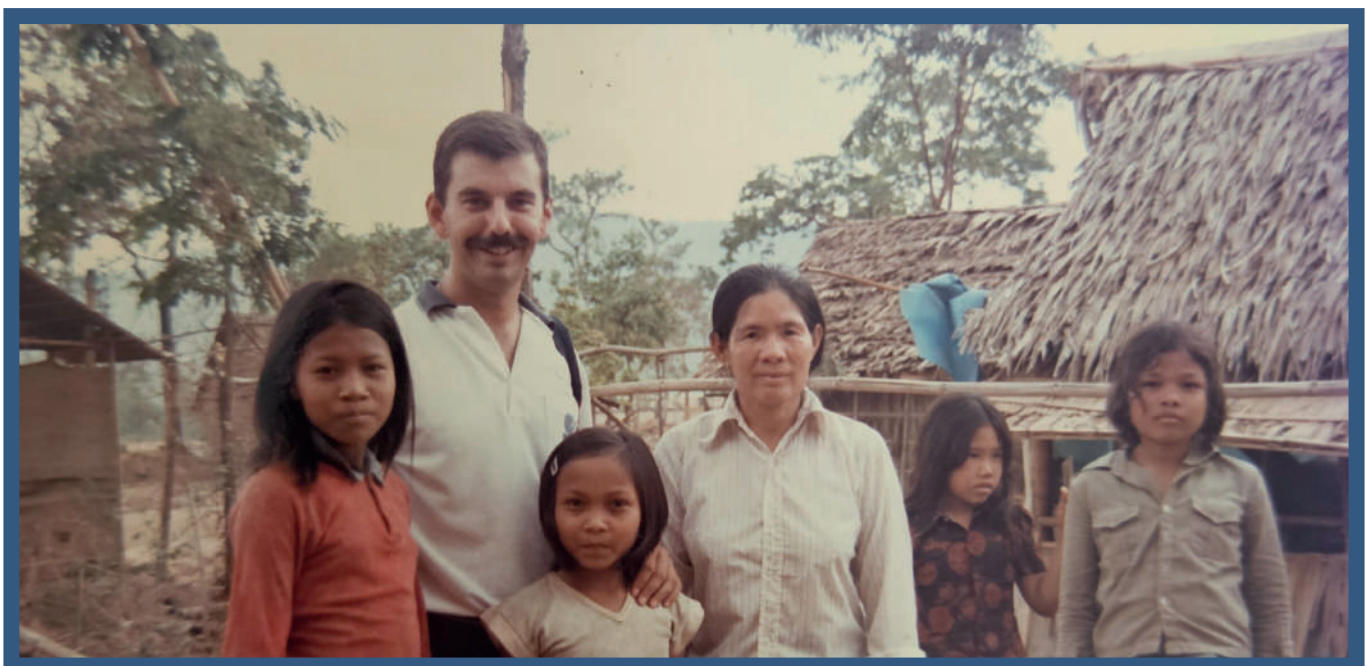
As Fr Arrupe had prophesied so astutely, it was clear that constant discernment was needed to deliver humanitarian assistance, not least thanks to geopolitical manoeuvrings in the region. While generous and courageous assistance was and is offered to refugees, there are powerful forces of evil at work when people are uprooted and driven from their homes and homelands. Kindness and cruelty grow together, and we who try to serve the refugees must learn to wait in joyful hope for the harvest, wrote Bill Yeomans SJ, who worked in several camps in Southeast Asia in the 1980s. JRS joined together with grand large-scale efforts for life-saving assistance. However, it became evident that even efforts to strengthen protection of refugees and to assist them could be subverted or instrumentalised, jeopardising their safety.

One challenge facing the JRS team serving in camps for Cambodian refugees on the Thai-Cambodia border called for a discerned decision. By the early 1980s, a political and military alliance had been formed at this border between the USA, China, Thailand, and Western governments, to oppose Vietnam ('the enemy of my enemy is my friend'). The Vietnamese army had driven out the Khmer Rouge and installed the Heng Samrin government loyal to Vietnam. An ad hoc humanitarian organisation was constructed to give food, water, and shelter to the refugees, called the UN Border Relief Operation (UNBRO). At the same time,

UNBRO discreetly allowed an armed movement to be provisioned. For the Thai, the camps that straddled the border provided a convenient buffer against a possible Vietnamese incursion. When these camps were shelled in 1985, the refugees were brought back clearly into Thailand but still remained close to the border.

The refugees were caught in the middle. On the one hand they were given life-saving assistance. On the other hand, their presence gave cover to underlying political and military purposes. They were 'instrumentalised' to maintain a war effort that continued the division of their country. Among its members, several felt that JRS should protest this injustice loudly and leave. Others were of the view that if the people were being exploited, then JRS should continue to accompany them and not leave them at the mercy of the armed factions. It was a question to discern. By good chance Fr Howard Gray, one of the known spiritual gurus in the Society at the time, was on hand and agreed to facilitate a decision-making process.

The deliberation lasted about six weeks and involved thirty members of JRS who met once a week in a simple village wat (temple) close to the Thai-Cambodia border. Most participants were Christian, a third were Jesuit, a few were Buddhist and some were non-believers. The diversity of the group was something that Fr Arrupe had foreseen in his talk in 1981: "... how terrific it would be for the Society to have non-Christians coming to work for the poor in the villages, coming motivated by philanthropy..." There were other aspects of the gathering that recalled his talk in Bangkok: "To come to agreed policy you will have to face tensions because we have different opinions."



All participants indicated that they were intent on finding the most appropriate outcome. Howard interviewed them and confided to me that several were not 'free' or 'indifferent' on the question for decision, so this would not fulfill all that is required in a true discernment. Nonetheless, he encouraged me to proceed, using the method of discernment. All thirty agreed to pray or to reflect for at least half an hour each day on the considerations that Howard would present each week and to share sincerely the outcome of their reflections. At the end of the six weeks each person was asked his or her personal decision on the question. The group was evenly split between those who wanted JRS to pull out completely and protest, and those who felt JRS should remain faithfully serving the refugees.

Howard Gray indicated that it was then up to me, as JRS Director, having listened to all the interventions, to make a final decision. As an outcome of this discernment, I decided that a JRS team would remain in the camp working actively for reconciliation and preparing for the repatriation of the refugees to Cambodia. Another team would establish in Cambodia and prepare to receive refugees, while also working actively for reconciliation. Both teams, especially the new team in Cambodia, would serve the poorest people, especially the many people wounded in the war who had lost limbs in the conflict or in their flight to the heavily mined border, since whichever faction ended up in power, care for the disabled would always be needed. The decisions taken because of that deliberation had immense ramifications into the future.

## Key elements of the discernment process

Reflecting on this example, one can identify elements of a prudent and even discerned communal decision-making process. These elements could apply if the purpose is to make a review, an evaluation or a major decision for an apostolic work or institution, to assess a socio-political trend, or to make an apostolic plan.



First, the discerning group needs a shared starting point. In this case, all engaged in the discernment were members of a team carrying the JRS identity. The core purpose of JRS had been outlined by Fr Arrupe and developed in the lives and reflections of the JRS workers. (The formula 'to accompany, serve and defend the rights of refugees' was not made explicit until the mid-1990s after considerable consultation.) Having a commonly agreed starting point, the group could also expect to arrive at shared conclusions, even if the outcome was not the one any member had initially wished or foreseen. In the case of a discernment among Jesuits, the starting point, or shared lens, includes all that binds us as friends in the Lord, our shared experience of the Exercises, the Formula of the Institute, the Constitutions, membership of the universal Society, among many factors.

Second, having a shared starting point helps to find clarity on who should be included in the discernment process.

Third, all who do participate should attempt to have an open mind. Even if they come with a conviction of what should be done, they are asked to put this aside and listen without prejudice to all the reasons and arguments that will be put. In Ignatian language this is 'indifference.'

Fourth, all are asked to be open to one another, hospitable, welcoming, listening, generous, patient, and to put the best interpretation on what is said by others. This is the spirit of Annotation 22, the 'Presupposition' of the Exercises. Moreover, all St Ignatius says about individual discernment in the Exercises is important for the individual to observe when participating in a communal discernment.

***"Discernment is learning to listen to God in the midst of all voices."***

Fifth, and most importantly, all depends on the quality of listening, especially by the one who must formulate the final decision, to know how each one is being led and what is most prudent for the group or community to do. 'Listening' means attending to information, to every nuance, reflective opinion, desires and passions. "Discernment is always done in the presence of the Lord, looking at the signs, listening to the things that happen, the feeling of the people, especially the poor," explained Pope Francis in his first extended interview to Jesuit journal *La Civiltà Cattolica*.

Sixth, it is assumed, but may need to be clarified, that all desire to emerge with a common narrative, that is, to reach a shared understanding of the complex context and to agree on a path forward in such intricate circumstances.

Seventh, there should be understanding among all participants about the process. It is neither a decision by democratic vote, nor an autocratic decision, but rather

an intense listening to collective reflection and prayerful wisdom. We believe that the Spirit of God works among us in this way. At the end, the leader, having listened attentively throughout, should formulate, with the advice and counsel of other participants if needed, what they understand to be the most prudent way forward. The outcome of the discernment cannot be delegated to a facilitator or to a sub-group.

Eighth, the question to be discerned should be put in a clear statement.

Finally, the process may be slow, since communal decisions take time to learn, think, reflect, listen to one another, and to pray. Instant discernment is possible but rare. *"The Jesuit always thinks again and again, looking towards the horizon towards which he must go, with Christ at the centre,"* said Pope Francis.

Despite all the detailed reflections and instructions on discernment, it is useful to remember that

personal and collective decision-making is a natural process. As Karl Rahner put it:

*It may be said too that nearly everyone in grave decisions makes a choice more or less exactly in the way Ignatius conceives it, just as the man in the street uses logic without ever having studied it, and yet it remains useful to draw inferences by means of logic that one has studied. In such decisions a man thinks things over for a long time.*

There is a pragmatic value in a communal approach to decision-making. Building consensus enables greater cooperation, a sense of ownership and the clearing of blockages. The involvement of diverse participants can lead to new information and original perspectives, all of which can lead to better decision making. These natural steps enable us to work in union of hearts and minds, transcending personal, social, national, and ideological differences in a shared concern for our common mission.



## Listening to the people we serve

St Ignatius does not speak of discernment in common. Nor is the word 'discernment' much used in the Jesuit Constitutions. There, Ignatius uses the phrase *discreta caritas* and often refers to the need for prudence. Prudence, Fr Kolvenbach remarked, is the central value in discernment, more central even than charity. Without prudence, charity is *caritas indiscreta*. When the Jesuit Constitutions refer to 'discretion' it is often as a quality that is essential to superiors in their decision making.

Discernment in common offers a centre point, a balance between a debating or parliamentary approach and an autocratic decision by an individual. There are people who push for greater democratisation and there are superiors who micro-manage, keeping all power to themselves. Discernment helps find a balance between these approaches. In the Society today there is an increased expectation for consultation and for greater participation in decision making and planning. In discernment in common, all participants have a responsibility to express the fruit of their prayer and reflection. Ultimately, as Fr Arrupe remarked in Bangkok, *someone has the responsibility to make the decision, someone who will listen to all, consider all that is discussed, and everything that is going on in the context, is open, prudent and with courage to decide and execute.*

Although St Ignatius and the Constitutions do not refer to communal discernment much, we learn about discernment from the life of St Ignatius who combined a movement to deeper interiority with a search for companions. Together those companions plumbed the depths of their own hearts and the heart of their times. They survived by begging and shared in the lives of people who lived precariously. All this helped them to read the 'signs of the times,' to move in the currents of culture, and to assess history and humanity prudently.

In any Jesuit apostolate we must not only listen to our colleagues, but also to the people being served. Fr Arrupe insisted in the case of the refugees that "God is calling us through these helpless people." Listening requires respect. Respectful listening is sometimes the greatest gift to a refugee.

Indeed, respectful listening invariably leads to the discovery that these people are not at all 'helpless.' Many refugees have considerable capacity but have been rendered helpless and could become even more so if left in situations of dependency and destitution. Such a discovery, and discernment, leads to designing responses that would increase the personal and communal capacity of the refugees. Many refugees are survivors who have already taken daring, creative initiatives. A big part of the work of JRS is to help them live as free men and women.

Even with his prophetic vision 'for today and for the future,' Fr Arrupe could hardly have imagined how the phenomenon of forced displacement would explode. Between 1985 and 1989, there were five major international emergencies that forcibly displaced people. In 1990, as the political and military confrontation ceased to balance opposing forces with the end of the Cold War, this number exploded to twenty. By 1994 it was twenty-six. Today there are approximately fifty-nine active armed conflicts across more than thirty-five countries, the highest number since World War II, and they are becoming more complex, with armed groups, shifting alliances, criminal intentions, and violence. At the same time, there is now the steady dismantling of the international humanitarian system, so painstakingly erected in the eighty years since World War II. Moreover, because people seeking refuge are increasingly refused the right to cross borders, there is a massive growth in those who are internally displaced, who are the victims of conflicts within their own countries and who remain without a home. This is our experience in Myanmar where there are now over three and a half million internally displaced persons, in addition to one million Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh and half a million refugees in Thailand and India, along with countless others escaping conscription and poverty.

## Conclusion

Consequently, JRS has grown into a large agency that is present in over 50 countries. JRS is sometimes seen to operate with autonomy, even though it is the only international apostolic work of the Society directly governed from Fr General's Curia. Discernment within the

Society about this service becomes ever more important today if we value the insight of Fr Arrupe who insisted back in 1981, "there has to be a basic unity of minds for this new type of apostolate just about to be born."

JRS is considered to be such a significant part of Fr Arrupe's legacy that it is also referred to as his swan song, just like his talk to JRS workers in Bangkok. When Fr Pedro Arrupe prophesied that JRS would bring great benefit to the Society of Jesus, he believed - I am sure - that by accompanying and listening to the refugees, and by reflecting on what is learnt from them in a discerning way together, the Society of Jesus would respond more decisively, not only to them but also to the deep needs of our time. It would refine its way of working for justice by accompaniment, research and communal discernment. Its initiatives would be flexible, collaborative and bold, fuelled by careful listening and by prudent and discreet charity. Communal discernment offers a path that leads to this prophetic ministry that Fr Arrupe called us to when he founded JRS: "This work will be a school in which we learn many things."

*Fr Mark Raper SJ spent twenty years with Jesuit Refugee Service, as Regional Director for Asia Pacific and then as International Director. Subsequently he spent another twenty years as a major superior for Australia, East Timor, Myanmar and as President of the Jesuit Conference of Asia Pacific. He currently lives in Myanmar.*



# A JOURNEY THROUGH DISCERNMENT IN COMMON

Sean Carroll, S.J. (UWE)



In August 2023, I faced an important decision as provincial. From September through December 2022, the USA West Province of the Society of Jesus had engaged our communities and ministries in spiritual conversations about where the Spirit was present and moving in our work and where the Spirit was inviting us to go. Fr. Ed Fassett, S.J. and Mr. Charlie Kelley, a consultant who had guided the former U.S. Jesuit Conference through a strategic discernment process in 2005, steered this effort with the support of a committee of Jesuits and lay partners.

In June 2023, we invited all province Jesuits and two lay representatives from each apostolate to gather for conversations and reflection on the feedback from the 1,250 people who had participated in the spiritual conversations. During this Spirit-filled meeting at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, we identified four apostolic directions that complement the Society's Universal Apostolic Preferences (UAPs). They are to:

- Ground our experience of God through the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatian spirituality and Ignatian discernment.
- Promote and support mutual collaboration.
- Foster community and belonging.
- Exercise an apostolic preference for youth and the marginalized.

While those four directions were essential guideposts, we still needed a vision to orient and focus our apostolic efforts. That was the decision before me in August of 2023. After spending time in prayer, it became clear to me that God was calling us to be a community of Jesuits and apostolic partners that fully embraces discernment in common. This vision would not only help our province respond to God's call, but it would also allow us to serve the Church and its mission more deeply. It

looked like it was a daunting task, especially since it would require building capacity throughout the province to engage in this form of communal discernment. We would also be attempting to follow the example of the First Companions, who discerned together in prayer how God was calling them to shape their common life and mission.

## Change of Epoch

Part of the context for this vision relates to what Father General has referred to as a "change in epoch." Both Pope Francis and Pope Leo XIV use the phrase, though in *Evangelii Gaudium* (52) Francis referred to it as "epochal change." It describes a fundamental shift in history – an actual change of era, rather than a transition within an existing one – with all the fear, disequilibrium, and disruption it entails.

The emergence of artificial intelligence, the prolific growth in the number of Jesuits in the Society of Jesus in some places in the world and the decline in others, and the rise of populist movements across numerous countries are but a few signs of the tumultuous and chaotic change we are experiencing. As Jesuits and lay companions, we are not immune to the turbulence and conflict these trends create.

At the same time, it seems to me that within this context, discernment in common offers us a way to grow as a community and to fulfill the Church's mission by rooting ourselves more deeply in our history and spirituality. It provides a way forward that grounds us and enables us to draw closer to one another and to God as we move into the future. This practice becomes an anchor and a source of support as we consider how to fulfill our mission and deepen our identity in such challenging times.

Sean Carroll, S.J. is a U.S. Jesuit priest and current Provincial of Jesuits West, appointed in 2021. He previously led the Kino Border Initiative, a bi-national ministry serving migrants along the U.S.–Mexico border, and is known for his pastoral leadership and advocacy for humane migration policy.



## What Has Gone Well

For our province to become a community that fully embraces discernment in common represents a significant cultural shift, as many of our lay collaborators and even some of our Jesuits are unfamiliar with the practice. To fill that need, I have put together a small committee of Jesuits and lay collaborators led by Fr. Steve Sundborg, S.J. and Ms. Cindy Reopelle as co-chairs.

Steve brings a wealth of experience through his background in spirituality and use of discernment in common from his tenure as president of Seattle University and his work with the Board of Trustees at Georgetown University. Cindy offers her extensive background in Jesuit secondary education and her leadership in Ignatian spirituality as the executive director of the Spiritual Exercises in Everyday Life (SEEL) in Spokane, Washington.

I have asked them to build capacity throughout the province so that we may more fully engage in discernment in common. Steve, Cindy and their committee have developed a number of resources to support this effort, including a 10-Point Primer on Discernment in Common, a video, and a set of case studies that have been widely shared across the province. Our strategy has been twofold: first, to work through the sectors (pre-secondary and secondary education, higher education, pastoral and spiritual ministries, justice and ecology organizing) to offer directors of works and key personnel both knowledge about and experience with discernment in common; and second, to build capacity among Jesuits in their communities.

In pre-secondary and secondary education, Steve introduced discernment in

common at the semi-annual gathering of presidents, principals, board chairs, and Jesuit superiors. He provided an overview of the practice, offered the group an experience of it, and encouraged them to return to their ministries and identify a key question they might engage. He asked them to engage in common discernment regarding the “soul” of their school, i.e., the essence of their mission and identity.

A number of schools were able to gather a group and grow in their capacity to practice discernment in common. One school found it helpful for discerning whether to resume a capital campaign. Another gained clarity regarding a significant property purchase that would support the school’s future, while a third discerned how to ground their strategic planning in their mission.

In addition to our pre-secondary and secondary education sector, I am pleased to report that other apostolic sectors have also begun building common capacity for discernment. In social ministries, discernment in common has helped bring the faith dimension into key questions and conversations that can all too easily remain in the secular realm. In parish ministries, a group of pastors found spiritual conversation to be a helpful way of examining their ministries in a prayerful and discerning manner. In higher education, a group of Jesuits used the practice to recognize the call to support their brother Jesuits working in this sector, particularly in a context where fewer Jesuits are serving the Church in this important area of ministry.

Not only has building capacity helped our works grow in their ability to use discernment in common for key questions, it has also enabled people to draw closer to one another. A number of participants have described how the process has helped them develop a deeper trust and connection

with one another. I have noticed this especially among boards of trustees or directors who have engaged in discernment in common together. One school shared that, although they did not achieve clarity on the specific matter they were discerning, the experience strengthened their bonds in a way that had not existed previously.

I have also observed that even when people are initially reluctant to engage in discernment in common, once they participate and experience it firsthand, they see and feel its wisdom. One school board member expressed this clearly some months ago when, after taking part in the process, he wrote that he was “all in” with the vision and where it would lead them.



## What We Have Learned

One powerful lesson has emerged from our Jesuit communities: the importance of identifying and choosing well the question to be discerned. As noted earlier, the matter for discernment should concern a core aspect of a community's or ministry's life – something directly related to mission and identity. Fr. General has emphasized that most decisions should continue to be made through our customary practices of consultation, deliberation, and reflection; only a small percentage – perhaps five percent – will naturally lend themselves to a discernment-in-common process related to mission. When Jesuit communities focus their reflection on a well-chosen question, the exercise tends to go more smoothly and fruitfully.

I have also learned that the support of the Jesuit community superior and the director of a work plays a critical role in the success of discernment in common. Ideally, they not only encourage the process but also participate in it themselves, investing personally in this important Ignatian spiritual practice. When both the superior and the director of the work are engaged, it encourages broader participation.

In addition, the preparatory work for discernment in common plays a key role in building trust and spiritual freedom within the group. The more opportunities people have to get to know one another, the readier they are to engage meaningfully in the process.

Our province has eleven distinct geographic regions spread across ten states, and we have recently begun regional discernments through spiritual conversations. We are asking Jesuits and collaborators in each region to discern how they might put into practice, through a concrete plan of action, one or more of our apostolic directions in relationship to the Universal Apostolic Preferences. This process invites participants to approach the question in a cross-sector way, with the hope that they can discern with freedom, openness, and creativity. Still, it can be a challenge to assemble a group that shares these qualities to a sufficient degree for good discernment to take place.

Given this, we encourage participants to spend some time getting to know one another before they begin. If we do not devote sufficient time to this foundational work, it risks undermining the process.

Taking a gradual approach to discernment in common has also proven helpful. We are asking our regional groups to engage in spiritual conversations because we have found that this form of prayerful reflection and dialogue is more accessible to a broad range of people than more formal discernment in common. As decree one, paragraph twelve of General Congregation 36 reminds us, spiritual conversation “involves an exchange marked by active and receptive listening and a desire to speak of that which touches us most deeply. It tries to take account of spiritual movements, individual and communal, with the objective of choosing the path of consolation that fortifies our faith, hope and love.” Discernment in common, on the other hand, describes the overall process of prayerfully making a particular decision, which includes choosing the matter carefully, fostering trust and freedom in the group, and seeking the will of God. In a word, spiritual conversation serves as a building block for discernment in common, and it allows Jesuits and lay partners across the province to participate in a broader process of discernment that is well-suited to a range of experiences and capacities.

## What We Hope

I have great hopes for what discernment in common will do for our province. It can provide a way for Jesuits and lay partners within a region to discern with freedom and openness. Together, they will provide input on how they will engage the province's four apostolic directions and the Universal Apostolic Preferences of the Society of Jesus. They will consider whether to pursue something new or to deepen commitments already underway.

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***“The importance of identifying and choosing well the question to be discerned.”***



While our regional conversations are important, I realize that we do not need to wait for that process to conclude before moving forward on an essential apostolic direction. Some months ago, I met with a number of Jesuits who work with youth and young adults and asked them how we might deepen our apostolic preference for young people through the gift of Ignatian spirituality. Their responses led me to gather them as a group, which has sparked an extraordinary process of listening and discernment called "Speak Up: The Jesuits are Listening."

A province-wide effort to hear the voices of the young, *Speak Up* involves seventy trained young adults facilitating spiritual conversations with young people about what they seek from us as Jesuits. A website has been created, which features a video inviting participation. This process will lead to a proposal that our province staff, Consultors and I will discern as we consider next steps in our service to and with young people. It is my hope that this initiative will empower us to reach people we are not currently serving and enable us to collaborate more deeply with the local Church, while avoiding duplication of the excellent work already happening in many of our youth and young adult ministries.

In addition, we are examining ways we might more intentionally exercise our apostolic preference for marginalized people. In San Diego, California, Fr. Scott Santarosa, S.J., pastor of Our Lady of

Guadalupe Parish, and his team have been doing important work accompanying immigrants to their court hearings. They are offering support at a very vulnerable moment for immigrants in the United States who are facing possible arrest and deportation.

I am hopeful that we can build capacity for Jesuits and lay people to provide this type of support in different areas of the province. Recently, we held an online meeting for Jesuits interested in this kind of accompaniment work, and the participation of 40 Jesuits in that initial gathering deeply encouraged me. Ms. Annie Fox, my provincial assistant for justice and ecology organizing, has helped lead these efforts to stand with people on the margins. She has also played an important role in a broader effort to uphold the human dignity of migrants, particularly through support of a recent bi-national border Mass that the Kino Border Initiative helped plan and host along the U.S.-Mexico border, as well as through actions connected to a national "One Church, One Family" initiative.

Discernment in common will play an essential role as we move forward, especially as we ask how God is inviting us to advance our apostolic directions, while God transforms us in the process.

## Meeting of Major Superiors and Audience with Pope Leo XIV

During the Meeting of Major Superiors in October 2025, we were grateful for the opportunity to meet with Pope Leo XIV. He clearly affirmed the Society of Jesus' Universal Apostolic Preferences and encouraged us to continue along this path. At the same time, he called us to continue going to the frontiers, just as Pope Benedict XVI urged the Society of Jesus to do when he addressed the delegates of General Congregation 35 in 2008. Whether those frontiers may be physical, cultural, intellectual or spiritual, Pope Leo emphasized that staying close to Christ enables us to respond faithfully to this call.

While embracing discernment in common at the province level offers one important way of going to the frontiers, I also hope that it draws us all closer to Christ at a challenging and chaotic time for our world. It helps us to be part of and to contribute to synodality within the Church. As we continue this journey, I hope that discernment in common becomes not simply a tool we use but also a way of being together as Jesuits and apostolic partners. In that closeness, may we allow God to show us the way "to the frontiers of today and beyond, renewing the Church and building a Kingdom of justice, love and truth."

Sean Carroll, S.J. entered the Society of Jesus in 1989 and was ordained a priest in the year 2000. After eight years of parish ministry, he served from 2009 to 2021 as the executive director of the Kino Border Initiative, a binational Catholic ministry focused on migration at the U.S.-Mexico border and working in the areas of humanitarian assistance, education and research/advocacy. He is currently the provincial of the USA West Province of the Society of Jesus.





# COLLABORATION: THE JESUIT WAY OF PROCEEDING

Cedric Prakash, S.J. (GUJ)

'Collaboration' is a sine qua non to our Jesuit way of proceeding! Right from the time St. Ignatius founded our least Society, he was convinced that the companions of Jesus had to work with others if we genuinely wanted to make a difference in the world. He showed the way by reaching out to every possible segment of society during his time; the first Companions and successive generations of Jesuits lived this 'collaborative' dimension of mission in ways they understood best.

Vatican II (1962-65), was a springtime of the Church, when Pope John XXIII literally threw open the doors and windows of the Church to make it a more collaborative and laity-focussed one, attuned to the signs of the times. This Ecumenical Council allowed a fresh breath of the Holy Spirit to blow into the Church. 'Gaudium et Spes', the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, is a clear indicator of the concerted efforts to modernise the Church (aggiornamento). Pope Paul VI, the successor of Pope John XXIII, did his best to implement the directives of Vatican II.

In keeping with the letter and spirit of Vatican II, the Society of Jesus, with Fr. Pedro Arrupe, of beloved memory, at the helm, immersed itself totally in the joys and struggles of the women and men of the times. In 1974-75, General Congregation 32 with its path breaking decrees set the trend for Jesuits to redefine themselves in the context of a fast changing world. Decree 4 'Our Mission Today: The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice,' became the new 'Magna Carta'. The mission of the Jesuits became amply clear; the Jesuits also emphatically stated (from GC32 right up to GC36) that for the realisation of this mission the Society must collaborate with all people of goodwill to address the crucial struggles of our times.

GC 35 reiterated that collaboration is at the heart of our Jesuit Mission and called for renewal by the members of the Society of Jesus of "our commitment to apostolic

*collaboration and to a profound sharing of labour of the life of the Church and the transformation of the world." It emphasised, "In his day, St. Ignatius gave shelter to the homeless of Rome, cared for prostitutes, and established homes for orphans. He sought collaborators and with them established organizations and networks to continue these and many other forms of service. To respond today to the pressing needs of our complex and fragile world, many hands are surely needed. Collaboration in mission is the way we respond to this situation: it expresses our true identity as members of the Church, the complementarity of our diverse calls to holiness, our mutual responsibility for the mission of Christ, our desire to join people of good will in the service of the human family, and the coming of the Kingdom of God. It is a grace given to us in this moment, one consistent with our Jesuit way of proceeding." (D.6 #30)*

With the arrival of Pope Francis, the first Jesuit Pope, the mainstreaming of the vision and the mission of Vatican II gained a new impetus. Pope Francis' Encyclicals, Apostolic Exhortations, his homilies and speeches focussed mainly on a new way of being Church. He challenged everyone across the board to become more authentic, caring and peaceful humans. It was certainly a tall order in a world that continues to become more fragmented and brutalised. For three years 2021- 24, Pope



Cedric Prakash, S.J. is an Indian Jesuit priest and prominent human rights and peace activist from the Gujarat Province. He founded PRASHANT, a Jesuit center for human rights in Ahmedabad, and has worked nationally and internationally on justice, communal harmony, and refugee advocacy, including with the Jesuit Refugee Service in the Middle East. He has received major honors such as France's Legion of Honour and India's Kabir Puraskar.

Francis did his best to initiate a Synodal Journey in the Church. The process focused on three key words 'communion', 'participation' and 'mission'; of these, communion and participation are the pillars of collaboration and truly indispensable for mission. The Synodal documents (both the Synthesis Report and the Final Document) highlight the need and importance for collaboration, at every level, in order to make the Synodal process more meaningful and sustainable. Something easier said than done.

The significance of Collaboration is found in the Synthesis Report, which states, "In its broadest sense, synodality can be understood as Christians walking in communion with Christ toward the Kingdom along with the whole of humanity. Its orientation is towards mission, and its practice involves gathering in assembly at each level of ecclesial life. It involves reciprocal listening, dialogue, community discernment, and creation of consensus as an expression that renders Christ present in the Holy Spirit, each taking decisions in accordance with their responsibilities." Pope Francis certainly had a vision to make the Church today a more people-focussed one, with greater collaboration and participation at every level.



The reality of course is very different. Parish councils often consists of 'yes-men/women' and are sometimes condemned to doing cosmetic, servile work and posing for photo-ops. There is very little dialogue, discernment and decision-making processes which are participative. Some 'laity' literally demand a slice of the cake, wanting the use of Church premises as personal fiefdom. There are exceptions of course, but these are rarities. The laity continues to conveniently fit and often succumb to a mould of 'pray, pay and obey.' The Synodal Process which was completed, a couple of years ago, in most dioceses, was relegated to a series of meetings and spiritual events, meant to produce reports for the records. Not much effort seems to have been made in truly empowering the laity and to provide them with the prophetic courage they need to respond to critical issues facing the church and the country.

A senior Catholic teacher with an outstanding and long years of teaching experience in a prestigious Jesuit school was appointed by the management as the Principal of the same school. It was a significant move in terms of lay collaboration. However, right from the beginning, roles and responsibilities of the Principal and also that of the Jesuits involved in the school, were not clearly defined. Some felt threatened and were not comfortable in allowing the Lady Principal to take independent decisions – even if these decisions were after due consultation with other lay staff of the school. Lay collaboration necessitates respecting the integrity, competency and professionalism of the lay person concerned. Once a lay person is given authority, clerics should not treat that person as a puppet, doormat or clearing house. This, in no way negates the importance and need of consultation, transparency and accountability at all levels.

There is no dearth of documents, all with directives which clearly outline the significance, the structures and the processes which are essential for greater collaboration both at the level of the Church and the Society. There are also other words and concepts which are used interchangeably with 'collaboration', these include 'partnership', 'cooperation',



'teamwork', 'walking together'. All of which are inconsequential if we do not live collaboration in every aspect of our lives. Sadly, collaboration is often relegated to tokenism: a mere cosmetic activity needed perhaps to make a point in a 'report' – which fails to underscore the factuality of things. Some of us feel threatened and insecure when another collaborator is in the seat of power and has a decision-making role. But it is important that we, as Jesuits, get down into a spiritual depth and realise the accompanying role we should be playing.

There are excellent examples of Jesuits collaborating with others at a Universal level on important issues. The Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) is an outstanding example. The point however is, how does one understand and do 'collaboration' in an Indian context? The reality here certainly throws up a whole range of challenges; these include:

## Collaborating with each other as Jesuits

It is not easy to do so! The experience of several is that we Jesuits tend to work in 'silos' – in a very exclusive manner. Many of us forget the fact that a Jesuit is sent on a mission by one's community. The mission of a Jesuit (be it ministry/apostolate/ other activity) belongs to the community. In that sense the Jesuit is accountable to one's community and the community is responsible for his mission. Some Jesuits become 'touch-me-nots' – they don't like anyone 'interfering' (even if it is a genuine concern or interest) in their work! One will never be able to collaborate with outsiders if we are unable to first collaborate amongst ourselves. St Paul reminds us that all of us are endowed with different gifts, and we are all called to complement each other, to make our mission more relevant and impactful today!

We need to do so through a continued process of fraternal dialogue and Ignatian discernment. We must challenge each other to get out of our comfort zones; to listen and to respond to the cries of the poor and the cries of creation. A must for all of us Jesuits!

***“Collaboration is the need of the hour! It is about collegiality and subsidiarity; about trusting the other, about sharing responsibility, about accompanying, about walking together... about a journey. Do we have the prophetic courage to run the gauntlet?”***

## Collaborating with women religious

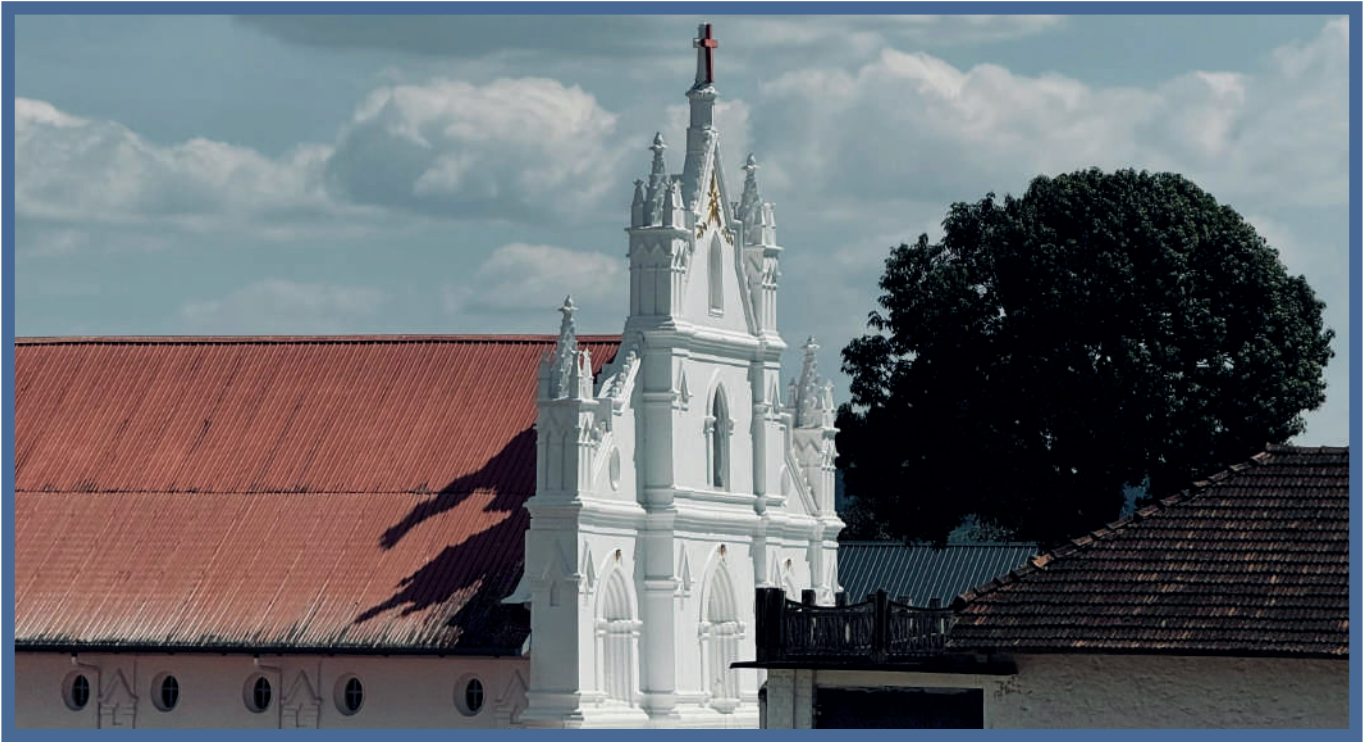
This is specific. Women religious are perhaps our first collaborators in mission. There are excellent examples of how Jesuits and Sisters of religious congregations work together. These must be applauded and examples of collaborative initiatives need to be propagated. Sadly, all is not smooth sailing! Some Jesuits treat religious women as second-class citizens and inferior to them. Jesuit arrogance is amplified when sisters are the subjects of their rant and rave. One often witnesses such behaviour particularly if a Jesuit is a Parish Priest or the Director/Principal of an institution where the sister is employed. She is treated as an employee rather than a collaborator in the mission. Working with religious women is a great opportunity for meaningful collaboration. Jesuits in these positions have a responsibility to treat sisters with dignity and equity; to dialogue with them, discern together, before any major decision is taken that could affect them.



## Collaborating with diversity

India is diverse; her wealth lies in her pluralism. In addition to Hinduism (the majority religion), there are several other religions, including Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Jainism, and Buddhism, as well as a range of folk/indigenous religions. India is a multicultural society where customs and traditions, food and dress, languages, and behavioural patterns differ tremendously. Collaborating here would mean accepting and appreciating the differences and working together to address critical issues that affect the poor, the marginalised, and disadvantaged sections of Indian society.





## Collaborating with civil society

In an Indian situation, this is absolutely necessary. As Jesuits and even as Christians, we cannot and should not work alone. The tendency is to be exclusive. We need to collaborate and network with civil society, both individuals and groups. Some of us have been very engaged with national groups such as the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), the National Alliance of Peoples Movements (NAPM), Citizens for Justice and Peace (CJP), and the All India Movement for Democracy (AIM). Besides, there are several collaborative actions taking place at the grassroots with local groups. The late Fr. Stan Swamy was an example of how a Jesuit could collaborate with other groups to highlight the plight of Adivasis (indigenous people). There is, however, much more to be done. Our alumni should be among our greatest collaborators; unfortunately, with a few notable exceptions, most are afraid to take a stand against what is happening to minorities or to the country at large. Our Alumni Associations need to be asked in the words of Fr. Pedro Arrupe, "have we Jesuits educated you to be men and women for others?" We need to participate in civil programmes and their activities. Jesuit educators could work in a Government school (or a school that is not our own) or in another independent institution. We often expect 'them' to come and work with us; they get the opportunity not because of the collaboration mandate, but simply because we have a shortage of Jesuits and need someone to fill the spot. Jesuit institutions in India have plenty of space and facilities. One practical aspect of collaboration is to make this space and facilities freely available to civil society groups for their programmes

## Collaborating for Human Rights, Justice, Reconciliation and Peace

India is currently in a mess! We seem to be failing on all fronts, particularly in human rights and justice. Minorities (particularly Christians and Muslims) are targeted and attacked. In a pluralistic country, what one eats and the way one dresses, what one sees, and even what one reads is questioned. The fundamental rights of speech and expression, to preach, practise and propagate one's faith, the right to life and livelihood are not only denied but used effectively to incarcerate one. Human rights defenders and journalists are languishing in jail. Environmental degradation is rampant: from the wanton destruction of trees to the unabated use of fossil fuels. At the receiving end are the poor and vulnerable, the excluded and the exploited, the minorities and the marginalised, the Adivasis and the Dalits, women and children, the LGBTQIA+ community and refugees, the migrant workers and casual labourers, the small farmers and the slum-dwellers, and all other disadvantaged sections of society. Collaborating with others, being visible and vocal, is the only way forward.

On 26 May 2022, Fr. Arturo Sosa, our Superior General in a letter to the Whole Society entitled 'Global Ignatian Advocacy Network (GIAN): A Pathway to deepen Collaboration' wrote, "For some time now, the Society of

***"As Jesuits and even as Christians, we cannot and should not work alone. The tendency is to be exclusive. We need to collaborate and network with civil society, both individuals and groups."***



Jesus has felt the need to adapt its governance structures to the new realities of the world. In today's globalised context, we are confronted with the need to act as a universal body with a global mission, capable of integrating the diversity and uniqueness of the contexts, cultures, times and peoples in which we live and work. Collaboration and networking offer richness, solidarity and a challenging opportunity for our engagement in today's complex and changing socio-economic, political and religious situations. The urgency of discerning together the appropriate apostolic structures to achieve the ambitious apostolic goals we have set for ourselves is therefore clear".

Collaboration is the need of the hour! It is about collegiality and subsidiarity; about trusting the other, about sharing responsibility. About accompanying, about walking together ...about a journey. Do we have the prophetic courage to run the gauntlet?

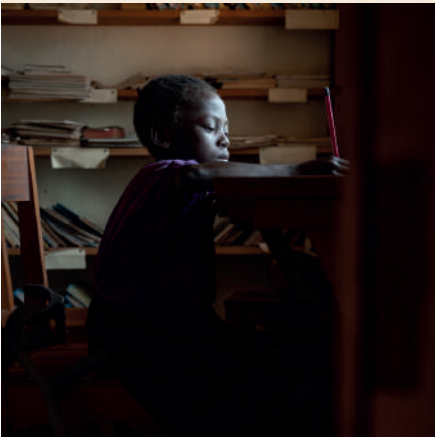
# JRS A GLOBAL APOSTOLATE OF THE SOCIETY OF JESUS

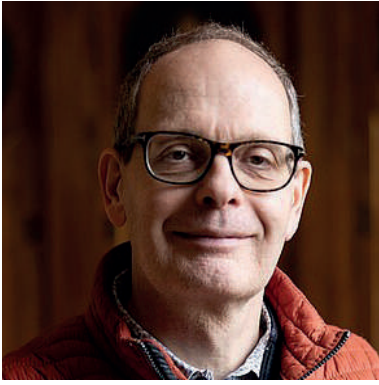
Michael Schöpf, S.J. (ELC)

## The local and universal dimension of transformation

The mission of the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) has always been both deeply local and universal. JRS is born in every relationship where we accompany a forcibly displaced person and share our lives for a time. We are moved by the suffering of others, and we care. The core of this relationship involves listening, often in situations of great uncertainty, loss, or trauma. Through listening to each other, we can discover our shared humanity, and space may open for us to imagine a different future. These hopes and aspirations help us see the fullness of life that God has promised to all of us. It is a truly transformative relationship in which God's presence in our world can become incarnate.

Nothing is more local than these relationships, which lie at the core of JRS and shape its services—our practical help toward a different future. I believe this is what Fr. Pedro Arrupe recognised when he asked JRS to provide a service that is human, pedagogical, and spiritual. At the same time, Pedro Arrupe clearly expressed that there is a universal dimension to this work. Our response to the tragedy of forced migration expresses how we live our humanity. It is a call that extends far beyond merely accompanying refugees. Our actions demonstrate who we are and who we aspire to be before God in this world. This engages us, as a Jesuit





Michael Schöpf, S.J. is a German Jesuit brother and the International Director of the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS). He entered the Society of Jesus in 1989 and has decades of experience working with refugees, beginning with missions in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, and Rwanda in the 1990s. He later led JRS Europe and, after serving as Deputy International Director, was appointed International Director in 2023.

apostolate, a religious order, and as members of our societies, in pursuing justice and reconciliation in our social and political systems. We are called to become pilgrims of hope both locally and globally. Because of this great challenge, JRS was established within the General Curia as an apostolate directly under the responsibility of Fr. General.

Since 1980, JRS has embodied both local and universal aspects of its mission in various ways. I remember the iconic image of a group of refugees celebrating the Eucharist in the fields along the Thai-Cambodian border, as well as JRS's significant role in the International Campaign to Ban Landmines. I recall the beginning of visits to refugees in detention centres; our numerous social, legal, and medical services in many parts of the world; and JRS becoming a leading force behind the International Detention Coalition, which has become a major advocate for ending the detention of refugees. I also remember the early 1990s when JRS started operating in the large refugee camps of that time. We decided to enter the humanitarian field because many refugees were living in camps regulated by the UN system. The transformative experience of accompanying them inspired us to provide quality education in this humanitarian setting and to develop systematic expertise in education in emergencies.



## A structured and articulated response

At the end of Fr. Arrupe's tenure, there were 6–8 million refugees worldwide. Today, more than 120 million forcibly displaced people exist, and their numbers continue to rise significantly. In 2024, the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) directly assisted over 1.1 million refugees through projects and programs in 58 countries, with a global budget of USD 102 million and about 11,500 refugee staff members, employees, religious personnel, volunteers, and interns. Demand for accompaniment and services has grown substantially. At the same time, with increasingly restrictive asylum policies and the deliberate dismantling of humanitarian aid, our sense of humanity is being tested even more.

As a Jesuit apostolate, our main contribution to shaping a different future remains the transformative experience of listening to and accompanying refugees—a process that also changes us, is life-affirming, and creates meaning. Our work is crucial in a world filled with aggression and exclusion. To be truly effective in our presence, services, and advocacy for justice and reconciliation, we need a clear and coordinated response now more than ever. JRS has expanded in many places in ways that are often unplanned, driven by local needs. This reflects the local nature and main goal of our work. For a unified effort that supports local initiatives while addressing today's universal challenges, there is a simple question: Which part of the work do we do better together, in a connected way, instead of reinventing the same actions 58 times in our 58 countries?

Over the past years, we have identified three key areas where the interconnected structure of a global apostolate is particularly useful. The first area emphasizes strong organisational practices and includes global policies, operational standards, and procedures that align all JRS offices work together to maintain quality. For example, clearly defined standards for policies that protect children and vulnerable people, along with oversight of their implementation, are essential. Shared accounting systems that guarantee the reliable management of large sums of money are also vital. Adequate support for staff working in very difficult situations should be available across all JRS offices. These examples are especially important because every activity bearing the name of JRS is viewed by external actors—such as governments, UN agencies, and donors—as part of an international organization. As JRS, we are held accountable.

Secondly, we aim to deliver quality services to refugees in areas like education, livelihoods, mental health, psychosocial support, and reconciliation. These areas require specialised knowledge, and we also contribute to creating such knowledge through our experience of accompaniment. This expertise cannot be offered separately in every country where needed. It requires an organizational structure that can make it available wherever it is needed.

Thirdly, fundraising at the global level with international agencies, global donors, or multiple religious congregations depends on a coordinated approach that includes a clearly defined flow of information among many offices, consistent donor stewardship, and technical expertise in grant writing that cannot be duplicated by each country office.

Besides these organizational issues, messaging and advocacy are crucial in today's world. We live in a time when our shared humanity is no longer considered. What we have seen in the past with landmine victims and administrative detainees has become much more common. Anyone who is not seen as useful for a specific political or economic goal, in a world of empires trying to expand their spheres of influence, can be discarded, considered irrelevant, and denied care. We can only confront this environment with strong, consistent, and united messaging across many settings that advocate for the world in which we want to live. A different future is possible because we live it together with refugees.

All of the points above call for an organisational structure that extends beyond a network or federation. They urge us to transition from collaboration among offices to the integration of functions, as this produces better results for the mission. As a global apostolate, JRS needs to move beyond a network approach—where different partners temporarily come together around a specific issue—and beyond a federation model, in which several organisations sharing the mission and possibly also the name adopt a common work plan under a charter they follow and dedicate certain resources to.

This became especially clear in 2025 when the U.S. government issued a Stop Work Order, practically ending all funding support to refugee projects overnight. It happened on a Friday. We could not imagine going back on Monday and telling thousands of students that their school no longer existed. Nor could we imagine telling those seeking help through our mental health and psychosocial support programs that no one would be available to talk to them anymore. Instead, we launched a global appeal to keep at least some services running. In the end, we raised USD 4 million out of a shortfall of more than USD 11 million. This was crucial: it helped us avoid breaking our trusted



relationships with refugees and prevented services from shutting down abruptly. This response was only possible because organisational structures at JRS were already in place. Information from projects could be collected through established channels. Emergency protocols allowed fundraisers to act immediately. Bridging funds could be mobilised. Equally important, we were able to communicate right away what was happening—an enormous shift in the humanitarian paradigm that could profoundly impact all of us.

## Elements of a global apostolate

The vision of JRS as a global apostolate of the Society today can be summarized in five key points.

First, the mission of JRS reflects the broader mission of the Society of Jesus as a work of reconciliation, guided by the Universal Apostolic Preferences. It is rooted in St. Ignatius's desire to help souls, share the experience of God's presence in everyone's life and in our world, and live as witnesses of hope. A key strength of JRS's mission is that the transformative experience of listening and accompaniment is accessible to people of various beliefs and backgrounds, and it brings them together. When selecting projects and programs, JRS uses the criteria for apostolic works outlined in the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus.

Secondly, as a global apostolate, JRS demonstrates the organisation's commitment through a shared strategic framework that guides and prioritises efforts across different local contexts, tailored to their specific realities. Over twelve months in 2024, we conducted this process, involving all JRS offices and

including hundreds of contributions from individual team members, refugees, and entire teams. The process was based on a discernment methodology. Starting with a thorough evaluation, we created a context analysis and engaged in a week-long reflection and discernment on enablers for a different future. A foresight-planning exercise focused on future access to protection for forcibly displaced people, developing scenarios of potential developments and challenging our imagination to prepare accordingly. Today, we see that our worst-case scenario has materialised much faster than anyone anticipated. Yet, we are ready to work in a connected way on building refugee agency, strengthening communities, forming new strategic partnerships, and renewing our services in an environment of precarity. There is a shared sense among us of unity and purpose regarding what protection can mean when states and legal systems fail or are dismantled. Thirdly, as a global apostolate, JRS must define and enhance the implementation of key processes at the global level to support and sustain local operations. This specifically involves effective operational management, resource mobilization with global donors, and programme quality—areas that cannot be adequately managed by each country alone.

Fourth, there is a need for unified teams of staff members that transcend office boundaries and are guided by functional responsibilities, operating under shared leadership. A global apostolate requires strong local teams rooted in listening and accompaniment, capable of developing relevant local services. Without them, nothing would have meaning. At the same time, it requires global support teams with an executive mandate to implement necessary actions under leadership supervision. Communities of practice can exchange experiences and offer advice, but they cannot ensure implementation, which would otherwise remain fragmented.

Finally, JRS can only succeed as a global apostolate if its governance bodies—such as boards and councils—are aligned and act in a unified, coherent, and effective manner to support the definition and implementation of essential functions. This involves a significant responsibility. Members of governance bodies are expected to make decisions for their respective countries or regional offices with an

informed understanding of realities beyond their own contexts. Mutual representation within governance bodies can help. As with the operational level, coherence and reliability across governance structures can only be maintained through active, well-informed, and committed bodies that strengthen both local action and global processes.

## Mission and identity

The most essential part of JRS's mission is its staff members from diverse backgrounds who are deeply rooted in an experience of transformation. This is especially crucial as we confront a world that relies less on the rule of law, multilateral agreements, and institutions capable of encouraging meaningful dialogue. A world of empires trying to extend their influence continually breeds violence at their borders, as painfully demonstrated in Ukraine over the past four years. Authoritarian regimes also generate violence inside their own borders. We are witnessing an unprecedented surge in hatred and exclusion toward refugees and forced migrants, resulting in deadly border regimes, extended detention, and scapegoating of refugees for unrelated, unresolved issues. This empire-driven world lives alongside neglected peripheries—forgotten crises where entire populations face systematic persecution and terror, with no governments advocating for their human rights. In such a world, conflicts will grow more frequent and brutal, while effective protection measures become increasingly scarce.

It is understandable that one may become frustrated, feel helpless, grow exhausted, mourn the loss of financial resources and organizational tools, or feel overwhelmed by the deadly consequences of an agenda of hatred and destruction. How, then, can our sensitivity survive, and how can we keep it alive? How can we support one another? How do we speak to one another about God's presence in this world? "As a global apostolate of the Society of Jesus, the fundamental challenge of JRS is to build on an identity deeply shared by its members. As a large organisation scattered throughout the world, acquiring and nurturing identity requires specific and systematic programs."

I vividly remember a practice from a local team. Most team members were involved in outreach work, but everyone would gather at the local office on Friday afternoons for about an hour. It was a meeting without a formal agenda. One by one, each person shared their experiences from the week—what they observed, the joys they felt, the struggles they faced—and what those experiences meant to them personally. Much of the understanding came simply through speaking aloud. Toward the end, the team reflected on what this meant for their relationships with refugees and the services they provided. I saw this as a form of mutual support that constantly highlighted our transformative presence, even



during difficult times. It kept hope alive and provided direction.

A global apostolate should provide systematic opportunities for individuals and teams to nurture our sensitivity and to participate in meaning-making. Several years ago, JRS began focused work on mission and identity to create such opportunities. Currently, there is an online orientation course for all new staff members that engages them with JRS's mission and values, Ignatian spirituality, strategic framework priorities, and humanitarian principles. Additionally, a toolkit exists for local teams to resource their activities, and we are developing a leadership course for country, regional, and sectoral leaders. This course, which includes 11 modules and will launch later this year, involves participants in leadership practices grounded in their own transformative experiences.

To keep hope alive in the new context, JRS sometimes needs to reassess its presence among refugees in extremely deprived environments. What does accompaniment mean when, due to funding cuts, JRS can no longer operate schools in camp settings; when refugees suffer from malnutrition because food rations have been reduced; and when it becomes impossible for them to think about the future because they are struggling to secure even one meal a day? What impact can our presence have in such circumstances? Supporting local teams that are asked to implement severe cuts while they also have to envision a new horizon is crucial. A global apostolate requires dedicated capacity to provide accompaniment and reflection in these volatile environments and to redefine the mission together with the refugees we accompany.

Finally, a global apostolate requires a structure that enables JRS to communicate about injustice clearly and systematically. In response to the significant changes, we face today for our world order, organized analysis and reflection across teams are crucial to establish the basis for advocacy and new integrated programming.

## Governance

Alongside mission and identity, the evolution of governance may be the most crucial factor in further strengthening JRS as an effective apostolic work of the Society. “From the universal dimension of the charism also arises the organisation that makes it possible to carry out the mission of JRS. A global organization for a global apostolate is the originality of JRS as an apostolate of the Society of Jesus.”

Unlike any other work of the Society, JRS is directly governed by Fr. General. This setup makes sense because it allows the Society to address a global challenge to our humanity and provide a universal service. It combines a very local presence with a global approach within a single organisational model.

Under the current JRS Norms and Guidelines from 2012, unity of approach and governance is primarily maintained through a clear line of accountability and appointment. A country director usually reports to a regional director, who reports to the International Director, who then reports to Fr. General. This

structure is vital for preserving basic organisational unity and governance and reflects both the charism and the services provided by JRS, as emphasized by Fr. General. However, while the Norms and Guidelines outline the basic structure, they offer little guidance on the additional organisation of operations and governance responsibilities needed to support a universal apostolate. The lessons from recent years are especially relevant here.

Operationally, integrated systems for accounting, project management, and funding sources are now vital. Organised information enhances transparency and enables leadership to discern options and make informed decisions that account for both local and global factors. From a leadership perspective, the current three-tier model—international, regional, and country offices—has revealed challenges. Although accountability lines may be clear, management processes are often poorly defined. This can lead to fragmented leadership that depends heavily on individual directors and may even conflict with the universal charism. Therefore, clearly defining key processes is essential.



***“A global organization for a global apostolate is the originality of JRS as an apostolate of the Society of Jesus.”***

Regarding relationships of JRS offices with Jesuit provinces, the unique governance model of JRS can raise questions. Why is a Jesuit provincial not solely responsible for JRS's work in the province, as with other apostolates? How should this be managed in practice? Since many decisions made locally have a broader, universal impact, and vice versa, how can this be considered thoughtfully, based on available information? Lastly, the Norms and Guidelines do not specify legal boards but only advisory councils at the country or regional level, following the Jesuit consult model. However, for practical reasons, most JRS offices today have their own legal entities with boards that hold legal responsibility. These important bodies are not integrated into JRS's usual governance practices.

These and other examples highlight the need to clarify and update the JRS Norms and Guidelines in the coming years to strengthen JRS as a global apostolate of the Society today and to keep the charism alive. Two directions seem especially important. JRS needs

strong, mission-driven local teams fully committed to accompaniment, with country offices capable of managing basic operational functions and aligned with the apostolic approach of their respective Jesuit provinces. At the same time, JRS requires strong regional and international leaders who, as a unified team, can provide governance for the universal charism of the mission. These leaders must be connected through transparent data and clear decision-making processes. In addition to local teams, a global office is essential to support operations, fundraising, and mission-driven transformation as a tool to implement leadership strategy.

The next version of the JRS Norms and Guidelines should further develop the organisational structure by adding to the model of already existing lines of accountability key processes and an interconnected way of proceeding. The emerging world of empires is dangerous for many people—through increased violence and resource deprivation—and it calls us to strengthen our response with clarity.



# COLLABORATING TO SERVE A MISSION THAT SURPASSES US

Daniel Villanueva, S.J. (ESP)

Experience teaches us that the decision to collaborate is not initially organizational. It originates from the encounter between a demanding call that exceeds us and a spiritual openness that must be translated into structures and processes. It happens when we accept that the mission we are sent on surpasses our personal abilities and usual organizational methods. Only then can we walk with others, trust in shared processes, and be guided by a mission we do not control but aim to serve faithfully.

## 1. Principle of reality

### 1.1. A response that cannot be improvised

Less than three days after the war broke out in Ukraine, the Society of Jesus launched a humanitarian response with unmatched speed and coordination. Within hours, provinces, social works, Jesuit NGOs, universities, and the Jesuit Refugee Service collaborated on a unified effort: clear, impactful, internationally coordinated, and rooted in a strong local presence. None of this was improvised. It was made possible because JRS was already operating in Ukraine and neighboring countries, and because the Xavier Network - a global network of Jesuit NGOs and mission offices - had gained fourteen years of shared experience in

international emergencies. Years of learning, correcting mistakes, building trust, sharing leadership, and refining procedures across diverse contexts such as Indonesia, Haiti, the Philippines, Nepal, the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Lebanon, and Ethiopia.

This journey enabled quick coordination of local needs within a single shared program—called “One Proposal”—and connected it to a global initiative that linked the General Curia, the provinces, and international solidarity actors through one support and accountability channel. That framework remains the main driver of our response to people displaced by war and continues to inspire the potential for future coordinated efforts.

### 1.2. A sense of community that becomes visible

For several years now, even in schools in remote areas, a map of the world showing the reach of the Society of Jesus's educational work has appeared on the walls. It features traditional Jesuit schools alongside those of the Jesuit Refugee Service and Fe y Alegría, forming the Jesuit Global Network of Schools.

This seemingly simple yet deliberate gesture is the visible part of a growing process of international collaboration. Thanks to it, we have

been able to share common tools such as global identifiers, promote campaigns like the Red Chair, and incorporate the Universal Apostolic Preferences into the daily life of our centers in ways that were unthinkable just a few years ago. All of this stems from work that began in earnest in 2012, at the first global meeting in Boston, which, fourteen years later, has fostered a sense of belonging unprecedented in our educational history.

### 1.3. An expanding “we.”

Fe y Alegría is one of the most extensive and important networks on our apostolic map. In its seventy-year history, the Society of Jesus has collaborated with more than 120 religious congregations that have played a key role in developing this educational mission for the poorest.

In a context of declining vocations, many congregations see in Fe y Alegría a true space for collaboration that allows them to extend their mission beyond numerically fragile presences. During a recent meeting with religious sisters in Peru, a provincial shared her emotion: “Thanks to the Fe y Alegría network, we are not only maintaining our current presence, but also exploring new ways of working in the Amazon, fostering hope and a spiritual energy that is very important for us today.”



Daniel Villanueva, S.J. is a Spanish Jesuit priest who since 2023 serves as General Coordinator of the International Federation of Fe y Alegría, a global Jesuit education network. He previously held senior leadership roles at Entreculturas and Alboan, and is known for his expertise in international development, education, and global Jesuit networking.



These simpler presences—supported by shared institutional processes and focused on enhancing charismatic density beyond property or management—are opening new inter-congregational opportunities. Everything indicates a different way of being Church, especially on the frontiers, where the Spirit urges a greater evangelical radicalism and a form of synodality that is also reflected in structures and networking.

#### **1.4. Being part of something greater**

These examples are not isolated instances. They indicate a deep change that has sped up in recent years. They reveal new ways of understanding and living out mission, capable of unleashing a collective force that drives us further than we could ever go alone.

Every time I reflect on collaboration and networks, I think about the Incarnation. Looking at the world broadens both the heart and the mind. The mission isn't confined to one work, one region, or one country. Therefore, international collaboration isn't just a strategic operation but a spiritual and apostolic outcome of our desire to serve a universal mission and our awareness that we are part of something greater than ourselves.

## **2. Lessons from practice**

It is important to recognize that collaboration within the Society of Jesus does not stem from globalization or technological progress, but from a gradual and deepening shift in how we understand our mission—becoming increasingly universal—and how we live it as a united international apostolic community. Jesuit collaborative efforts at this supraprovincial level, which have been particularly emphasized over the past 20 years, have not only produced tangible results but have also created a new way of understanding the mission, leadership, and scope of our apostolic work.

### **2.1. Clear mission and architecture at the service of the local**

The experience with the Xavier Network shows the importance of having a clear and simple shared mission, mainly focused on common projects and emergencies. This approach makes collaboration more precise and prevents trying to cover everything. It has also been vital not to add unnecessary layers of structure, which allows member institutions to act and stay visible without replacing the organizations that actually do the work. The principle of subsidiarity is a key aspect of global networking.



This insight is confirmed through work with the Kanisius Foundation, a Jesuit educational network with nearly 200 schools in Central Java. A carefully designed institutional structure has enabled it to sustain a century-long presence and, today, plays a significant role in improving public education in Yogyakarta. Getting the institutional structure right can determine whether a long-term apostolic initiative succeeds or fails.

### 2.2. Time as a condition for collaboration

Working with the Global Jesuit School Network shows that networks cannot be improvised. They require time, clear phases, and growth periods. Mutual understanding, ongoing dialogue, and shared themes are necessary for any joint action plan. This network has already experienced this process over two 6-year cycles, proving the suitability of the pace and approach. Rushing these processes often results in frustration or superficial efforts.

The Global Ignatian Advocacy Network, with over 17 years of history, shows that it takes years to find the right dynamics to articulate, permeate, and align the right actors and efforts for international collaboration. Collaborative work has a methodology, a strategy, and takes time.

***“Collaborating means accepting that our identity engages in dialogue and complements others.”***

### 2.3. Diversity and adaptation to context

The experience of the Jesuit Refugee Service underscores the importance of tailoring strategies to specific regions and institutional contexts. Global efforts only succeed when they are adapted to the unique realities of each conference and province. Every network that operates beyond a single conference understands this. Otherwise, networks that attempt to unify everything tend to weaken the overall apostolic mission.

In Fe y Alegría, this conviction is especially clear. The true strength of the network comes from the deep value of the local. The network only makes sense and will only succeed if our collaborative efforts support, enhance, create value, and improve the specific local mission. Therefore, it is possible to build networks based on listening, dialogue, and collective discernment from the communities we serve. This requires spaces, methodologies, and dialogical processes that ensure this complex building process.

### 2.4. Complementarity and representativeness

A key lesson from working with university networks is that collaboration can be hindered when it involves entities with very different institutional priorities if there is no clear shared mission. Therefore, it is essential to connect academia with other apostolic fields. Universities offer a unique ability to think through and develop answers to questions that emerge from apostolic practice. These are questions many agents ask, but they often lack the time or resources to explore in depth. Academia also provides research and data, which support strategies across different regions, such as in advocacy, relationship building, or dissemination. This is where one of the main strengths of international networks becomes evident.

While working with GIAN for the right to education, we have discovered that there is still a wealth of collaborative experience that remains unintegrated at the international level. The more we explore the apostolic map, the more we realize that many initiatives are not yet known to our networks. There are real networking treasures in Indonesia, India, and the Philippines, for example, that stay largely unseen and are only loosely connected to larger-scale efforts. It is difficult to admit, but even today, collaborative efforts are still limited by communication gaps or a lack of representation on the international stage.

### 2.5. Co-creation and openness

Working with youth networks like MAGIS or RG21+ teaches an important lesson, one that can be uncomfortable for institutions at times. When collaboration is genuine, the outcomes cannot be predicted or easily controlled. These networks become genuine spaces for co-creation, where young people not only participate but also redefine the very goals of the shared mission. Embracing collaborative dynamics means accepting uncertainty. It's not just a symbolic act but an institutional shift: letting go of control and trusting others. Networks provide methods and structure, but the mission truly comes alive when the members of the networks can envision and commit to a genuinely shared goal. The outcome is often unpredictable.

Finally, working in inter-congregational spaces shows the openness that these collaborative efforts require and actually broadens our identity. Collaborating means accepting that our identity engages in dialogue and complements others, truly contrasting our sense of community, and pushing us to find common ground and refine our goals. Moving forward in collaboration involves accepting this exposure as part of the journey and growing from it.

## 3. A new way of proceeding

A fundamental conviction emerges from these experiences. Our apostolic body has two sides: hierarchies and networks coexist. Networks are not just support functions, but active apostolic agents with their own power, like the works. That's why they need a direct connection with Jesuit leadership and official spaces for coordination with other mission actors. We are on that journey.

In the past, leading the mission was primarily about the apostolic coordination of institutions, but today it also includes supporting



and energizing networks. This should be kept in mind at every apostolic level. The secretariats of the General Curia have long integrated their regional leadership with those responsible for international networks. However, despite years of working groups and dialogues at the highest level, the question raised by GC36 about the right level of governance for Jesuit networks remains unresolved.

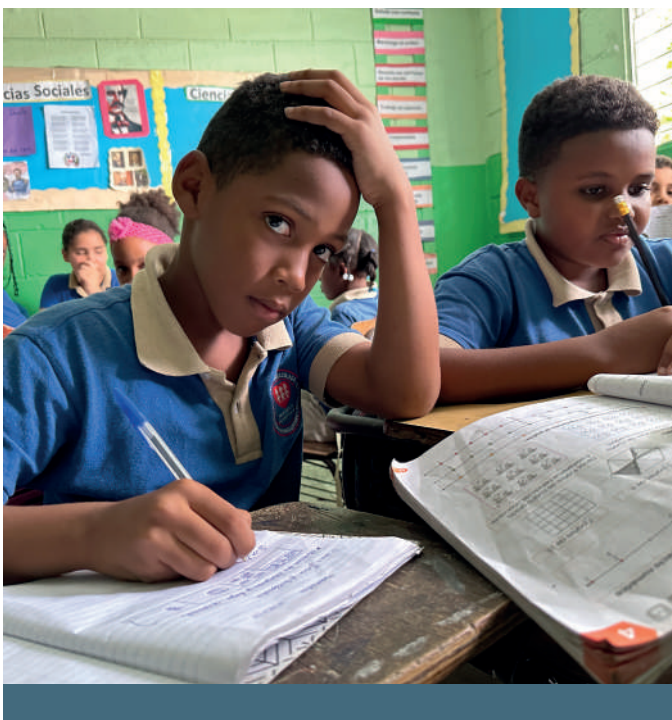
Our apostolic body is adopting a more complex and, at the same time, more unified structure. It is organized like a web where territorial regions, apostolic sectors, and cross-cutting networks intersect. One of the achievements of the last General Congregation was the creation of Discernment and Apostolic Planning, as well as the development of the triad that guides our approach today: discernment, collaboration, and networking. These are not separate concepts; they are interconnected facets of the same spiritual and apostolic energy. Networks enable collaboration. Collaboration

fosters the conditions for genuine apostolic dialogue. And this dialogue allows for true discernment as a community. Without networks, collaboration cannot expand. Without authentic collaboration, community discernment remains superficial.

Finally, it is very important that, as the sectoral secretariats develop global networks, working groups have formed within them that focus on their shared themes. Ecology, migration, education, and global citizenship are becoming cross-sector themes, naturally emerging in each secretariat and calling for development as common areas of focus.

## 4. Ways to move forward

All of the above points to a new approach that is clearly apostolic, relational, and in ongoing discernment. This approach is guided by mission rather than structures, operating from a systemic logic that begins with reality, embraces its complexity, and seeks to articulate it without simplification. It is a necessary way to respond to a mission that is no longer confined to the local level but requires articulation and supra-provincial agency. From there, I cannot help but conclude this article with some reflections on the coming years.



**The first point is clear. Mission and identity are the true glue of any network.** Collaboration only works when we recognize that we are part of something larger and shared. Reinforcing a deep sense of universal mission requires integrating this aspect into everyday practice at the work, provincial, and conference levels. It is crucial to keep developing broad frameworks of shared mission, such as the Apostolic Preferences, while also paying attention to similar tools of the Church and civil society, like the United Nations Global Compacts and their Church-related implementations in areas like migration and education.

**Secondly, networking requires a solid institutional framework.** Goodwill alone is not enough. It is essential to strengthen the Secretariats of the General Curia as spaces for sectoral coordination and, at the same time, to establish stable channels for dialogue with global intersectoral networks. If apostolic structures directly connected to the General Curia are not chosen, the Conferences of Provincials serve as the natural space for coordinating international apostolic efforts. To achieve this, we must create conditions that enable these regional coordination spaces also to oversee global dynamics. We need an international arena where we can engage in dialogue with a comprehensive vision and, before forming new networks, attend to existing ones and maintain the coherence of the entire system.

**The third insight is that networks require leadership based on persuasion, encouragement, and trust,** rather than hierarchical authority. Finding suitable candidates for this role can be difficult. Therefore, investing in international and collaborative leadership programs that combine management, interculturality, and Ignatian spirituality remains essential. Additionally, careful selection processes and ongoing support for those in these roles are vital. Many of our challenges at this level are more related to profiles and capabilities than to structural or strategic issues.

**All of the above requires overcoming institutional individualism and strengthening a collaborative culture.** Self-sufficiency and silo mentality continue to weaken our networks. Today, leading and influencing apostolically means accepting hybrid works and processes in which our presence will not always be about control or ownership. It means fostering interprovincial generosity and expanding the “we” as the true subject of mission, collaborating with other religious congregations and civil society. There is no apostolic horizon without collaboration with those who share, from different places, a commitment to justice, human dignity, and the common good. Although this step may seem simple, it continues to be a serious challenge in the formation of our scholastics and often requires a reconfiguration of the Jesuit identity concerning “our” apostolates and mission.

**Finally, it is crucial to establish stable spaces for reflection and discernment on the practice of collaboration.** In 2012 at Boston College and in 2017 at Georgetown, two international meetings focused on studying networking. In 2024, an apostolic planning meeting occurred in Rome, with reflections and dynamics that took place within this same international organizational framework. We need more experiences like this. The apostolic body learns little if it cannot systematize its own experiences.

*“Networks are not just support functions, but active apostolic agents with their own power, like the works. That’s why they need a direct connection with Jesuit leadership and official spaces for coordination with other mission actors.”*



## 5. The future as a common task

The latest General Congregations have made it clear: networking is not just a technical option, but “an indispensable condition” for our mission. By supporting and encouraging networks, the Society acknowledges that our organization is closely tied to the mission we pursue.

May this article help us realize that, as we collaborate and create structures for it, we are wiring our apostolic body, giving concrete form to how the mission can unfold in the future. Today, the future of our apostolic map depends on the ability to creatively combine existing institutions and make them work together—and with others—in new ways. It is not a question of opening more works, but of discerning with clarity and leadership how to missionarily articulate those we already have.

That is where our responsibility lies today.

I firmly believe that how we set up our networks today and promote collaboration will largely determine how far we can go tomorrow as an apostolic body serving the greater good. The mission will continue to challenge us. Our task is to respond together.

***“Mission and identity are the true glue of any network.”***







Social Justice and Ecology Secretariat (SJES)  
General Curia of the Society  
of Jesus Borgo Santo Spirito 4,  
00193 Rome.