

**Padre Nicolas – Manila – 20 julio 2009**  
**Challenges & Issues in Jesuit Education**

**(Keynote Address of ARPN Adolfo Nicolas, SJ,  
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*On the Occasion of the 150th Anniversary*

*Of Jesuit Education in the Philippines*

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(Text Courtesy of Fr. Danny Huang SJ and Fr. Jojo Magadia, SJ)

**INTRODUCTION**

(1) I am delighted to be with you this morning, as we celebrate together the gift of a hundred and fifty years of Jesuit education in the Philippines. There is so much to be grateful for. There has been amazing growth, from the tiny Ateneo Municipal of 33 students in 1859, to the nine institutions which now comprise the Jesuit Educational Association and which have educated hundreds of thousands of students over these years. We have been blessed with outstanding students who have truly made a difference, among whom I need only mention the most famous, your national hero, José Rizal; through him and so many others, Jesuit education has been such a force for good in this country. And of course, we cannot but be grateful for the many gifted and generous Jesuits and co-workers and companions who have served together over this century and a half, of whom you are the present-day representatives. We thank the Lord together; but today, allow me to begin by congratulating and thanking you all, in the name of the entire Society of Jesus.

(2) But I am even happier that you have chosen to celebrate this century and a half of mission in education, not in self-congratulation, but in a very Ignatian way: by looking forward and by asking what more you can do for God's glory and the service of his people. The Basic Education Congress organizers have designed a wonderful logo that expresses the spirit of our gathering today beautifully. The logo I have seen shows a ship, a sea vessel moving forward in full sail—with a sail that resembles both dove and flame! The ship, of course, reminds us of the journey across the seas of the first group of Spanish missionaries who returned to the Philippines in 1859. But it is also a symbol of all of you together, moving on a journey to new frontiers, moved by the fire and wind of the Holy Spirit!

(3) This logo tells me two important things about the educational sector of the Philippine Province. First, that it is forward-and-outward-looking. The world has changed in many and important ways since the Characteristics of Jesuit Education came out; certainly since the Ratio Studiorum was first produced. I am happy to see, for example, that later in the program Principal Tyler Sherwood will speak about the fact that “our students and education are evolving. Are we?” In other words, you are asking about new needs, searching for new answers, in a new world.

(4) But the second thing this logo tells me is that this gathering is meant to be inward looking too. We hear a lot today about being competitive in the rapidly changing educational environment, and certainly this is important. But your logo tells me that what this assembly aims at is not just professional updating but listening to the Spirit, letting the Spirit really be the wind that fills the sails and directs the boat of our schools. In other words, I understand that these days are meant to be spent in a discerning, listening, spirit and attitude.

(5) That gives me more confidence to speak because I know that you will not be looking for ready made and complete answers for me, even though you have given me a frighteningly ambitious title: “Issues and Challenges in Jesuit Education”! After all, YOU are the experts in education, not I. You have been deeply involved in this apostolate for a long time and you know much better than I, I think, what the issues and challenges are. Besides, you are already familiar with many excellent documents that still have much to say to us: The Characteristics of Jesuit Education, the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm, Fr. Arrupe’s classic 1973 talk, Men for Others. So, my contribution will be much more modest. I aim to contribute a few thoughts, to evoke your own thinking and listening and exchange. In fact, I hope to raise more questions than to provide answers; and they are not “trick questions” in the sense that I already have the answers myself. Sometimes, questions are ways by which we can create chinks, openings in thick walls of defense, for the wind of the Spirit to blow.

(6) My experience though is that if people really try to listen to the Spirit, you end up in strange, surprising places! That is how I ended up, without my planning or foreseeing it, as General of the Society last year. So my hope is that at the end of this Congress, you will find yourself surprised to find yourselves, as individuals and schools and as a network, in strange new places! Some of you might even find yourselves in Rome (this is not a threat)! But that will be the test, I think, of the success, of this gathering: if at the end, you have let go of something that you have been holding on to for security, and sailed forward a little further, a little deeper.

## **THE BASIC QUESTION**

(7) One of the favorite words from GC 35 that has captured the imagination of so many Jesuits and friends in mission is “Frontiers.” Many in the Church, many other congregations are using it, too. We do not own the term. But, that word is a very evocative word. One can more easily understand it in its original geographic sense. When the first ten Jesuits from the Aragon Province sailed on the ship Luisita to Manila in 1859, in those days when travel took so much longer and involved so much risk, obviously that was a journey to the frontiers. They were going to a country very distant from their own, and they could not use “Google Earth” to get information or statistics or to show them images of their new home! Today, there are new Jesuit schools in places like Kosovo and the Sudan, places where there remain such need, such risk, such challenge, that it is easy to understand that, in opening these schools, we have gone to the “frontiers.”

(8) But what might the word “frontiers” mean for you, most of whom have to go, day after day, to the same campus, to the same office, to the same classrooms? What are the “frontiers” for a well established, successful, respected Jesuit educational system such as the one we find here in the Philippines?

(9) I think the key to understanding the word “Frontiers” is to return to what the Holy Father said when he addressed us Jesuits during the recent 35th General Congregation. Many of you

are very familiar with this wonderful speech, when Pope Benedict XVI said to us, and by extension, to all of you: “The Church needs you, counts on you, and continues to turn to you with confidence, particularly to reach the geographical and spiritual places where others do not reach or find it difficult to reach.” (Allocution, No. 2) “The geographical and spiritual places where others do not reach or find it difficult to reach”: these places are our “frontiers.”

(10) As you know well, we in Jesuit education do not have small goals, but an enormous dream: to assist our students to achieve what Fr. Kolvenbach described as “the full growth of the person that leads to action—action, suffused by the spirit and the presence of Jesus Christ, the Man-for-Others.” What are the frontiers we need to “go” to in order to achieve this goal?

(11) As I have said, I do not have all the answers to these questions; and I think the whole point of this congress is for us to search together for these answers. But let me share a few of my own reflections that might stimulate your own reflection. Basically, I would like to propose two frontiers. They are two of my most important concerns for the Society of Jesus today, which I feel also are concerns for our mission in education.

### **THE FRONTIER OF DEPTH**

(12) The first frontier I would like to propose is the frontier of depth. Depth, for me, is perhaps a better translation of Ignatian Magis. The trouble with translating Magis simply as “More” is that it can too easily be understood as the “More” of a competitive, consumerist culture. If we have more awards, higher rankings, more computers and sports facilities, more faculty members with advanced degrees, then we can too easily fool ourselves into thinking that we are living the Magis. I am not saying that these are not important; they are vital for a good school. But to be a good Jesuit school, they are not enough.

(13) Ignatius was always concerned with depth. You have heard many times, I am sure, his principle of *Non multa sed multum*, literally, “Not many, but much,” originally one of the annotations in the *Spiritual Exercises*, but applied often to Ignatian pedagogy as well. One could paraphrase this as “not quantity, but depth”: “what satisfies the soul,” Ignatius says--in other words, what really matters in the business of becoming human and Christian--is not many superficial bits of knowledge and information, but a deep understanding and appreciation of what is most important.

(14) When one looks at the Gospels, we see that Jesus always responded in depth. Look at any healing story: the way Jesus heals the paralyzed man brought in by his friends through the roof; the leper; the woman with the issue of blood. Jesus first responds to a concrete, immediate need: the healing of a sickness. But then he goes on to respond to a deeper need: the burden of guilt or the sense of hopelessness or rejection and isolation. Finally, he goes deeper still and offers what they long for most, often without knowing it: the gift of the Kingdom of God, of friendship with a God of unconditional love, in a way that transforms them at the core of their persons.

(15) What is the depth of the education we provide, and how might we be called to go deeper? Let me offer a few questions that might help explain what I mean.

(16) How deeply do we respond to our students’ needs? If our instruction is good and up-to-date, then we respond to their need for forming and developing their talents. But beyond that are deeper needs. Even the brightest and most talented of our students are struggling. Beyond

the normal struggles of youth, many of them struggle with families that are broken, wrestle with problems of isolation and misunderstanding and insecurity deeper than their minds. And how do we respond to their deepest hungers for meaning and purpose, for strength and hope that is the Kingdom of God experienced in their lives?

(17) These days, in the liturgy, we have been reading from the story of Jacob and his struggle with God. His first vision is consoling, promising, full of light: he sees angels ascending and descending on a ladder to heaven. But his last vision is much darker and more mysterious because it is deeper. He wrestles with a stranger, who turns out to be God, and Jacob wins the struggle, but comes out limping, walking a little like Ignatius did. Perhaps this should be the image of what our students turn out to be: not just walking out of our schools straight, tall, completely confident and sure of themselves, but rather, limping, even a little, because they have struggled deeply.

(18) How deeply do we help them see? When you live in Rome, you enter many beautiful churches adorned with glorious images, frescoes, statues, paintings, stained glass windows, and you realize that in an earlier age, these were the images that filled people's imaginations. They were images that taught people to aspire to a certain model of humanity. But our young people are growing up in a world where the media floods them with other glittering images, on billboards, on websites, on magazine covers and MTV's. They are images that are filled with promises. They sell dreams that tell them that they become more human when they have the right gadgets and wear the right clothes. What these images do is hide the face of the poor and the suffering, and make them invisible. How can we help them see more deeply, to truly see the real beyond the virtual, to see beyond these images that make false promises so that they can see the face of the hidden humanity of the poor in a way that moves them to want to serve in compassion?

(19) How deeply do we invite them to think? Our students today, as you know, are flooded with an incredible amount of information that keeps entering our houses, our computers, our lives. The sheer amount of information and the ease with which one can "surf" from one page to another can promote superficiality. How deeply do we help them screen, digest, connect, decide about this flood of data and the accompanying (albeit camouflaged) values that accompany them? There is evidence that the capacity of people for sober understanding and a critical sense have weakened. When I look around and see so much fundamentalism and fanaticism around the world, and the suffering that these escapes from sober thinking have produced, I wonder whether we have to think more creatively of how we can ensure that our students learn how to think deeply?

(20) How deeply do we form their inner persons, their commitments and convictions, their faith and their strength? You are aware of how quickly even a religious culture like that of the Philippines is becoming secularized and pluralistic. All around, our young people are being given more and more choices—not just choices of websites on the Internet, or choices of TV stations on cable TV, or choices of stores in malls, but choices of values and beliefs. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but it does mean that one cannot expect that external structures and traditions alone will support them in the Christian faith, beliefs or values. I have worked with Filipino migrant workers, and I have seen how easily, in a different environment, they have gone over to other groups. As the external supports become weaker, then the inside must become stronger. Depth of knowledge and, even more important, depth of experience, must mature into a depth of conviction that is able to remain peaceful and steadfast even in a confusing and hostile world.

(21) In the end, the test of whether our education is one of depth, is whether we are able to produce people who can “decide from inside”—which is another way of saying, the test of our education as Jesuit education is if we are able to produce people of discernment. More and more, people are making choices, not from the inner realm of faith, conscience, values, truth, but from the seductive voices coming from the outside, of gain, profit, public opinion, convenience and fashion. People are becoming weaker in the habit of finding in the depths of the heart the answers to difficult emerging questions. On the other hand, if one looks at the alumni we are proudest of as products of the Jesuit educational system, I think we will find in them a certain of depth of perception, thinking, commitment, and character, and the habit of deciding from inside.

## **THE FRONTIER OF UNIVERSALITY**

(22) The second frontier I would like to propose is the frontier of universality. You may be aware of a letter I wrote recently on the subject of the universality of our Jesuit vocation, inspired by the spirit of GC 35. Today, I think a challenging frontier for Jesuit education is to be a more universal education in the Ignatian sense of breadth of belonging and wideness of concern and responsibility.

(23) Again, universality translates *Magis* but in a way that challenges the competitive way we sometimes translate *Magis* simply as “Excellence.” Of course, we strive for excellence, but sometimes we fall into the trap of measuring excellence only if we see ourselves as better than some other schools run by other religious groups, or even worse, better than other Jesuit schools!

(24) When I travel around the world, I see the violence and suffering caused by a terrible narrowing of the sense of belonging and competitiveness. It is a paradox of globalization that as technologies allow us to grow in knowledge of those very distant from us, at the same time, there is greater fear of the Other, the one who is different, who does not belong to my tribe or my race or my caste. Because of their fears, people end up with very small, suffocating worlds, and regard those who do not belong to those tiny kingdoms as insignificant sub-humans, at best, or as threats to be eliminated, at worst. And, I am afraid that if we are not careful, the prestige that attaches to our schools, the fame of the “Jesuit brand” of education may tempt us to make our schools a new but still narrow base for belonging, which we use to distinguish and separate ourselves from others.

(25) But there is nothing of this narrowness of belonging in Ignatius’ vision of life. He was always a man of large vistas: he loved to look at the stars, at the vastness of the sky that reflected the universal, all-embracing love of God. Ignatius’ concern was always the more “universal good”: he always wanted Jesuits to be ready to serve anywhere where there is hope for God’s glory. And he gathered around himself such a diverse group of men, of different languages, cultures, nationalities and personalities, to form a single group of friends in the Lord, who transcended their little differences, in their common dedication to the same universal mission.

(26) GC 35 further heightened this Ignatian universality by pointing out how urgently a more universal perspective, which allows us to see beyond our narrow concerns and to work with others, is needed in our world. The great challenges of the world cannot be responded to by one province, one region alone, or by Jesuits alone. The enormous challenges of the Philippines and Asia, to come nearer to home, cannot be responded to by one school or by

one university alone. They require the breadth of vision and spirit that overcomes little sectarianisms so we can work with each other, Jesuits and other co-workers and companions all together in mission.

(27) What might this frontier of universality mean more concretely for Jesuit education in the Philippines?

(28) First, do our students, as a result of their time with us, end up with a broader sense of belonging and responsibility than their own families, classes, clans? My predecessors, Frs. Arrupe and Kolvenbach, spoke famously of the goal of Jesuit education as forming men and women for others and with others—men and women whose hearts have been universalized and broadened, so they feel this compassion for the poor and the suffering who are not members of their blood family, but who are now part of their larger human family?

(29) Second, with regard to the schools themselves, can we break out of our narrow sense of belonging to this particular school? I am very happy, for example, to see that the nine Jesuit schools in the Philippines are gathered here together for this congress. I am aware of the ways the Jesuit Basic Education Commission, and more recently, the Jesuit Higher Education Commission, have tried to promote this wider sense of belonging and cooperation—but not without resistance, too, I know! It would be more consoling to find out that this kind of gathering is not something that happens only once in one hundred and fifty years, but that more and more, the schools do not live in indifference to and competition against one another, but rather address their many common concerns together.

(30) Third, can we break out of our particular school system and serve those outside the Jesuit system in the Philippines? Our schools have been so blessed with human, material, academic and spiritual resources beyond many others, in a country where poverty remains crushing for so many, and where good education can serve as the most effective way out of this dehumanizing situation. What more can we do, for example, to serve, support, improve the many other schools in the Philippines, which have such scarce resources? Are the benefits of Jesuit education only to be limited to these nine schools, or can we think more creatively of more permanent, ongoing ways in which, even with our limited personnel, we can share the heritage and resources of Jesuit education with a wider group of people, especially the poor, in the ways, for example, the network of Cristo Rey and Nativity schools in the United States, or the Fe y Alegria network in Latin America are doing?

(31) Fourth, can we break out of our concern for the Philippines and start thinking of how more we can serve the wider world of Asia around us? I am happy to hear that there is much interest in and exchange with China in some of your schools: this is a very positive development. But what of the other poorer nations and less established Jesuit missions in East Asia? Can the Jesuit educational system in the Philippines reach out to serve and share with East Timor, Myanmar, Cambodia, to name just a few possible places where the needs for what you can share are great?

## **FRONTIERS OF DEPTH AND UNIVERSALITY FACING UNIVERSITIES**

(32) I would now like to address a special word to those involved in higher education who have come to join us this morning. I hope that what I have said earlier about the frontiers of depth and universality is relevant to you too. But I would like to elaborate a bit more on what the frontiers of depth and universality might mean for Jesuit universities.

(33) When he visited the United States, the Holy Father used a very striking image to describe the Church. He said the Church is like a cathedral decorated with stained glass windows. When you are inside the Church, with the light shining through them, the stained glass windows are glorious and beautiful. But if you see them from the outside, they seem dark and unattractive. And the Holy Father said that in today's world, unfortunately, too many people stay outside and see only the grim and unappealing exterior.

(34) Recently, my Council and I have been reflecting on this present reality of the apparent unattractiveness of the Church in today's world. It is a very serious problem. I have heard that a recent survey in Britain showed that the majority of the people surveyed felt religion did more harm than good in the world. This is obviously not the same everywhere, but this kind of attitude is more and more prevalent, in many parts of the world, not just in the West, and it weakens the ability of the Church to gain a listening for the message of life and hope of the Gospel. We have been seeking to understand the causes of this apparent weakening of the credibility of the Church, hoping to see how the Society of Jesus, as servant of the Church, can help.

(35) The causes are complex, and this is not the place to discuss them. But, one thing that emerged very clearly when we discussed this problem from the perspective of various continents is that there are two groups who especially feel this alienation: intellectuals and the youth.

(36) Obviously, these groups are present in our universities. And thus, it seems clear to me that our Universities can play a special role in responding to this present challenge to the Church. And the universities can respond precisely by going more boldly and creatively into the frontiers of depth and universality precisely as universities

(37) Perhaps I can best explain by referring to some concrete ideas taken from the recent and very rich new encyclical of Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*.

(38) First, the Holy Father, reflecting on Pope Paul VI's teaching in *Populorum Progressio* in the light of our present globalized world of inter-connection, makes this striking statement: "As the society grows ever more globalized, it makes us neighbors but it does not make us brothers." (CiV, 19). Reason, he says, can grasp "the essential of equality" of people, our disciplines and technologies can help us control our "civic coexistence," but the felt sense and conviction that others are really my family, my brothers and sisters, for whom I am responsible, can only come with an experience in the heart of God's fatherly love for all. How deeply do we reach the young people entrusted to us, so that as we give them rigorous intellectual and professional training, we go further and touch them "at the level of the heart," to use the Holy Father's words? (CiV, 20)

(39) Second, Pope Benedict quotes Paul VI, who said very truly: "the world is in trouble because of the lack of thinking." (CiV53). This is one of the convictions of the Holy Father throughout his encyclical: the present world economic crisis and the continued suffering of millions reveals to us that many of our old solutions do not work, and require new solutions based on deeper, more adequate, more creative ways of understanding the many complex realities of human life and the world: business, finance, culture, the role of the State and politics, the environment, the family, migration, international relations and cooperation, human rights and duties, the very meaning of what it means to be human. Here is a clear call to depth: How can our universities, with all the gifted and highly trained intellectuals, teachers

and researchers in them, promote still deeper reflection and research into these crucial areas on which the creation of a better future for the world depends?

(40) Finally, in this encyclical in which the Holy Father memorably describes globalization as the “explosion of worldwide interdependence,” (CiV 33), it is not surprising that he calls for a similar kind of inter-dependence and cooperation in the search for truth in love. “In view of the complexity of the issues,” he writes, “it is obvious that the various disciplines have to work together through an orderly interdisciplinary exchange. . . in a collaborative effort to serve humanity.” (CiV 30, 31) How can our Jesuit universities—the word “university” itself shares the same root as “universal”—heed this practical call to universality, breaking out of parochial enclaves of disciplines, departments, universities, and even countries to engage in the kind of collaborative work that is a service of the future of our people and our world? How can the Jesuit universities in the Philippines, for example, deepen their commitment to the very promising, but still fragile collaborative efforts, for example, of AJCU-EAO?

(41) If our universities can deepen formation and intellectual work, and make more truly collaborative and universal our work together, our universities will truly serve the Church’s mission of integral human development, and at the same time, give a convincing witness in today’s secularized world of the presence of the life-giving love and truth at work in the Church.

### **CONCLUSION: MOVING FORWARD IN HOPE**

(42) You have many more talks ahead of you, and I am sure they will present you with many more challenging things to reflect on. In the spirit of non multa sed multum therefore, I shall leave you with these two frontiers which, as I said, are for me, two of the most important frontiers for the whole Society of Jesus in all its life and mission today: depth and universality. I trust that later, you will have time to reflect more deeply on what I have said, to confirm, to correct, to concretize.

(43) Before I end, however, I would like to share with you a little anecdote from the life of Fr. Arrupe. One of his valued possessions, I heard, was a picture given him by the first man who walked in the moon, the astronaut Neil Armstrong. It was a picture of the earth taken from the moon, and Fr. Arrupe kept it on his desk. It proved a very helpful reminder for him. When he was confronted with a very heavy or demanding problem, he would look at the picture and ask himself: “Where is Italy in that picture? Can I see Rome? Can I see Borgo Santo Spirito 4 (which is the address of the General Curia)?” Of course, he could not see Rome or Borgo Santo Spirito. And he would say to himself: “Well, if I cannot see Borgo Santo Spirito, maybe the problem I’m concerned about here in Borgo Santo Spirito isn’t that big, after all!” And he would be at peace!

(44) It’s a good story, I think, for many of you teachers and administrators when you face what seem like very heavy problems in your work! I hope you remember it, and find comfort in it! The point of the story, however, is not to trivialize problems or pretend they are not real. It is about seeing things from a wider perspective.

(45) More precisely, I think this picture helped Fr. Arrupe see things—our work, our service, the problems and challenges we face—from the truer perspective of God’s infinitely larger point of view. What we do, how we plan and choose, matter a great deal; but something

larger—God’s universal plan of bringing life, hope and joy to the world—gives those specific plans and choices their true depth, value and meaning.

(46) In a sense, that is what I have tried to do in my small way with this opening talk. I have not spoken technically as an educator. By reminding you, however, of an education that promotes depth and universality, I have been speaking to you not of general educational goals, but of specific goals of Jesuit education that make it not just a noble humanitarian work, but a service of the Gospel. If we dream of an educational system that teaches people to decide from inside, from the depths of their hearts, and to serve generously not just a tribe, but as broad a slice of humanity as it can, it is because these were the goals of Jesus, and the only reason Jesuit schools exist is to serve humanity according to the vision and the spirit of the Gospel.

(47) Let me put it another way. Recently, during an intensive meeting of the General Council, one of the Councilors pointed out that we were using, over and over again, the same verbs: pianificare, coordinare, organizzare: to plan, to coordinate, to organize. These are organizational verbs, very important, necessary for moving ahead. But, that evening, when we celebrated the Eucharist, the Gospel of the day showed Jesus sending out his disciples and the verbs he used were very different: preach the gospel to the poor, heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, expel demons, raise the dead. All these were verbs of life, verbs of giving life, which show that the mission of God in Jesus, the business he is about, is making life flow more abundantly for humanity wherever it is lacking or blocked. And the real secret of mission is not to get rid of the organizational verbs or the Gospel verbs, but to somehow make the organizational actions that we have to perform expressions of the life-giving actions of the Gospel. Yes, we plan, coordinate, organize—but only so that we can preach the good news to the poor, heal the sick, liberate the enslaved, raise the dead!

(48) I think it is the same with Jesuit education. We use many verbs in the course of our lives as schools: we prepare lesson plans, practice classroom management, attend department meetings, write papers, evaluate and grade our students. But in reflecting on depth and universality, we are reminding ourselves that all these actions we only do so that we can somehow be instruments of sharing, increasing, enriching life according to God’s plans.

(49) This thought not only challenges us, but encourages us. The problems and challenges are many, but we are reminded that in the end, we are servants of Christ’s mission, and as Fr. Arrupe saw in his picture, we do our best, but in the end, it is all in God’s hands. As you continue your congress, therefore, I pray that the challenges do not overwhelm you, but you welcome them with joy and eagerness, with optimism and hope. Like all the first Jesuits who returned in 1859, like all the founders of your respective schools who began without road maps and guarantees but with energy and conviction, may you move forward to the frontiers with courage, trusting that you are doing a share of God’s life-giving work!

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