



On Jesuits missioned to the intellectual apostolate

2014/09

TO THE WHOLE SOCIETY

Dear brothers,

The long tradition of the involvement of the Society of Jesus in the intellectual apostolate forms part of our religious identity. We know that the first companions came to know one other in Paris while they were studying to become Masters of Arts. We remember the participation of some of the first Jesuits (Diego Laínez, Alfonso Salmerón and Claude Le Jay) at the Council of Trent as theological experts. We preserve the memory of the efforts of so many Jesuits in the creation and development of the Roman College, an institution which became a recognized center for scientific studies in the seventeenth century. Up to the present, many other Jesuits have played an important role in the dialogue between science and faith, and, in a more general way, in the dialogue between faith and reason. This tradition is one of the apostolic preferences of the Society. Nonetheless, a renewal of our efforts is needed in every generation because of the constantly changing context of this important work.

Many new questions emerge from developments in science and technology (for example, in the fields of biology and physics), the awareness that we live in a world with limited natural resources, and changes in ways of establishing relationships with others (the information society). Responding to these questions requires openness to intellectual reflection regarding all the fields of our mission. Whether we work in universities, periodicals, social centers, retreat houses or research laboratories, whether we are involved in the youth apostolate, in parish life or in ecclesial movements - in whatever field the Jesuit mode of involvement in apostolic life includes reflection on the social, economic and political context and on the anthropological questions of our time. The intellectual dimension is part of all our ministries (cf. CG 34, d. 16). Thus, we need to be prepared to enter into this dimension from the start of our formation.

In November and December 2013, two groups of Jesuits and laypeople, specifically involved in the intellectual apostolate, met in Rome to share their apostolic experiences¹, and I was glad to have been a witness to their exchanges. I thank them for their contributions to the discernment of the mission of the Society.

I am now sending this letter to all Jesuits to invite the Society to a renewal of the intellectual apostolate, particularly in the field of research.

¹ The following contributed to these meetings: Vivien Amonkar (India), Xavier Arockiasamy SJ (MDU), Matthew Carnes SJ (CFN), Eric Charmetant SJ (GAL), Francis Clooney SJ (NYK), José Mario Francisco SJ (PHI), Thomas Hidyá Tjaya SJ (IDO), Job Kozhamthadam SJ (DEL), Ludovic Lado SJ (AOC), Bernard Muhigirwa SJ (ACE), Inácio Neutzling SJ (BRM), Yanuar Nugroho (Indonesia), Arturo Reynoso SJ (MEX), Enrique Sanz SJ (CAS), Josef Schuster SJ (GER), Nicolas Standaert SJ (CHN) and Gerlinde Verbist (Belgium).



1. An apostolate at the service of the mission of the Church

The intellectual apostolate helps us discover God's presence and activity in the depths of reality and to share this discovery. We want to be open to the presence of God who, even today, works in our societies and cultures, as He does in the heart of every human being (cf. Sp. Ex. 235-236). The intellectual apostolate contributes to the mission of the Society with a faith that promotes justice, that is present at the frontiers, that form part of our human condition, and that multiplies efforts to promote reconciliation (cf. GC 35, d.3, nn.12-80). This means that our openness will be innovative when faced with the challenges of our world, thereby contributing in a specific way to the development of the sciences. Jesuits, as true apostolic laborers, will often be led to propose in a thoughtful and responsible way, an approach that is critical of the values that underlie some developments in today's world (for example, in the areas of economics and bioethics). Similarly, it may be that their involvement with the reality of the world may lead them to take active part with others in shared initiatives to promote human dignity in our world.

The intellectual apostolate establishes a bridge of dialogue between Gospel and culture, between sciences and religious traditions, and accomplishes this using their languages. In a world in which the link between faith and culture is controverted, in which, in a similar way, the relationship between faith and reason is questioned, the need for intellectual depth in the apostolic life is urgent. Together with others, the Society of Jesus seeks to respond to this call, with determination and humility, sharing thus in the mission of the Church. Initiatives that we can take to strengthen these links in our universities, faculties, cultural centers and periodicals should be encouraged. With determination we will create occasions for true encounter, in which academic reflection and the concrete life of people are brought together. In this way, the intellectual apostolate will be a real service to the mission of the Church in our world. We know that on this road there can arise incomprehension and burdensome tensions. We cannot avoid these problems, but we will try to live with them in the spirit of "sentire cum Ecclesia", to which the Ignatian tradition invites us. Our mission calls us to "go to the frontiers" with rigor and discernment.

Hence, the Jesuit intellectual apostolate should offer, at the same time, a service to the sciences and to the mission of the Society in the Church. From this simultaneous service comes the fruitfulness of this apostolate.

2. Various ways of living out the intellectual apostolate

Although we should not forget the *intellectual dimension* that is present in all our ministries, it is possible to distinguish different ways of living out *the intellectual apostolate*, properly so called, in the Society:

- a- Some Jesuits receive a mission that invites them to be part of an intellectual community (for example, in the natural or social sciences, or the humanities) or to develop research in philosophy or theology. Their mission can be described as a "ministry of research" and it unfolds in study, in belonging to a worldwide community of researchers, in publishing in specialized journals etc.
- b- Other Jesuits are involved in higher education. As professors in universities (whether the institution depends on the Society or not) they participate fully in the life of their institutes or faculties. These Jesuits involved in the "ministry of teaching" are, or should also be, involved in the "ministry of research".
- c- Some, who may be members of one or other of the two first groups already mentioned, are involved in some way in the formation of Jesuits: that is, in the philosophical and theological studies of scholastics and brothers. Often, these Jesuits



who work in the “ministry of formation” are also involved in the formation of seminarians, religious, and laypeople.

- d- Other Jesuits are involved in the accompaniment of those actively involved in fields such as social development, economics, medicine, and politics. Over the years, these Jesuits have been equipped to understand the culture of the people working in these fields, thus enabling these Jesuits to develop, through and with those whom they serve, a “ministry of discernment in the world”, that is exercised, for example, in movements, in journals, or in cultural and social centers.

3. The spiritual attitude required for the intellectual apostolate

The intellectual depth to which we are called has a spiritual perspective as its foundation. In whatever way Jesuits live out their intellectual work, humility, abnegation and patience are needed. Intellectual reflection implies that one begins a long journey. This journey of research and reflection requires a readiness to live in a certain solitude, but also to be open to sharing and to collaboration with others.

The Jesuit commitment to the intellectual apostolate must be free of every desire for personal advancement and of a spirit of competition and rivalry, because this commitment is inspired by a desire to serve. In particular, studies at the level of the doctorate are not done to give a Jesuit a gratifying image of himself. In the field of intellectual work as well, every Jesuit is called to receive his mission as the fruit of a discernment carried out with his superiors. For their part, Superiors should be aware of their responsibility when they become involved in discerning the mission of a Jesuit in the intellectual apostolate. Having clearly defined apostolic priorities allows the Superior to dialogue with a Jesuit who may be called to be involved in the intellectual apostolate, and to mission this Jesuit with a clear purpose.

It would be helpful if Jesuits working in the intellectual apostolate are assigned to institutions of the Society that work in this apostolic field: for example, universities, house of formation, journals, etc. In these works, Jesuits will find like-minded colleagues to work with and opportunities for reflecting together on the fundamental questions of our time. It would also be good to live out this intellectual mission in a spirit of collaboration and of dialogue, both within the Society and in collaboration with others (including men and women coming from other confessional traditions or without a particular religious affiliation).

4. Strengthening the “ministry of research”

I wish now to dwell on a particular form of the intellectual apostolate: the “ministry of research” described above. First of all I want to thank all Jesuits who are already working in philosophical, theological, and scientific research. Their work is often carried out silently and discreetly. At other times, their labor emerges into the public arena. Their perseverance and their desire to take part, through research, in the mission of the Society are very important. I am aware of this and wish to express to them my gratitude and encouragement.

To carry on this tradition of the Society in the “ministry of research” today, how should fields of study around which this ministry can be developed be chosen? How does one do planning for this ministry? Who should be missioned to this ministry? How should this ministry be lived out?

4.1 Fields of study for the “ministry of research”

No field can be excluded *a priori* from the “ministry of research”: philosophy and theology, but also the sciences dealing with life, human and social sciences, physics etc.. Nevertheless, our societies today are faced with radical challenges. What does “being human”



mean today? How can we live with religious, spiritual, and confessional diversity, in cultures often marked by secularization, by secularism, or by fundamentalism? How can the people of the world live together in justice and with mutual respect? How do we live on an earth with limited natural resources? Many of these challenges have already been identified by the Conferences when they established their “frontiers” for mission.

4.2 Planning for the “ministry of research”

The “ministry of research” ought to feature in apostolic planning at the level of the Province or Region, and, taking account of the level in which certain challenges are present, also at the level of the Conferences. The discernment that Major Superiors should engage in to promote the “ministry of research” has an interprovincial dimension that involves the Conferences of Major Superiors. The “frontiers” articulated by the Conferences already identify some fields in which this “ministry of research” can be developed at the interprovincial level. Having established apostolic priorities will be very helpful when it comes to identifying areas of research towards which candidates for the “ministry of research” can be directed.

4.3 Candidates

After a discernment carried out by every Major Superior in conjunction with the other Major Superiors (at the level of the Conferences for example), concrete choices become necessary. Only those Jesuits who possess the required capacity to do research, have the interest for such an enterprise, and, who possess in a notable way the necessary spiritual dispositions, should be missioned to the “ministry of research”. Ways should be found to orient their studies and to support them during their studies. I therefore ask Major Superiors to pay particular attention to this last point which often goes beyond the immediate horizon of one’s own Province or Region.

I ask Major Superiors to discuss these points with their Consultors. I hope that, in every Province and Region, a dialogue between Jesuits and their superiors can be developed for the sake of the “ministry of research” that the Church expects of us.

4.4 Conditions for research

Jesuits missioned to the “ministry of research” must be given the time needed enter profoundly into an enterprise which often does not bear immediate fruit. In order not to waste such an investment of time and effort and to allow research to continue, it would be prudent not to burden these Jesuits with administrative chores which, despite their great importance, could distract them from their research. They should be given the opportunity to persevere in their task, without, on that account, remaining isolated. It is desirable that they be part of institutions where they can work with other researchers with whom they can develop this apostolate. Their participation in active networks of collaboration, within the Society but also beyond the Society, is necessary. In these networks they will be able to offer recommendations and proposals for the future to public authorities. In a similar way, there should be regular opportunities for them to give an account of their work to their religious superior. Thus, in this apostolate, they will not be isolated but deeply immersed in the apostolic dynamic of their Region, Province, and Conference.

Thanks to the labors of previous generations, we have many instruments at our disposal that can help us to renew the intellectual apostolate so that it may be a true service to the mission of the Church in today’s world. In the present context, in which the number of Jesuits is diminishing in some parts of the world and growing in others, we need to continue our efforts in this field, seeking to adapt our efforts to present realities. I am grateful to all Jesuits



who, in so many countries, are already involved in the intellectual apostolate with this concern for renewal. In a particular way, the Society needs to give priority to and protect the “ministry of research” so that it can offer that service of depth that the Church expects from us. A real commitment to apostolic choices and planning is demanded of us.

Let us ask the Lord to help us in these efforts of discernment and of renewed creativity, so that we may become ever more committed servants of his mission in the today’s world. May Our Lady of the Wayside, the Madonna della Strada, accompany us on this journey!

Fraternally yours in the Lord,

Adolfo Nicolás, S.I.
Superior General

Rome, 24 May 2014
Feast of Our Lady of the Wayside

(Original: Italian)