

*The Intellectual Apostolate  
in the Society's Mission Today*

TO THE WHOLE SOCIETY

DEAR BROTHERS IN CHRIST:

I write you about the intellectual apostolate for two main reasons.

First, I want to stress its importance for our mission today. Some doubt this and ask whether the intellectual apostolate still has a place in the Society after the 32nd General Congregation. Certainly this uneasiness vanishes to a large extent when the documents of the General Congregation are carefully studied and really understood. Meanwhile, my duty help the Society to carry out its mission ever more effectively moves me to insist on the need for a fresh approach to the intellectual apostolate in our day. The first part of my letter will deal with this topic.

The other reason that prompts me to write — perhaps the more important in fact — is that the 32nd General Congregation has posed certain questions about the intellectual apostolate and has given some guidelines to those engaged in it. I feel it is my duty to comment on and stress some of them. This will be the subject of the second part.

While addressing myself primarily to those directly involved in the intellectual apostolate, I write to all Jesuits because they all need a correct understanding of its place in the whole spectrum of our ministries and because, in the end, all our efforts in every field contribute to the one, integral mission of the Society.

Another preliminary remark: perhaps some may expect me to begin with a definition of the « *intellectual apostolate* ». I'm afraid that there is none that would satisfy everyone or do justice to such a complex reality. I'll content myself, then, with stating very simply what I have in mind when using this expression.

I visualize at one and the same time an apostolate through intellectual activities and an apostolate among intellectuals. I have in mind involvement in science, research, reflection, literature, art; but I think also of many other tasks of training and teaching, of publication and also of popularization. And when I speak of « *intellectuals* », I mean not only scholars, research specialists, academicians and also artists, but no less, professional men whose activity is more specifically intellectual. Moreover, I think also of the young who are starting out on serious study. Intellectual pursuits begin

even as early as the secondary school level. I will be dealing, however, more particularly with later stages.

## FIRST PART

### THE INTELLECTUAL APOSTOLATE IN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE SOCIETY'S OPTIONS TODAY

What connection has the intellectual apostolate with the mission of the Society today? And what place should this apostolate have in our work at present?

#### *Intellectual and Cultural Crisis and Change*

The answer is plain, it seems to me, when one looks at the needs of contemporary man. It is enough here to recall the judgment of the 32nd General Congregation about the state of the world at the present moment: there is widespread injustice but, equally, a profound crisis and change in the intellectual realm.

The General Congregation spelled out this latter aspect at the beginning of Decree 4 when it stressed the fact that « *many of our contemporaries (are) dazzled and even dominated by the achievements of the human mind* » (n. 5) and went on to describe the effects of progress in technology and the human sciences (n. 25).

Those cultural and structural changes are closely linked with « *secularization* » (n. 26).

#### *Intellectual Dimension of the Key Options*

Matters become clearer still when we move from a diagnosis of the situation to the priorities that the 32nd General Congregation derived from it: the service of faith and the promotion of justice. Both are described, in fact, as having important intellectual dimensions.

First, the service of faith. « *We must find a new language* », the Congregation says, « *a new set of symbols* » (D. 4, n. 26a) for the renewal and adaptation of « *the structures of theological reflection, catechesis, liturgy and the pastoral ministry* » (D. 4, n. 54), and for the study of « *the main problems confronting humanity and the Church today* » (D. 4, n. 60).

Likewise, the promotion of justice. It implies that we « *are prepared to undertake the difficult and demanding labour of study* » required for understanding and solving contemporary problems (D. 4, n. 35; cf. n. 44). At the same time, the General Congregation

lays stress on the unjust structures of society (D. 4, nn. 31, 40). But how can we understand these structures and discover ways to modify them, without serious study?

### *An Objection?*

Despite all these requirements is there not a danger that the 32nd General Congregation is diverting us from intellectual matters and minimizing this apostolate by its stress on « *the service of the poor* » (D. 4, n. 60) or its desire that we become actively involved with « *the voiceless and powerless* » (D. 4, n. 42?)

An answer to this difficulty calls for certain distinctions. It is a fact that we can hardly serve the poor if we do not have real contact with them and enough actual experience of their life. Still, it is equally true that, for that very goal of promoting justice and serving the poor, we need to collaborate with other people besides the poor. We must have contact with those who exert influence on social structures (n. 40) or « *who have the power to bring about social change* » or are « *persons who themselves will multiply the work of worldwide education* » (D. 4, n. 60). The point is that intellectuals are in the ranks of those who wield influence on society. Moreover, it is partly, though not exclusively, from among young intellectuals that agents of social change continue to be drawn.

### *From the General Invitation to Serious Intellectual Work to the Need for an Intellectual Apostolate that is Detailed and Organized*

It has to be noted, as well, that the General Congregation calls for the most profound intellectual effort in every Jesuit enterprise. Nonetheless, even though it is here most explicit, what it says cannot be boiled down to this single point. Speaking of the range of our actual works, for instance, the General Congregation mentions two that are closely linked with the intellectual apostolate: the education of youth (« *continuing and more effective* »); « *theological research and reflection* » (D. 4, n. 60). Moreover, it expressly confirms the decrees of the 31st General Congregation, many of which deal with the intellectual apostolate (DD. 28, 29, 30). And in the same way it backs up the 31st General Congregation's statement about the urgent need of having priests involved in « *scientific research and teaching, especially in the sacred sciences* » — « *a genuine apostolate for the Society's priests* » (GC 31, D. 23, n. 8).

But apart altogether from these references, it is clear that the Society as a *body* could not do justice to the intellectual dimension

attaching to our key apostolic options unless a sufficient number of its members are committed with a special priority to research, to science, and, more broadly, to an apostolate that is explicitly intellectual. And further, what better means do we have, in many cases, for carrying out these tasks than well-organized centres, universities, colleges, research institutes, periodicals (cf. D. 4, n. 7).

### *The Pope's Recommendations*

To conclude this point let me remind you that after having listened to the General Congregation we ought to recall that our mission comes to us from an even higher source. For certain comments of the Pope, in whose light we ought to interpret the General Congregation itself, have an especially important bearing here. Think, for example of his description of the Society (in his allocution of December 3, 1974) as « *the Society of those 'sent' by the Church* », to which he immediately added this further precision: « *Hence there have come theological research and teaching ...; the social apostolate and intellectual and cultural activity which extends from schools for the solid and complete education of youth to all the levels of advanced university studies and scholarly research* ».

A little further on, you will remember, the Pope singles out as a kind of hallmark of the Society, the fact that « *even in the most difficult and extreme fields, in the crossroads of ideologies, in the front line of social conflict, where there has been and there is confrontation between the deepest desires of man and the perennial message of the Gospel, there also have been, and there are, Jesuits* ».

Obviously, he is not dealing only with the intellectual apostolate. Still, who can be blind to the fact that it occupies a special place in the Pope's view of things?

Moreover, Paul VI did not fail to remind us of the charge committed to us in 1965 on the subject of atheism: a mandate whose execution, at least in part, involves an intellectual apostolate. And on August 6, 1975, in the presence of the rectors and presidents of Jesuit universities, he reaffirmed the « *serious mission* » of the Society « *within modern culture* ».

### *Going Beyond These Remarks ...*

It is clearly impossible, without turning a simple letter into a treatise, to express in all their theological profundity the links between understanding or knowledge and faith or evangelization. Rather, I look to those of you who have reflected on these matters

to produce this explanation. But this at least is clear: the mission that we have received and our options today call for a strong commitment to various types of intellectual apostolate.

## SECOND PART

### GUIDELINES OF THE 32ND GENERAL CONGREGATION FOR THE INTELLECTUAL APOSTOLATE

Does this mean simply the continuation of what we have traditionally done and, where necessary, the resumption of an activity that has been dropped here or there, or the initiation of new works and the modification in certain respects of existing ones?

The answer, I believe, must include both, with the need for wise discernment according to the circumstances. It is, to be sure, precisely for such discernment that the last General Congregation, and even more so the Constitutions, have furnished us with criteria.

The intellectual apostolate, just like other types of ministry we perform (D. 4, nn. 70ss), must be subjected to reappraisal and the Jesuits engaged in it ought in their own way to examine themselves on the questions put to all of us by the 32nd General Congregation (D. 4, n. 74). But, without being able to cover the whole ground, there are also certain particularly pertinent matters on which I wish to insist at this moment.

#### *Choices of Areas and Subjects*

In the first place, areas of the intellectual apostolate must be chosen in accordance with the key criteria designated by the General Congregation: the service of faith and the promotion of justice. It is especially necessary that these same criteria be used in guiding young Jesuits who have talents for these areas. Not every type of intellectual work or research is equally compatible with the aims of our mission. On the other hand, we are in fact far from being really involved in the intellectual field in all those areas to which we are summoned by the options of the last General Congregation.

When we come to the various disciplines, our criteria suggest that first place be given as the 31st General Congregation had already asked (D. 29, n. 1B), to the sacred sciences, whether exegesis, theology, moral or spirituality. Our responsibility is here all the greater because the number of others working in this service of the Church is less.

On the same count, a priority must be given to philosophy, a

field in which we need to improve our strength, and to the human sciences, including the social sciences<sup>1</sup>.

It remains likewise useful, of course, to have some of our men engaged in the mathematical and natural sciences. The process of discernment must be more rigorous here, however, than with respect to the priorities given the theological and human sciences. Still, more than one factor is at work here. You will recall that the 31st General Congregation recognized the influence exercised by the mathematical and natural sciences, with the help of philosophers and popularizers, on the formation of the « *contemporary mentality* ». How can we maintain suitable theological reflection however, without possessing a deep understanding of the well-springs of this mentality? Moreover, how otherwise can we guarantee the Church's presence and effective personal contacts in an important sector of the scientific and technological world? One should add that the achievements of the exact and natural sciences are often excellent means of helping men to overcome evils and sufferings of all kinds: here indeed is a summons of love.

Clearly we are not in a position to attempt to do everything. Our numbers would be too few and we would be scattering our forces. Still, it helps to keep an eye on the lengthy list of possibilities that are in principle open to our apostolic initiative or of areas that fit in with our vocation in terms of existing needs and our available resources. And I realize, too, that we ought to extend that list to include literature as well as the fine arts and the mass media, fields in which cooperation among Jesuits has lately experienced a welcome increase.

In order to make more exact choices, personal talents and callings must be taken into consideration and, with an eye to the future, a careful scrutiny made of what is relatively most urgent and most needed in different places.

I would be very grateful to those whose experience of the broad range of contemporary culture suggests further specifications for our choices if they would share their insights with me for the sake of the common good.

### *Research, Teaching, Other Forms of Apostolic Involvement with Intellectuals*

The same criteria should also determine the properly balanced distribution of our resources among research, teaching and other forms of apostolic involvement with intellectuals. Research looks

---

<sup>1</sup> 31st GC, D. 23, n. 8; 32nd GC, D. 4, nn. 35, 44.

in fact to the long range and on that account has always enjoyed a certain priority in the Society (« *a more lasting good* »). The education of youth has been understood by the 31st General Congregation as one of the sectors « *where the destiny of the human person is at stake in a special way* » (D. 23, n. 8); and the 32nd General Congregation has not contradicted that stand (cf. D. 4, n. 60). As to other types of apostolic involvement with intellectuals, they derive their significance from the communication they make possible with men and women who commonly exercise a considerable influence on their contemporaries, and even on society taken as a whole and on its structures.

Let me add, at this point, that every center of higher studies under the direction of the Society — and in a very special way, every center of theological and philosophical studies — has the responsibility of maintaining a high standard both for teaching and also for at least some carefully chosen branches of research. And such research programs must undergo the same regular evaluation as the teaching programs.

As to an apostolate on behalf of intellectuals that is neither scientific work on a full-time basis nor educational activity in the proper meaning, I would like to stress how important it is that those who are engaged in this way should be sufficiently open, at the scientific level, to the fields in which those they meet are working. They ought also keep in touch on a continuing basis with developments in these fields and at the same time in theology so as to keep pace with the problems that arise.

### *Continuing Formation of men in Intellectual Work*

Research men and teachers, to be sure, do not enjoy a special exemption from the rapid outdating of their first training. All, therefore, should ask themselves this question: who knows if we have not more or less abandoned serious study and our intellectual, as well as spiritual, renewal, the day we finished our doctorate or shortly after that?

The summons of the 32 nd General Congregation to continuing formation (D. 6, nn. 18-20, 35) does not apply solely to apostolic men involved in pastoral ministries. Moreover, we ought to be well aware that the continuing formation of a Jesuit involved in intellectual pursuits implies, among other things, an attentive listening, not only to developments in theology, but also to the experience of companions who perhaps have more direct contact with men, or more frequent contacts with a far greater variety of people, including the most ordinary.

### *Collaboration, Interdisciplinary or Multidisciplinary Work*

The last two General Congregations have stressed, moreover, the importance of collaboration among Jesuits in different disciplines and even of interdisciplinary research<sup>2</sup>. We are well aware of the practical difficulties involved in multidisciplinary work if it is to be anything other than superficial. It cannot even begin unless each one perceives and grasps the questions that confront him from other disciplines as well as from his own. And mention should also be made of the fact that the Society needs at least some men who are researchers of a new type, men equipped with a gift for synthesis that inclines toward those global, deep and unified solutions demanded by the great human problems. But it is also necessary, as a general rule, to overcome our individualism and a tendency to self-centredness that makes a man turn in on his own field.

We ought to be especially concerned about the concrete application of different disciplines to the study of questions posed by the local situation. In this connection, a realistic encounter ought to take place, not only among the several sciences, but also between those who have, for example, an existential acquaintance with the realities of poverty and those who investigate them rather from an intellectual point of view. When you take into consideration the variety of our intellectual activities, the geographical spread of the Society and the breadth of its contacts with different cultures and groups, it is easy to see that we have exceptional opportunities for interdisciplinary efforts. We thus have a great responsibility, and we are obliged to make an organized effort to cast light on these « *great problems that the Church and mankind must face today* » and that the 32nd General Congregation has called to our attention in a special way: problems that are almost always multidisciplinary. How often, in fact, do we touch them only in passing, on the surface, because we approach them only by starting out from the particular frame of reference that is familiar to each of us?

### *Care for Sensitivity and Simplicity*

Another requirement for today's intellectual apostolate is a broad human sensitivity, one that embraces all categories of men, including the most marginalized.

I have also in mind the need to eliminate in ourselves, and to work for the elimination around us, of an arrogance or contempt

---

<sup>2</sup> 31st GC, D. 3, n. 14; 32nd GC, D. 4, n. 60.

with respect to the non-intellectual, an insensitivity born of a certain « *objectivity* » that the intellectual life sometimes produces.

There is an illusion involved in the wish to do away with all differences that exist among the different types of work men do, for example intellectual and manual, or the like. There is a genuine quest for justice, however, in the wish to eliminate the pride or contempt that is linked to these differences or the privileges that are sometimes derived from them. Don't we too often give in to these feelings of superiority? Has not each received almost everything from the Society? Don't we occasionally take advantage of such practical privileges? And all this when we ought to give a clear example.

### *Witness of Poverty in the Intellectual Apostolate*

This entire matter is not divorced from our profession of poverty, another topic that the General Congregation asks us to review. Poverty is not limited to material dimensions; or, if you wish, poverty is also a thing of the spirit. This involves making available to everyone all that has been given us; it calls for modesty and collaboration; it calls for generosity in sharing our learning; it calls for acceptance of the little man.

On the other hand, as the 32<sup>nd</sup> General Congregation states, « *solidarity with men who live a difficult life and suffer collective oppression cannot be the job of only some Jesuits* ». For our present purposes let us agree that this is demanded also of those who devote themselves to the intellectual apostolate. Perhaps they are not the ones who, to be sure, can most « *partake of the lot of families of slender means* », but still there are certain men who will be inspired to this sharing and at the same time to a life of intense intellectual work. I wish to encourage them with a view to discovering a new style of apostolic intellectual involvement. At least, all Jesuits involved in intellectual work are invited, as are the rest of the Society, to a conversion of their mode or style of life. Allowance being made for the legitimate needs that arise from the specific work of intellectuals, we are scarcely obliged to live in all respects like those with whom we work. Moreover, some intellectuals, of whatever persuasion, in this regard set a striking example that is far removed from prevailing middle-class standards. Could it be that we Jesuits are in arrears about desiring to be identified « *with the poor Christ who himself is identified with the most defenseless* » (D. 4, 48)? A witness of poverty, appropriate to the existing circumstances, is not only possible, but necessary, in the intellectual apostolate.

*Fidelity to the Evangelical and Apostolic Motives of our Intellectual Commitment?*

We are, in the end, religious apostles and very many of us are priests. It is, as I have said, under the very title of the apostolate and the priesthood that we commit ourselves to research, to scientific investigation, to teaching at the higher level, and to every sort of apostolic service in the intellectual world. But it is not enough to start off on the right foot. It still remains necessary, over the course of the years, to maintain a balance in such a life.

Those who dedicate themselves to the intellectual apostolate ought also, in accord once again with the advice of the 31st General Congregation, « *to be on guard against the illusion that they could serve God in a more suitable fashion in other works that are apparently more pastoral* » (D. 29, n. 2). They should not, then, allow themselves to become absorbed, after a few years of scientific work, by ministries that in certain respects are more attractive, to the detriment of their intellectual commitment.

But, while remaining faithful to this commitment, they ought to be equally alert to keep alive in their minds and hearts the explicitly evangelical and apostolic motives for which they undertook this work. Let us then put the question to ourselves again: have we not at times, caught up in the stream of life and in the absence of a frequently renewed awareness of our vocation, allowed our existence to be reduced to a type of research or intellectual exercise that no longer has a relationship to the service of the Gospel and has lost, for us as for other people, its apostolic meaning? If things stand that way, let us realize that unless we recapture the basic inspiration of our commitment, we place our vocation in danger, we risk in many cases becoming apostolically ineffective. This renewal ought to be regular, frequent, even constant, as one notices in the example, old and new, of Jesuit scholars and intellectuals who are recognized by all as apostles. It is particularly essential that each man should work out, and unceasingly renew, on his own and in a very personal fashion, the integration of his intellectual work and his priesthood. Free of inner divisions, the priesthood should vitalize our intellectual life even when the latter appears to be secular in certain respects.

*Remaining « Sent on Mission »*

As Jesuits, we are « *men on a mission* » (D. 2, n. 14). This essential characteristic holds true for the intellectual apostolate as for other types of mission. Yet here, the years that pass involve

the risk, if we are not careful, of having an erosive impact. Thus, even though he enjoys scholarly prestige, or holds down important posts in the scientific and university world, a Jesuit should never stop practising the virtue of availability. Even if he is riveted to many aspects of a task that appears to demand his entire life, he must preserve this availability. Let us therefore accept with simplicity the summons that the 32nd General Congregation has made to us when it insists so strongly on mission.

### *Integrated into the Body of the Society*

I wish further to stress what the General Congregation has given us in its vision of a mission « *as a body* ». What is demanded here is integration of all tasks, including therefore all types of intellectual apostolate, in the apostolic plan of the Province, and in any case in that of the Society as a whole. This takes for granted that all enter into the spirit of that mutual support that different tasks should lend one another, and that all are open to common deliberation on various apostolic aims and their integration, under the responsibility of Superiors.

### *The Case of an Intellectual Apostolate of a More Individual Type*

It is even more important that certain men should carry on an intellectual apostolate of a highly individual nature, outside the centres of the Society. Such an apostolate can fit perfectly within our vocation; it is at times the only way open to cultivate a given discipline; it can be essential for contact between the Church and certain milieux. Yet the motivations behind such commitments should be made the subject of a true spiritual discernment on the part of the men involved and of their superiors. The latter should attach great importance, in the matter of the choice of persons, to the heavy human and religious demands that will be asked of them. At the Province level it is certainly necessary, before multiplying such commitments, that they be weighed carefully on the score of their apostolic values and in the concrete circumstances, against possibilities available through an apostolate that uses existing centres of the Society. Today as yesterday, many of the criteria for our choices that are set down in the Constitutions tend to favour, where the possibility exists, lasting centres, of extensive outreach, where activities are coordinated. Moreover, the Pope has recently reminded us, on his part, of the value of Catholic universities<sup>3</sup>.

---

<sup>3</sup> Address to the Presidents of Jesuit Universities, August 6, 1975.

One way or other, men who receive a mission to engage in a more individualized intellectual apostolate must not become isolated in a Province, either through their own doing or that of the Province. The Provincial should exercise a special concern for these men, especially in their first years in such a ministry. Their work ought to emerge as an integral contribution to the corporate effort, thanks to frequent contacts, a deep mutual acquaintance, and participation in common discernment. Much less should these men be isolated in their own local communities.

### *Fidelity to the Church Because the Mission is From the Church*

« *Men on a mission* », it is true, but it is always a mission from the Church that we have, even when our assignment comes from Jesuit superiors. I have quoted above the words of Paul VI on the Society as « *sent by the Church* », a description that he has applied to various works but in a very special way to undertakings of our intellectual apostolate. This means that, while making use of his legitimate freedom of research, every Jesuit intellectual, especially a theologian, ought to have an acute awareness of his duty in fidelity to the Church, and to act in fact with responsibility. This is also a point that the 32nd General Congregation has stressed for us.

### *Balance of Religious and Priestly Life.*

I return again, finally, to the balance of our religious and priestly life in which we should grow. Those who are priests, the 31st General Congregation tells us, should remain « *united with all other priests in one total priestly ministry for the sake of men* » (D. 23, n. 12). Since I am aware that the Brothers play their part in the intellectual apostolate, and that some scholastics have already had an introduction to it before they are ordained, I add that the same recommendation holds true for them: close union with all those who work in the Church's apostolate.

But I wish further to specify something that is taught us by experience: anyone who moves ahead in the intellectual life, whether it be in an area that is to all appearances secular or not, but who does not make progress at the same time in deepening his faith, exposes himself to danger (cf. 76/15). In the same way, without being able here to set down a general rule in view of the diversity of needs and circumstances, it can be said that the proper balance of the priestly life of a Jesuit intellectual often demands that he be involved to some extent in a ministry that is more directly pastoral, or among poorer people.

The Eucharist, finally, ought always to be plainly at the center of his life: the sacrament of the consummation of all that transformation of the world which we strive to bring about by knowledge as well as by action<sup>4</sup>.

#### CONCLUSION

In sum, today is no time to slacken the Society's commitment to the intellectual apostolate. This is certainly as true in the wake of the 32nd General Congregation as it was after the 31st General Congregation. It is the time, however, to search out new fields of involvement in this apostolate. It is the time to give a new style to this endeavor, in tune with the demands of faith and justice that the 32nd General Congregation stressed. It is the time to overcome factors that make for isolation, the time for interdisciplinary work and the apostolic integration of all our labors. It is, further, the time for a renewal of « *mission* » and of the spirit of mission.

In closing this letter I call on the Provincials to be concerned about the proper place of the intellectual apostolates in the planning of ministries for tomorrow.

I call on young Jesuits, who have the ability to prepare themselves for such works, to be open to them: this means facing up to long-term investments that yield deferred results, and a readiness to live patiently and, in a special way, in faith. Those who are in charge of formation should support and encourage such men in this effort.

All those, finally, who have already made this commitment and whose lives are being spent in this field — whether it be research, teaching or other forms of activity among intellectuals — I call on to return to the roots of their commitment if there is need, to rediscover its motives and to work to discover this new style of intellectual apostolate that the 32nd General Congregation demands.

If it should happen that they give in to bitterness in the face of a lack of understanding, let them seek strength in the Lord to overcome this sentiment through contact with the apostolic aspirations that animated the last General Congregation. Their renewal, based on their vocation, will enhance the effectiveness of the demanding life to which they are committed, often in an irrevocable manner. It will also provide a model and an encouragement to our young men that they need at the moment of their own entrance on a future whose austerity they perceive. By far one of the best

---

<sup>4</sup> Cf. 31st CG, D. 23, n. 12; 32nd GC, D. 11, n. 35.

---

examples will be always that of a fraternal union with the other Jesuits of the Province who are busy with other tasks and involved in other spheres.

As I am putting the last touches to this letter, all of mankind is about to celebrate Christmas. May the Word of God who broke into this earth of ours truly be the Light that illuminates our quests, the Wisdom presiding over our deliberations, and the Presence dwelling in our hearts.

Rome, on the Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord  
December 25, 1976

PEDRO ARRUPE  
*Superior General*  
*of the Society of Jesus*