

The Intellectual Apostolate

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Abstract

Anything done by a Jesuit, anything done by someone in a Jesuit work should be done intelligently, and those involved in the diverse apostolates of the Society need to have cultivated the life of the mind. The challenge for the intellectual apostolate is: building bridges to frontiers and maintaining creative fidelity to the centre, while being true to ones intellectual discipline and being open to engagement with other intellectual disciplines. The new apostolic challenge is for all Jesuit apostolate partners to be adequately formed, networked, and missioned so that we can act globally and think locally.

Resume

The term “intellectual apostolate” is classic Jesuit-speak. Anything done by a Jesuit, anything done by someone in a Jesuit work should be done intelligently, and those involved in the diverse apostolates of the Society need to have cultivated the life of the mind. The challenge for the intellectual apostolate is: building bridges to frontiers and maintaining creative fidelity to the centre, while being true to ones intellectual discipline and being open to engagement with other intellectual disciplines.

The problem is: Jesuits (whatever their work or institutional base) and all those who work in institutions sponsored by the Jesuits are called to be intellectually true to the Church and to the World. There is a widening gap between the Church and the World. Jesuit apostolic partners have a worldwide presence, a universal scope and reach at many levels that they can efficiently interconnect: presence in the field, academic research in universities, the capacity to build local and international institutions, possibilities to advocate at political level and in political institutions, a spirituality in which common apostolic discernment plays an important role, and influence in the media of communication. All these must be applied intelligently. The new apostolic challenge is for all Jesuit apostolate partners to be adequately formed, networked, and missioned so that we can act globally and think locally.

Introduction: What is the challenge? What is the problem?

The challenge for the intellectual apostolate is: building bridges to frontiers and maintaining creative fidelity to the centre, while being true to ones intellectual discipline and being open to engagement with other intellectual disciplines.

The problem is: Jesuits (whatever their work or institutional base) and all those who work in institutions sponsored by the Jesuits are called to be intellectually true to the Church and to the World. There is a widening gap between the Church and the World. Do we try to narrow the gap or do we straddle it? Are we now sent to the frontiers or are we to man the barricades? Are we to build bridges to be used mainly by others or are we to build fences which demarcate the differences between the Church and the World? Or are we to do both –

and with a declining number of Jesuits but with an enhanced commitment to work, think, pray and share our lives together?

We now live and work in a milieu which does not lend itself to encouraging and enhancing intellectual inquiry by relating it to religious faith, Church tradition and the apostolate of the Jesuits. Neither is it so easy to foster faith, sustaining the tradition and building the apostolate for faith and justice with intellectual labour and creativity.

Analysis of the Problem

Most of the world's intellectuals are no longer people of faith. There are now more intellectual disciplines than when the Catholic Church was so dominant in Europe. There are fewer Jesuits than there were at the time of the Second Vatican Council. The modern Society of Jesus is defined by and committed to the faith that does justice. Jesuit universities are privileged loci for building the bridges and working at the frontiers of faith, knowledge and justice.

The term "intellectual apostolate" is classic Jesuit-speak. There would even be many academics at Jesuit universities who would be hard-pressed to understand the term. The core example is of a Jesuit himself. He is missioned by his superiors. Having been missioned, his work is then much more than a daily job. It is his life – and thus the risk that a Jesuit without family will become a workaholic. Every Jesuit is expected to apply himself intelligently to his apostolic tasks whatever they be. Jesuit institutions of higher learning are expected to have an apostolic dimension to their intellectual activities.

Many intelligent people committed to intellectual tasks now think that these tasks are best performed without consideration of religious belief, tradition or authority. Reflecting on how these tasks can be performed and enhanced in conformity with religious belief, tradition and authority is central to the work of the intellectual apostolate.

In 1995, at the 34th General Congregation of the Jesuits issued a decree entitled “The Intellectual Dimension of Jesuit Ministries”. While insisting on the need for Jesuits to be trained specifically for the intellectual apostolate, the Congregation “strongly reaffirm(ed) the distinctive importance of the intellectual quality of each of our apostolic works”¹. Anything done by a Jesuit, anything done by someone in a Jesuit work should be done intelligently, and those involved in the diverse apostolates of the Society need to have cultivated the life of the mind. The Congregation said, “In apostolic works which are more directly intellectual, professional formation and competence are to be accompanied by that legitimate responsible autonomy and freedom which are requisites for progress in scholarly teaching and research.”² The intellectual work, the intellectual apostolate, the intellectual dimension of every ministry and task are all facets of the intellectual life. The Congregation noted that those engaged in the intellectual life encounter more than the usual “periods of exaltation and of doubt, of recognition and of being ignored, of intense satisfaction and of bitter trial”. It is hard work! It can be very lonely, hard work! Being so subject to intense scrutiny – whether by gossip, peer review or the media, - the person engaged in intellectual work needs “a humble ability to accept praise and also to face rejection and controversy”³.

One domain of the intellectual apostolate which is very demanding for practitioners seeking to exercise their autonomy and freedom responsibly is “theological research and reflection”. Back in 1970, Fr Arrupe called for theological reflection on “humanism, freedom, mass culture, economic development, and violence”. In 1975, the 32nd General Congregation added to the list of intellectual tasks confronting the whole Society of Jesus saying, “We cannot be excused from making the most rigorous possible political and social analysis of our situation.”⁴ In 1983, the 33rd Congregation reaffirming the importance of the intellectual apostolate, said, “Research in theology and philosophy, in all other sciences and in every branch of human culture is likewise essential if Jesuits are to help the Church

understand the contemporary world and speak to it the Word of Salvation.”⁵ No intellectual discipline is exempt; none is irrelevant. While we would never abandon strong intellectual commitment to theology and philosophy, we would always welcome academic excellence within the network of Jesuit apostolic partners whether it be in fine arts or in nuclear physics.

The Faith and Justice Dimension

In 1995, the 34th Congregation supplemented even further the 1970 list of Fr Arrupe and called for theological reflection also on “the contemporary understanding of the promotion of justice, including inculturation and interreligious dialogue”.⁶

In 2003, Fr Kolvenbach communicated to the Society a list of key apostolic preferences for the Society including the intellectual apostolate. He said that “the situation of our world, with the hot issues humanity faces, and the expectations of the Church concerning the Society, call also, on the part of the Provinces and the Conferences of Major Superiors, for a specific commitment to the directly intellectual apostolate”. Then at the most recent Congregation in 2008, the Jesuits were anxious to respond to the gracious inclusion extended them by Pope Benedict XVI ; but they were also anxious to expand their horizons beyond harmonious relations with the Holy See, embracing evocative images of bridges and frontiers to describe the contemporary mission of the Society.

At that Congregation, Pope Benedict XVI spelled out his concerns. At the commencement of the Congregation, he wrote to Fr Kolvenbach saying that it is indispensable “that the life of the members of the Society of Jesus, as also their doctrinal research, be always animated by a true spirit of faith and communion in ‘humble fidelity to the teachings of the Magisterium’”.⁷ He conceded, “Certainly this is not a simple undertaking, especially when called to announce the Gospel in very different social and cultural contexts and when having to deal with different mentalities.” Benedict called for “total adhesion to Catholic doctrine, in particular on those neuralgic points which today are

strongly attacked by secular culture”. He itemised “the relationship between Christ and religions; some aspects of the theology of liberation; and various points of sexual morality, especially as regards the indissolubility of marriage and the pastoral care of homosexual persons”. When meeting with all the Congregation delegates at the end of proceedings six weeks later, he had cause to restate his desire that the Jesuits “renew your interest in the promotion and defence of the Catholic doctrine ‘particularly in the neuralgic points strongly attached today by secular culture’.”⁸ Benedict was keen to tie the intellectual commitment of Jesuits, especially in regard to theological research, to the “characteristic fourth vow of obedience to the Successor of Peter” which some Jesuits are invited to take. Benedict suggested that this vow “not only implies readiness to be sent on mission to far away lands” but also “to love and serve the Vicar of Christ on earth with that effective and affective devotion that must make of you his precious and irreplaceable collaborators in his service of the universal Church.”⁹ Manning the barricades, and building those fences?

The liberating aspect of Benedict’s address was at the outset when he spoke the language of frontiers and bridges, reaffirming that this is central to the Pontiff’s perspective on the Jesuit mission:

As my predecessors have said to you on various occasions, the Church needs you, relies on you and continues to turn to you with trust, particularly to reach those physical and spiritual places which others do not reach or have difficulty in reaching. Paul VI’s words remain engraved on your hearts: "Wherever in the Church, even in the most difficult and extreme fields, at the crossroads of ideologies, in the social trenches, there has been and there is confrontation between the burning exigencies of man and the perennial message of the Gospel, here also there have been, and there are, Jesuits" (Address to the 32nd General Congregation of the Jesuits, 3 December 1974; ORE, 12 December, n. 2, p. 4.).

In their decrees, the Congregation delegates then obliquely addressed, having wrestled with, the tensions raised between intellectual freedom, autonomy and creativity exercised at the frontiers and by the building of bridges on the one hand and effective and affective devotion to the Pope asking for consolidation and support at the centre in repelling the effects of the secular culture over the so-called “neuralgic points”. The decree “Challenges to our Mission Today” is subtitled “Sent to the Frontiers”. The decree starts by reaffirming the Jesuit mission as the service of faith. The integrating principle of that mission is “the inseparable link between faith and the promotion of the justice of the Kingdom”.¹⁰ The previous Congregation had seen that inculturation and dialogue were essential elements now for the Jesuit way of proceeding in mission.¹¹

Possibilities for Global Collaboration

The 35th Congregation noted the new context for mission as outlined by Benedict XVI:

Your Congregation is being held during a period of great social, economic and political change; of conspicuous ethical, cultural and environmental problems, of conflicts of all kinds; yet also of more intense communication between peoples, of new possibilities for knowledge and dialogue, of profound aspirations for peace.

Rapidity of change, globalisation, and the new media were singled out for attention. The Congregation then set the language for our contemporary mission under the rubric of reconciliation: reconciliation with God, with one another, and with Creation. In relation to seeking reconciliation with each other they noted the good and bad effects of globalisation and said:¹²

The complexity of the problems we face and the richness of the opportunities offered demand that we build bridges between rich and poor, establishing advocacy links of mutual support between those who hold political power and those who find it difficult to voice their

interests. Our intellectual apostolate provides an inestimable help in constructing these bridges, offering us new ways of understanding in depth the mechanisms and links among our present problems.

In relation to reconciliation with creation, the Congregation put a distinct challenge to those working in universities and research centres:¹³

This Congregation urges all Jesuits and all partners engaged in the same mission, particularly the universities and research centres, to promote studies and practices focusing on the causes of poverty and the question of the environment's improvement. We should find ways in which our experiences with refugees and the displaced on one hand, and people who work for the protection of the environment on the other hand, could interact with those institutions, so that research results and advocacy have effective practical benefits for society and the environment. Advocacy and research should serve the poor and those who work for the protection of the environment.

The Congregation acknowledged the apostolic preferences which Fr Kolvenbach had previously adopted in consultation with the Conferences of major superiors: Africa, China, the intellectual apostolate, the inter-provincial houses in Rome and migration and refugees. While asking Fr Nicolas to review these preferences, the Congregation gave a specific endorsement to the need to strengthen and renew the intellectual apostolate:¹⁴

The intellectual apostolate has been a defining characteristic of the Society of Jesus from its beginning. Given the complex yet interrelated challenges that Jesuits face in every apostolic sector, GC 35 calls for a strengthening and renewal of this apostolate as a privileged means for the Society to respond adequately to the important intellectual contribution to which the Church calls us. Advanced studies for Jesuits must be encouraged and supported throughout formation.

At the end of the Congregation, the delegates finalised an introductory decree as a response to the “invitation of the Holy Father”. Professing a better understanding of why the Pope was stressing the Church’s reliance on the Jesuits’ responsibility for formation in theology, spirituality and mission, the delegates affirmed that “fidelity demands serious and rigorous research in the theological field and in dialogue with the contemporary world, cultures and religions”.¹⁵ Aware of the importance of the intellectual apostolate and seeking to respond to the mission as outlined by the Pope (including attention to the neuralgic points), the Congregation noted that “To be missioned to this work at the new frontiers of our times always requires that we also be rooted at the very heart of the Church.” They thought that “This tension, specific to the Ignatian charism, opens the way to true creative fidelity.”¹⁶

Though no specific decree was produced on the intellectual apostolate, the Congregation published three pertinent recommendations:¹⁷

First, young Jesuits should be encouraged to consider this apostolate and to be assigned to it. In spite of the cost and time involved, it is indispensable to promote special studies among them without neglecting care for their personal and community life.

Secondly, it is crucial that the intellectual apostolate foster every possible form of collaboration among persons, teams, centers and journals, promote working in networks and choose institutions which can assure excellence in research.

Thirdly, Conferences and Provincials should care for the conservation and preservation of our intellectual patrimony or its distribution.

Possibilities for Collaboration amongst faculty and policy makers

The 2009 Copenhagen Summit on Climate Change poignantly highlighted the need for greater collaboration across disciplines and between the academy and governments if we are to shape the future for a more humane, just, sustainable globe. Even well educated global citizens are confused about the best way forward. If we are to find and apply answers for the

good of the planet we need to consider: What is the science? What is the economics? What is the politics? What is the correct ethical approach? What are the key theological insights?

One of the Jesuits who attended the Summit at the Bella Center at Copenhagen was the Belgian theologian Jacques Haers. As the world confronted the pending gloom that the national leaders were not going to reach significant agreement, he rode the train home to Belgium and tapped some reflections on his computer, then transmitting them to the international Jesuit network – a veritable case study in the possibilities of collaboration. He wrote:

There is an important role for religions, although they were but little present at COP15, i.e. in the Bella Center and amidst the negotiations. There have been, of course, some remarkable religious events outside of the Bella Center, and I think especially of Rowan Williams' sermon in Copenhagen's cathedral. Religions touch the capacity to face truth and reality (particularly when it has become difficult to face these, as is the case with global climate change), they are spaces for visions and hope, they are intimately connected to cosmologies and worldviews and, therefore, also to nature itself, they use methodologies of discernment that are more holistic than scientific, economic, military, etc. perspectives, they pay attention to the voices of broken people and broken creatures, they can mobilize and motivate people. There is a great need for these religious voices, also amongst politicians and leaders who are facing the current challenges. Leadership at this level and at this moment requires a worldwide perspective and a strong rootedness in constructive and pro-active values.

Common Research Projects

During his train journey, Jacques Haers SJ went on to offer this reflection on the possibility for Jesuit collaboration:

I also come home with ideas about the role of the Jesuits and the Ignatian Family. They have a worldwide presence, a universal scope and reach at many levels that they can efficiently interconnect: presence in the field, academic research in universities, the capacity to build local and international institutions (as the Jesuit Refugee Service), possibilities to advocate at political level and in political institutions, a spirituality in which common apostolic discernment plays an important role, influence in the media of communication, etc. To have received these capacities is at this moment of history a very precious gift and puts the Ignatian Family and the Jesuits at a “kairos” in which they can commit wholeheartedly and, in doing so, rediscover who they are.

The 2006 Report of the Taskforce on Globalisation and Marginalisation by the Social Justice Secretariat recommended four key areas for theological reflection which is the distinctive hallmark of the Jesuit intellectual apostolate:¹⁸

1. As regards our service of faith, we need to develop a new interpretative philosophical and theological framework that emphasizes togetherness and interdependence.

2. Reflections on justice may balance our present focus on the individual as the holder of rights and the Christian understanding of the ‘justice of the Gospel’ with a compassionate and sensitive approach to the ‘right relationships’ required to build the Kingdom of God.

3. The issue of culture touches on the issue of how knowledge and its use define and form identities, a process intimately linked to power-relations. Though globalisation has sometimes been defined as the disappearance of (cultural) borderlines, this tendency often entails a cultural homogenisation, resulting in a form of imperialist domination of the stronger culture over the weaker. More promising is an approach of reflection on, and analysis of, globalisation as a process universalising the ‘frontier spaces of encounter’, a process creating more and more spaces where cultures find a new mix (hybridisation).

In these spaces that are at the margins, so to speak, cultural diversities meet and new hybrid forms are created.

4. Interreligious dialogue needs to move more decisively into a reflection on the issues of fundamentalism. Closely related to this is the tendency of religions to ‘take flight from reality’ and look at it only in terms of ‘good’ and ‘evil’, black and white. This tendency may well be the result of fear. Interreligious dialogue is often thick with issues of religious identity – identities in which we find ourselves at ease, as they provide us with secure beacons for our daily life. Interreligious dialogue, however, may explore the need to develop new religious identities resulting from genuine encounters at all levels. We need to explore the ways in which a certain ‘fluidity’ of religious identity may be allowed to enrich us all and preserve our interconnectedness.

Questions to stimulate discussion

1. How can my intellectual discipline be enhanced by a consideration of religious belief, Church tradition and authority, and the Jesuit ethos?
2. Do church documents and Jesuit language help me or hinder me in fostering the life of the mind and a humane response to the challenges I confront?
3. How can my intellectual work contribute to a more humane, just and sustainable globe?
4. How can my intellectual work and integrity contribute to a Church better equipped to contribute to a more humane, just and sustainable globe?
5. How can I relate to and work more constructively with persons of other intellectual disciplines so that together we might contribute to a more humane, just and sustainable globe?

6. How can I relate to and work more constructively with persons in other institutions, ministries and cultures so that together we might contribute to a more humane, just and sustainable globe?

7. What difference does it make for me to work at a Jesuit university or to collaborate with others imbued with the Jesuit ethos?

Ways to establish a global network

After this conference, we will return to our homes, our desks, and our laptops. We will have met fellow academics from diverse disciplines, different countries and ethnicities, of different religions and none. We share a commitment to applying the life of the mind to our global reality. We need to maintain the communication, commit ourselves to some common tasks

The 2006 Taskforce on Globalisation and Marginalisation concluded:¹⁹

We Jesuit apostolate partners together are blessed by our connectedness with each other, with the marginalised, and with the global actors. We are called to be bridge builders. With our personal vocations, our institutional apostolic bases, and our networks, we are well positioned to answer that call, bridging global chasms and local divisions. These bridges can be built only if we give all that is ours, and even our very selves to the task. In an age of globalisation and marginalisation, we still dare to pray for the coming of the Kingdom.

Our challenge in a globalised and marginalised world is not so much to think globally and act locally- we do that already. The new apostolic challenge is for all Jesuit apostolate partners to be adequately formed, networked, and missioned so that we can act globally and think locally.

Endnotes

¹ GC34, D16, n.1

² GC34, D16, n.4

³ GC34, D16, n.5

⁴ GC32, D4, n.44

⁵ GC33, D1, n.45

⁶ GC34, D16, n.7

⁷ Letter of Benedict XVI to P H Kolvenbach SJ, 10 January 2008

⁸ Address of Pope Benedict XVI to the 35th Congregation, 21 February 2008, n.6

⁹ Address of Pope Benedict XVI to the 35th Congregation, 21 February 2008, n.7

¹⁰ GC34, D2, n.14 and GC35, D3, n.2

¹¹ GC34, D2, n.14-21 and GC35, D3, n.3

¹² GC 35, D.3, n.28

¹³ GC 35, D.3, n.35

¹⁴ GC 35, D.3, n.39. It is interesting to note that footnote 4 of the document “Issues for the Ordinary Government of the Society of Jesus Studied at the 35th General Congregation” states, “The intellectual apostolate is another of the global preferences established by the GC35 Decree 3, n 39(iii).

¹⁵ GC 35, D.1, n.7

¹⁶ GC 35, D.1, n.13

¹⁷ Issues for the Ordinary Government of the Society of Jesus Studied at the 35th General Congregation

¹⁸ *Globalisation and Marginalisation: Our Global Apostolic Response*, Report of the Taskforce on Globalisation and Marginalisation, Social Justice Secretariat, Rome, 2006, pp. 32-3

¹⁹ *Globalisation and Marginalisation: Our Global Apostolic Response*, Report of the Taskforce on Globalisation and Marginalisation, Social Justice Secretariat, Rome, 2006, pp. 34-5