

DECREE SEVENTEEN, GC 34

Jesuits and University Life

404 1. Jesuits have been engaged in university teaching, research, and scholarly publication almost since the foundation of the Society. From astronomy to classical ballet, from the humanities to theology, Jesuits try to enter into the languages and discourses of their inherited or emerging cultures. They attempt to discover, shape, renew, or promote human wisdom, while at the same time respecting the integrity of disciplined scholarship. They also seek to accompany in faith the men and women molded by the potent cultural forces inherent in the university as an institution. St. Ignatius was aware of the wide cultural impact of universities and chose to send Jesuits there, as places where a more universal good might be achieved. Throughout our history we have continued to affirm this basic Ignatian intuition.

405 2. Today, approximately three thousand Jesuits work in nearly two hundred of our own institutions of higher learning, touching the lives of more than half a million students; other Jesuits exercise this mission in other universities. This apostolic activity not only has an influence on the lives of students; it goes beyond the immediate university milieu. We recognize that universities remain crucial institutional settings in society. For the poor they serve as major channels for social advancement. In and through universities, important debates take place about ethics, future directions for economics and politics, and the very meaning of human existence, debates that shape our culture. Neither the university as an institution and as a value for humanity nor the still urgent imperative for an unflagging Jesuit commitment to our tradition of fostering university life stands in need of any fresh defense.

406 3. Moreover, many excellent documents already exist which treat the role and future of Jesuit universities.¹ General Congregation 34 wishes only to encourage Jesuits engaged in this important and traditional Jesuit work and to consider two relatively fresh challenges to Jesuit universities. A Challenge from the Structure of Universities

407 4. During the past thirty years, Jesuit higher education has undergone very rapid development in size, complexity, and more participative structures of government. During this same period, the number of Jesuits engaged in a university, or at least the proportion of Jesuits within the entire university community, has greatly diminished: lay and religious colleagues join with us in a common enterprise. In some places Jesuits no longer own our universities in any real sense. In others, government regulations create a situation in which we no longer fully control them. In places, some ecclesiastical superiors may be distrustful of the freedom necessary for a university truly to function in accord with its specific aims.

408 5. In response to this challenge, Jesuits must continue to work hard, with imagination and faith and often under very difficult circumstances, to maintain and even to strengthen the specific character of each of our institutions both as *Jesuit* and as a *university*. As we look to the future, we need consciously to be on guard that both the noun *university* and the adjective *Jesuit* always remain fully honored.

409 6. The noun guarantees a commitment to the fundamental autonomy, integrity, and honesty of a university precisely as a university: a place of serene and open search for and discussion of the truth. It also points to the mission proper to every university: its dedication to research, teaching, and the various forms of service that correspond to its cultural mission: as the indispensable horizon and context for a genuine preservation, renewal, and communication of knowledge and human values.² As Jesuits, we seek knowledge for its own sake and at the same time must regularly ask, *Knowledge for what?* A Challenge from Faith and Justice

410 7. We affirm the adjective *Jesuit* no less strongly. This presupposes the authentic participation in our basic Jesuit identity and mission of any university calling itself Jesuit, or any university which operates ultimately under our responsibility. While we want to avoid any distortion of the nature of a university or any reduction of its mission to only one legitimate goal, the adjective *Jesuit* nevertheless requires that the university act in harmony with the demands of the service of faith and promotion of justice found in Decree 4 of GC 32. A Jesuit university can and must discover in its own proper institutional forms and authentic purposes a specific and appropriate arena for the encounter with the faith which does justice.

411 8. We applaud the many ways in which Jesuit universities have tried to apply this decree, both in the lives of students through outreach programs of mutual contact and service with the poor, and in the central teaching, research, and publication aims of the university. If it remains true that most Jesuit universities must, in various ways, strive to do even more in order to embody this mission of service to the faith and its concomitant promotion of justice, this only reflects the challenge all Jesuits face to find concrete and effective ways in which large and complex institutions can be guided by and to that justice which God himself so insistently calls for and enables. The task is possible; it has produced martyrs who have testified that *an institution of higher learning and research can become an instrument of justice in the name of the Gospel.*³

412 9. The complexity of a Jesuit university can call for new structures of government and control on the part of the Society in order to preserve its identity and at the same time allow it to relate effectively to the academic world and the society of which it is part, including the Church and the Society of Jesus. More specifically, in order for an institution to call itself Jesuit, periodic evaluation and accountability to the Society are necessary in order to judge whether or not its

dynamics are being developed in line with the Jesuit mission. The Jesuits who work in these universities, both as a community and as individuals, must actively commit themselves to the institution, assisting in its orientation, so that it can achieve the objectives desired for it by the Society.

413 10. Jesuit universities will promote interdisciplinary work; this implies a spirit of cooperation and dialogue among specialists within the university itself and with those of other universities. As a means toward serving the faith and promoting justice in accord with their proper nature as universities, they can discover new perspectives and new areas for research, teaching, and university extension services, by means of which they can contribute to the transformation of society towards more profound levels of justice and freedom. Thus our universities have a clear opportunity to promote interuniversity collaboration and, in particular, to undertake common projects between Jesuit universities of developed and developing countries.

414 11. A Jesuit university must be outstanding in its human, social, spiritual, and moral formation, as well as for its pastoral attention to its students and to the different groups of people who work in it or are related to it.

415 12. Finally, we recall how crucial it is for the whole Church to continue to have dedicated Jesuits engaged in university work. They are committed, in the most profound sense, to the search for the fullness of truth. We are assured that, despite occasional appearances to the contrary, the truth we seek will ultimately be one. That truth, rooted as it is in God, will make us free. GC 34 sends a warm word of greeting and encouragement to all those Jesuits dedicated to make authentic and currently fresh this long-standing but sometimes challenged Jesuit commitment to the university apostolate.

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1. Cf.
 2. GC 31, DD 28, 29, 30; GC 32, D 4; GC 33, D 1, n. 44
 3. Pedro Arrupe, 'Discourse at the Universidad de Deusto,' Bilbao, May 1970 (Rome, C.I.S. 1971, pp. 102-16); 'Apostolic Priorities,' Address to the Congregation of Procurators, Rome, 5 October 1978 (AR 17 [1980]: pp. 518-81); 'The Intellectual Apostolate as a Mission of the Society Today' (AR 16, [1976]: p. 76)
 4. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, 'The Jesuit University Today,' 5 November 1985, AR 19 (1985): pp. 394-403; 'Address at the Centenary Celebration of the Universidad de Deusto,' Bilbao, 5 June 1987, *Selección de escritos del Padre Peter-Hans Kolvenbach* (Provincia de España, 1992), pp. 377-84); 'Address to the U. S. Jesuit Higher Education Assembly,' 7 June 1989, S.J. Documentation 64 (August 1989): pp. 1-11; 'La Universidad: Espacio para la unidad de las ciencias,' Universidad Javeriana, Bogotá, 26 February 1990; 'Educación y valores: A la Universidad Iberoamericana sobre un nuevo modelo de Universidad,' Mexico City, 23 August 1990; 'Apostolado educativo, familia y sociedad nueva,' Guadalajara, Mexico, 29 August 1990; 'En el centenario de la Universidad Pontificia Comillas,' October 1992
 5. John Paul II, Apostolic constitution *Ex Corde Ecclesie* [Return to text](#)
 6. John Paul II, Apostolic constitution *Ex Corde Ecclesie*, Art. 2.1. [Return to text](#)
 7. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, Address to the Congregation of Provincials 1 (20 September 1990), AR 20 (1990): p. 452. [Return to text](#)