

**Speech by the Father General at the Inauguration of the new rector of Comillas**  
**Madrid, Universidad Pontificia Comillas, 4 September 2024**

Most eminent and most reverend Cardinal, Archbishop of Madrid,  
Father Provincial of the Society of Jesus in Spain and Vice Grand Chancellor of the university,  
Magnificent Rectors, Incoming and Outgoing,  
Honourable authorities,  
Dear members of the university community of Comillas,  
Ladies and gentlemen.

We are gathered together in this solemn act of inauguration of the Rector of the Universidad Pontificia Comillas and inauguration of the academic year 2024-2025. As Grand Chancellor of the university, I have come with the sincere desire to closely accompany the life and development of the institution and, especially, of its human community at a significant moment in the life of the university.

The change of the Rector of the University is undoubtedly an important moment in the life of the University which, furthermore, expresses something fundamental to the people who make up the university community. Together with the confirmation of the mission that gives meaning to the University, it is the moment to thank the dedicated life of the person who has completed his task as Rector and, at the same time, the availability of the person that receives the task.

On behalf of the Society of Jesus and the Universidad Pontificia Comillas, I would like to thank Father Enrique Sanz for his work and very complete personal dedication during these years in which he has demonstrated his total availability to the not easy task entrusted to him. Father Sanz has not worked alone, he has had a team that has made possible the management of a complex institution such as the university. I would like to thank each and every one of you who have teamed up, shared the toil and achieved abundant results.

I would also like to thank Father Antonio Allende for his availability to the mission entrusted to him. As is well known, Father Allende has for many years been carrying out a very demanding work of leadership and direction in other apostolic areas of the mission of the Society of Jesus with equal availability. With some trepidation, he has had no difficulty in taking up this challenge and putting his leadership skills at the service of a complex and challenging apostolic institution. I am sure that his personal qualities, experience and broad apostolic vision will be a rich contribution to the life and development of the Universidad Pontificia Comillas.

I must thank Father Provincial, Father Enric Puiggròs, for his work as Vice Grand Chancellor, and for following the life of this work and this community with the closeness and interest it deserves, in the name of the Society of Jesus.

I take this opportunity to share with you a simple reflection on the university mission in the Society of Jesus which, at the beginning of a new period, may serve as a reminder to the Rector and the university community of some of the characteristics of the identity of a Jesuit university.

Reflection on the identity of the universities entrusted to the Society of Jesus has spread and deepened in recent years, taking into account the diversity of contexts in which the university apostolate develops. One of the best known and most inspiring models is the Ledesma-Kolvenbach paradigm, named after our well-remembered Father Melecio Agúndez. Father Peter-Hans Kolvenbach<sup>1</sup> as Superior General of the Society of Jesus made important contributions to the reflection on the identity of the Jesuit university. One of the most inspiring was the updating of important intuitions of Father Diego Ledesma, a 16th century Segovian Jesuit and lecturer at the Roman College, who did extensive preliminary work leading to the elaboration of the *Ratio Studiorum*.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, “Address to the Georgetown University Board of Directors”, Rome 10 May 2007.

This paradigm has particularly marked the thinking on the university mission in the Province of Spain, brought together in UNIJES, and has made it possible to deepen it with great results.

We know the four dimensions of the Ledesma-Kolvenbach paradigm or the meta-competences<sup>2</sup> that must be present in university teaching, research and management: *utilitas*, *humanitas*, *iustitia* and *fides*. The four dimensions are an indissoluble whole and can only be understood as interrelated to each other, explained by each other.

From the charisma that inspires the life-mission of the Society of Jesus, it is understood that *fides* is the dimension from which the other three dimensions spring. It is the foundation and inspiration. At the same time, it must be said that, in the recent tradition of the Society of Jesus, the paradigm presupposes a *fides* that demands the promotion of *iustitia*. This approach has been highlighted in the contributions of the Superiors General through a concrete hermeneutical key: the University as a force for social transformation, as a project of social transformation<sup>3</sup>, as formulated by Father Ignacio Ellacuría, rector-martyr of the UCA in San Salvador.

For Ignacio Ellacuría, the University is shaped by the society in which it lives, in particular by the impoverished majorities that compose it, and it is destined to enlighten and transform this social reality as the social force that it is. The historical task of transforming society must be done not in any way, but from the university specificity, which implies the rational analysis of reality, the creative effort to find remedies, the transfer of self-determination to the population, and the preparation of ethical and capable professionals involved in the transformation process<sup>4</sup>.

This hermeneutical approach, inspired by Ignacio Ellacuría, has been present in all the speeches at recent Jesuit university meetings since Father Kolvenbach's speech at the Santa Clara University in 2000<sup>5</sup>.

To understand the institution and the university mission in this holistic way is nothing other than to understand it as an apostolate<sup>6</sup>. Like all the apostolates of the Society of Jesus, the university apostolate is also enlightened by the Universal Apostolic Preferences -showing the way to God, walking with the excluded, accompanying young people on their journey, caring for our common home- which are the keys to the mission of the Society of Jesus and are now crossing the halfway point of their ten years of application. The Universal Apostolic Preferences are existential orientations of every apostolate of the Society of Jesus which indicate the spiritual path to follow.

If we look for references to the elements inherent in academic life in their formulations, we will not find them directly. The Universal Apostolic Preferences point out vital objectives and call to the personal and institutional conversion in order to carry out the objectives of university work according to the identity that flows from the charism of the Society of Jesus. However, academic work is essentially present in them and is enlightened by them:

- The Apostolic Preferences help to understand the university apostolate which organically cultivates an intellectual life that is not closed in on itself, but integrates other dimensions at the service of the mission of the universal body.
- If we are true to our identity, intellectual and academic work is necessary in each and every Universal Apostolic Preference.

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Melecio Agúndez, "El paradigma universitario Ledesma-Kolvenbach" *Revista de Fomento Social* 63 (2008) 611.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Arturo Sosa, "The university as a source of a reconciled life", Loyola 2018.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Ignacio Ellacuría, "Commencement Address at Santa Clara University", *Escritos universitarios*, UCA Editores, San Salvador 1989, 221-228.

<sup>5</sup> Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, "The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice in American Jesuit Higher Education", Santa Clara University, 6 October 2000

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Arturo Sosa, "The university as a source of a reconciled life", Loyola 2018.

- Intellectual depth is a main feature in the approach of every apostolate of the Society of Jesus. It is the Ignatian approach to proclaiming the Gospel. It is our unique contribution to the Church, an essential element of our work.

As far as I am aware of the Strategic Plan that has marked the life of the University in recent years, the vocation to be a university as a project of social transformation is fully present. The Plan suggests among its strategic and action lines to develop “an integral and consistent training of students”, to carry out “useful, transforming, networked and inter(trans)disciplinary research on key issues”, as well as the “creation and transmission of knowledge in favour of the young people who are being trained and of society as a whole”<sup>7</sup>. It also points out as strategic for the university “to keep in touch with the aspirations of a better world towards which the efforts of research, knowledge creation and social impact are oriented”<sup>8</sup>.

In this sense, we see how the Universidad Pontificia Comillas has been seen throughout history, not only as a centre of high academic quality and prestige, but as a true apostolate that aims to carry out the mission of the Society of Jesus in all its richness.

We are in the middle of the decade for which the Universal Apostolic Preferences were identified. For this second half I have made a call to return to them with a look that goes beyond sectorial or geographical limits, so that the apostolic effect of the Society may be less fragmentary and more integral, more total.

In this regard, I would like to reiterate the invitation to deepen the intersectoriality in the mission of the university; an intersectoriality that is not foreign to Comillas. Among its lines of action is the definition of a strategy for the projection of the identity and mission of the university in Church and the Society of Jesus. This is evident, for example, in the University's long-standing collaboration with the social apostolate on migration issues, in the collaboration with the safe environment system, or in the recent collaboration agreement signed with Entreculturas. As a universal body of the Society of Jesus, we are at the beginning of a long and rewarding journey.

I do not want to overlook the very valuable examples of intersectoral collaboration that are taking place at the level of UNIJES. In recent years, thanks in part to the different perspective that the apostolic sectors bring to the institutions, very interesting intersectoral steps have been taken that are worth highlighting. Among them, the collaboration between the Education Sector-EDUCSI and UNIJES to present Jesuit universities to the students of the Province's schools. But the so-called Reference Research Centres, which currently deal with migration, development cooperation, ecology and the environment, are particularly noteworthy because of the ambitious nature of the initiative. These centres are a very interesting example of network architecture in which it is possible to combine transversality between institutions, with intersectoral collaboration, in these cases with the social apostolate, and all with a clearly missionary aim.

Beyond achievements and projects, this reflection on the university mission of the Society of Jesus must lead us to recognise that behind the name of the centre and its structures there are people who make up a community. This community is the subject that is called to carry forward the mission in the light of the Universal Apostolic Preferences<sup>9</sup>.

In our vision, the University is not just a more or less efficient organisation. We see it as an authentic apostolic or missionary community. In this sense, it is worthwhile to make explicit and differentiate this apostolic character, bringing together those who are discovering in their work an authentic vocation of an apostolic community of Jesuits and lay people working together in the university<sup>10</sup>. I

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<sup>7</sup> Strategic plan 2019-2023, 13.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Patxi Álvarez de los Mozos, “The promotion of Justice in the universities of the Society” *Promotio Iustitiae* 116 (2014) 46-52.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Ibid., 49-50

encourage you to move in this direction as is already being done in so many areas and apostolic works in the Province of Spain.

The directors of university education in Jesuit institutions today consider human care a fundamental key to the consolidation of the university community that gives meaning to the multiple and complex activities carried out by the university.

Caring for people means knowing them, listening to them and ensuring appropriate spaces for participation in the life of the university. This disposition requires, therefore, the implementation of spaces and moments of common discernment at different levels, in an attitude that I have described before as ‘letting go of the reins’ and ‘being led where we do not know’<sup>11</sup>. The university community thus conceived is the way to express the synodality proper to the Church of which we are a part of and to whose mission we contribute. As for the whole Church, putting this vision into practice is an authentic cultural change, a conversion, which affects the models of both university and ecclesial leadership.

The university community is an organised and structured community, otherwise it would not be able to carry out its mission effectively. In this sense, the keys of synodality and common discernment, as well as the accumulated wisdom on the characteristics of good governance of institutions, must enlighten the governance structures of the university.

That is why I also invite you to continue the work of rethinking the governance of the university in a more synodical and collegial sense. It is about overcoming an old vision that places all expectations - and an enormous burden - on the figure of the rector, who is expected to deal successfully with all challenges. Instead, the aim is to develop appropriate collegial governing bodies that work closely with the rector and his team.

On the other hand, this task of social transformation in a globalised and partly chaotic world, in order to be effective today, inevitably requires the creation of apostolic networks. As Father Adolfo Nicolás said, we are invited to see Jesuit higher education as a single global social project, as a service to the world and to humanity<sup>12</sup>. The university mission requires each institution to be active and constructive actors in the creation of networks in the different areas of Jesuit life (UNIJES, Kircher Network, IAJU, as well as cross-cutting networks...). We know it is a long-term and often frustrating job, but we have also become more and more convinced that it is a necessary job. Sometimes it will require a critical and demanding word towards the networks, but the willingness must be to build together and to invest resources, time and people in something that goes beyond the immediate interests of my institution. As I recently said to the Provincials and Presidents of governing bodies of North American Jesuit Universities in Chicago: ‘If each university goes its own way, the future is very uncertain. If we understand ourselves, each of the universities, as complementary parts of one body, then we can face the future with hope’<sup>13</sup>. The commitment to networking today is not a luxury or a waste of generosity, but a response to the reality we want to transform.

In this regard, I would like to highlight two areas in the field of networks that I consider to be of great importance for the future. On the one hand, the joint Advantere School of Management project of the universities of Comillas and Deusto, in strategic academic alliance with Georgetown University, which seeks a truly high-quality approach to the global field of business from the heart of Ignatian spirituality. I am aware of and grateful for the great human and financial effort put into this project by both universities and I encourage them to continue to develop it as a valuable and ambitious networking initiative in the direction of global social transformation.

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Arturo Sosa, “Discerning the Present to Prepare the Future of the University Education of the Society of Jesus”, Boston 4 August 2022.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Adolfo Nicolás, “Depth, Universality and Learned Ministry: Challenges to Jesuit Higher Education Today”, Mexico City, 23 April 2010.

<sup>13</sup> Arturo Sosa, “The Call to Leadership of a Jesuit University”, Chicago 6 April 2024.

On the other hand, a very important initiative is the convergence and networking of the three theology faculties of UNIJES: Comillas, Deusto and Loyola. An initiative in which some steps have already been taken. The Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium* already established the need for networking among institutions that cultivate ecclesiastical studies as one of the four key criteria for the renewal of said studies<sup>14</sup>. Important networking initiatives are now emerging among the Faculties of Theology that seek to make better use of the resources available, overcoming geographical and linguistic barriers. It is therefore necessary, as a service to the Society and to the Church, that three faculties as close and linked as those of UNIJES can be articulated in order to offer in a coherent and attractive way the theological proposal of the Society of Jesus in Spain.

These are the reflections I wanted to share on this occasion. I hope that, in their simplicity, they will be of help to university life as it begins. Beyond these words, I hope that my presence at this event is understood as an expression of my esteem and apostolic care for this work of such value and for the human community that carries it forward.

Thank you very much.

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<sup>14</sup> Francisco, Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium*, 4.