

THE INTELLECTUAL DIMENSION OF JESUIT MINISTRIES

Discourse of Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, Superior General of the Society of Jesus held on 20 May 2002 at the University School of Philosophy and of Education „Ignatianum” in Cracow / Poland

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is for me a source of great joy to meet with our collaborators in this magnificent Aula Magna of the *Ignatianum* to share on the intellectual ministry. You have a right to know how we Jesuits perceive the nature and mission of our educational institutions. Even university and cultural circles at large seek to know the spirit with which the Society of Jesus enters the world of science, research, academic instruction, and cultural activity generally. The reflection I am about to submit is also meant to give impetus to the process the Polish Jesuits are involved in of defining their presence in the sector of education that after the fall of communism is experiencing a tremendous growth. All this is taking place in conjunction with the worldwide assessment the Society is making of its commitment to university education and the role it intends to play in it.

Certainly, the presence of the Polish Jesuits in education has a long history, as the preceding papers have shown. However, after decades of enforced absence from schools and of the limitations placed on the influence of Christianity in the intellectual and cultural world, they are engaged along with many others in efforts to restore the Church's place in Polish society and to find new ways of proclaiming the Word of God to its people. This search is producing a pluralistic Catholic presence in the world of culture and of the university. It is not only a pluralism of institutional forms but also of approach to the social and cultural reality and to an understanding of our place in it. In fact, a mixed system is emerging in which some theological faculties in state universities coexist with institutions such as the Catholic University of Lublin, the Pontifical Academy of Theology here in Krakow, and the pontifical

academies in Warsaw and Wrocław. Through their academic institutions, the Polish Jesuits believe they can make an original contribution to the growth of Christian culture.

This is a continuation of a tradition that goes back to Saint Ignatius himself, who encouraged Jesuits to engage in the ministry of education, moved as he was by the notion of the *Magis*, to serve the Divine Majesty in areas of greater importance and need, where a greater service could be given.

The last General Congregation, the 34th, reaffirms „the distinctive importance of the intellectual quality” of each Jesuit work as contributing to „the discovery of the creative work of God” and as recognising „the legitimate autonomy of human inquiry” (Cf. GC 34, D.16). Because „freedom and the ability to reason are attributes which characterise human beings as created in the likeness of God and are closely tied to genuine faith, an intellectual tradition continues to be of critical importance for the Church’s vitality as well as for the understanding of cultures which deeply affect each person’s way of thinking and living.”

The Congregation „resolutely encourages a vigorous spiritual and intellectual formation for young Jesuits and ongoing spiritual and intellectual formation for every Jesuit” as well as „serious and active intellectual inquiry” as characteristic of „our commitment to integral evangelisation.” In more directly intellectual apostolic works, „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.”

It is also essential to recognise the specific characteristics of each of the various scholarly disciplines. Because the intellectual dimension of every apostolic work also supposes that each Jesuit knows how to be a companion with others, „the intellectual mission calls for a humble ability to accept praise and also to face rejection and controversy.” Jesuits must learn to live creatively „between profound insertion into all the details of our work and an open and critical attitude towards other points of view and other cultural and confessional positions.”

But if we pursue our intellectual apostolate in the spirit of Saint Ignatius we are aware that the present-day problems are very different from those of the early days of the Society of Jesus. There is a similarity, however, in that he too lived in the context of a break-down in the world of knowledge. The universities of Alcalá, Salamanca and Paris where Ignatius studied claimed to offer a synthesis of all scientific disciplines, which avoided compartmentation and repetition. It was the era of the „Summas” in which Aristotelian logic served to link all the sciences towards the attainment of „sophia” made possible by a „paideia”. Already in the time of Ignatius, the reform movement was

undermining the unity of the faith and with it the conviction that there was one source of revealed truth ensuring the unity of intellectual endeavour. Out of the Galileoan revolution came positive science, by nature and method very different from what existed before. This in turn produced various fields of study separated from each other. Specialisation became the norm. In the words of a former president of Beyrouth University in Lebanon, people come to know everything about a restricted body of knowledge or to know almost nothing about everything.

We must consider another aspect of modern life. Through newspapers, radio, television, E-mail and internet, we have rapid access to vast amounts of information. Computers and photocopiers add to this facility of communication. As far as intellectual life is concerned, we are forced to make the choice of either leaving the door wide open to this flow of information and keeping in touch with the vibrant life of the world or withdrawing into the world of books, in one's own interior, to study and reflect on basic questions at the risk of separating ourselves from the world and becoming outdated. There is so much to absorb that there is little time to read. We can also give in to the temptation to briefly summarise knowledge, thus cutting ourselves away from a true learning process and depriving ourselves of the joy of appropriating the thought presented in a text.

Granted that the context of intellectual life in the 16th century as Saint Ignatius and the first Jesuits knew it is very different from our own, they also must have experienced the tension between acquiring knowledge and being formed. At the beginning of the Spiritual Exercises, which reflect Ignatius's spiritual experience, we read that, what fills and satisfies the soul consists not in knowing much but in understanding the realities profoundly and in savouring them interiorly" (Ex. 2). It is somewhat surprising that a text that encourages deep reflection is at the same time critical of the desire to acquire much knowledge.

Let us look at another aspect of the intellectual character of Ignatius. Although he is at the origin of so many Jesuit universities and schools, he himself did not seek, either for himself or for his companions, to develop an ideal of intellectual life or a new pedagogy. At the moment of his conversion, he asserted that God was the master who was teaching him. „God treated him at this time just as a schoolmaster treats a child whom he is teaching" (Autobiography 27). Whether this was because of his lack of education or because he had no one to teach him, or because of the strong desire God himself had given him to serve him, he always believed without doubt that God treated him in this way.

It has to be noted that this teaching by God himself without the mediation of studies and schools put Ignatius in the suspicious area of the illuminated, the *alumbrados*. How can someone be a theologian without a theological training? The question was formally raised later on when Ignatius tried to start some studies at the University of Salamanca. The friar who questioned him knew that he was not a man of learning and still he preached. How could he speak about theology? „No one can speak about these things except in two ways: either through learning or through the Holy Spirit.” Ignatius did not answer, because by saying „through the Holy Spirit” he would be condemned. In any case, he was put in jail for twenty-five days, and as a consequence of this happening he decided to go to Paris to study at the university there, at the age of thirty-five.

This incident in Ignatius' life is significant for us even today. Emotion, especially of a religious nature, can be so overpowering that it leaves little place for scientific study and analysis, for patient and methodical investigation. If God speaks to us directly through the Scriptures, then we can come to think that exegetical studies and the learning of dead languages are of little benefit. Such an approach, that is sometimes wrongly called 'charismatic', can lead one to doubt the value of reflection and study. It can easily produce an anti-intellectual attitude. Spontaneity and enthusiasm, even though sincere and authentic, can invade the domain proper to reason with its objective verification and questioning.

Through trial and error Ignatius had to discover the importance of learning for the ministry. It was in Barcelona, before he started to look for a university, that Ignatius, still a pilgrim, after his failure to do apostolic work in the Holy Land, experienced an 'inclination' to study, to take intellectual life seriously. „He continually pondered within himself what he ought to do. Eventually, he was rather inclined to study for some time...” (Autobiography 50). Once more we have here a common fact in life: a person uncertain about his future and trying to see more clearly what to do. It underlines the necessity of thought as the way to the truth. It is sufficient to observe the rising tide of scepticism and fundamentalism, of verbal and ideological violence, to conclude that in our world many have lost confidence in thought and language. It is once more in his religious experience that Ignatius recognises the value of pondering and reflecting, especially in the context of decision making. „After I have gone over and pondered in this way every aspect of the matter in question, I will consider which alternative appears more reasonable. Then I must come to a decision in the matter under deliberation because of weightier motives presented to my reason, and not because of any sensual inclination” (Ex. 182). It

is with confidence in God's gift that the General Congregation of 1995 could state: „It is therefore characteristic of a Jesuit that he embodies in creative tension this Ignatian requirement to use all human means, science, art, leaning, natural virtue, while maintaining at the same time a total reliance on God's grace" (553). In the context of the complex challenges and opportunities of our contemporary world, the intellectual ministry requires all the learning and intelligence, imagination and ingenuity, solid studies and rigorous analysis that we can muster (554). This confidence in the intellectual ministry does not mean that Ignatius did not realise the limitations of our power of thought. In order to recognise and separate the good from the bad, we must exercise discernment, which implies asking questions, searching for solutions, learning from experience and research. According to the former Master of the Dominicans, it is also learning from one's mistakes. „It means a willingness to take the risk of falling on one's face, picking oneself up again, having another go. Unless we dare to get it wrong, then we shall never get it right. A university that is filled with fear of making mistakes has betrayed its vocation. We must form people who dare to think, to be intellectually adventurous, confident that their mistakes help them on their journey to the truth."

A healthy critical attitude to the world around us is also a part of intellectual activity. We must learn to resist indoctrination and external pressures, whatever their source. We must not let ourselves be over-influenced by popular currents of thought. There is also the world within with its more or less subtle strivings for position and honour. It is with freedom of spirit that Saint Ignatius and his first companions pursued intellectual formation, established universities and colleges, did apostolic work and encouraged application to study. They were constructively critical of the intellectual life of their time. Ignatius' guiding principle was the service of the Divine Majesty. Thus we find him suggesting a re-examination of the studies at the university of Vienna and the time given to them, „for some bright talents produce little fruit" (Ep. Ign. 7, 633-634, n. 4859). Elsewhere, he criticises the pursuit of degrees for the honour and privilege they bring while encouraging people to seek them for the authority that goes with them (Ep. Ign. 10, 515, n. 6101). We ought not to be taken in by the temporary popularity of best-selling writers whose books are not bad but controversial while there are so many other valuable books produced by less well-known people (Ep. Ign. 6, 80, n. 4003). The ideas of the humanists are lofty but contribute little to helping the Church assailed on all sides by so many contrary forces and the people of God caught up in an increasing moral decrepitude and living in a state of gross ignorance.

Now, as in Ignatius' own time, intellectual activity risks becoming centered on itself, study can be pursued for its own sake rather than for motives of a better service. For, in the mind of Ignatius, all intellectual work must be ordained to this service of mankind, of all men and of the whole man. It must be rooted in the human reality and the respect of the freedom of others, whether in collaboration or confrontation. Whatever its domain or speciality, it must be guided by a proper vision of the world, and ordained to the promotion of true values, now fundamental now relative depending on the circumstances of the moment. It presupposes an awareness of the consequences of learning, for good or bad. It must be exercised in relationship with others, relationships which can be sought or which are inevitable. It must be pursued in relation to the needs of the Church, of the people of God and of the country, and with a willingness to act as seems appropriate or necessary.

In conclusion, I want to make some propositions about a Catholic and Jesuit educational institution. These may stimulate a further discussion on the themes that define the work of the intellectual apostolate and inspire us as Jesuits. The presupposition is that such an institution is oriented to the uncompromising and unrestricted pursuit of truth and excellence in all the disciplines engaged in by staff members, scientific, theoretical and practical. This principle underlies all our academic and educational work. At the same time, the religious, moral and pedagogical values proposed below do not diminish our belief that serious scholarly inquiry is absolutely crucial to the vitality of the intellectual apostolate.

This apostolate rests on two fundamental principles. The first is that all inquiry can serve to deepen faith and that faith by its nature demands understanding. Faith and understanding are intrinsically connected. Religion and secular intellectual culture need to be open to one another's insights. Religion and culture raise important questions and need each other to answer them fully. The second principle is that love of God which does not include love of neighbour is a pious fraud. Thus we must ask ourselves whether our students deepen their sense of wonder and curiosity, cultivate their ideals, widen their understanding of human life and their sympathy for others. Does the education we offer enable them to learn how best to ordain their lives to what is best for themselves and good for other men and women? In an institution of higher education the knowledge gained through inquiry brings with it the responsibility of acting justly for the common good. But the ethical ideal proposed by our schools should be of a higher level than that of liberal education. We and our students should continually be asking ourselves if the choices we make are leading us to the ideal of service

as proposed by the Gospel: „Whoever would be great among you must be your servant.” (Mark 11, 42)

Jesuit education then should prepare students for active participation in the Church and in the local community. Do we have a model of educational formation, appropriate to the national and international context, that takes seriously the spiritual and intellectual development of students and also keeps alive the vision of just service to the human community? Is there an equal concern for the needs of the local community and the more universal preoccupations of the Church?

Cross-cultural encounters and political-economic interdependence have become facts of life for ordinary men and women as never before in human history. New forms of interaction across the boundaries of nations and tradition open formerly unimaginable possibilities for a true community among the men and women of the earth. Nation-states are beginning to recognise that transnational problems like environmental degradation, the forced migration of refugees, economic development and unemployment require transnational responses. Global economic interdependence calls the very idea of 'domestic' economy into question. An educational institution must become a place where the newly interdependent world we are entering today is both present and more adequately understood. How are we present to the discussions on the subject of the globalisation of the economy and of culture?

Our colleges are on the one hand local and on the other international. National boundaries can no longer mark the horizon of the Society's work as it did in the past. No single entity like an institution or even a nation can meet the challenge posed by a technology that allows the free sharing of information across national boundaries. Awareness of this fact should lead us to participation in international exchange programmes (Socrates, Erasmus) for teachers and students.

Jesuits alone cannot give adequate responses to these challenges. In the spirit of Ignatian discernment and following the principle of collegial co-operation, we need to enter into a process of collaborative dialogue with the men and women who share our concerns about contemporary culture and about the role of education in it. This dialogue has to be situated in the particular experience of truth and in the quest for understanding that have shaped our professional lives as well as the convictions that orient our lives as human beings.

For Ignatius and his companions the practise of evaluating work and reviewing its 'fruit' were very important, as a way of seeing whether an apostolate was still in accord with God's will. We need to find ways to integrate these Ignatian values not just in our individual lives, but also in the life of the institution, for example by welcoming new members into the university community, rewarding those who excel in these

values, integrating these ideals into university planning, and keeping alive our traditions and the memory of those who have served before.

Thank you for this opportunity to have had this conversation with you.

INTELEKTUALNY WYMIAR DZIAŁALNOŚCI JEZUITÓW

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