

## “Research in a University of the Society of Jesus from the perspective of the Mission”

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### Baseline approach

This article will deal with university research, focusing on Jesuit universities. Therefore, we will focus on research from a mission perspective, with three keywords to articulate the reflection: research - Jesuit university - mission.

It is strictly necessary to start with other speakers have argued in previous interventions: the universities of the Society of Jesus must be, above all, universities, that is, institutions dedicated to the triple mission proper to every university: research, teaching and service to society, as formulated in the Magna Charta Universitatum (Great Charter of Universities) (Bologna 18/09/1988) and as stated in no. 12 of its Catholic equivalent, the Ex corde Ecclesiae (15/8/1990).

Along with the noun university, it is necessary to maintain the adjective "Jesuit", which always calls for "Catholic". Maintaining the noun means guaranteeing the university's autonomy, integrity and honesty as an academic institution so that it carries out with the highest quality what constitutes the being and doing of a university in its triple mission. In no case does the Catholic or Jesuit qualification given to a university authorise it to be outside the triple function that makes it a university. Maintaining the adjective means that the Jesuit university can and must discover in its institutional context and genuine university objectives the specific and appropriate field to develop the mission of the Society of Jesus within the mission of the Church.

To be a *Jesuit university* means: 1) Imbued with Ignatian spirituality; 2) at the service of the mission: open to faith and the promotion of justice of evangelical inspiration; 3) with dynamics of inculturation and dialogue. The four terms Faith-Justice-Culture-Dialogue. Hence, the universities of the Society of Jesus and those of us who work in them have our specific way of carrying out the mission of the Society or the Church and our way of being universities, faculty, and administrators. It is a non-neutral mode. There is no need to be ashamed of the non-neutrality because every person and institution has, in fact, its choices of meaning and its ethical commitments, whether these are explicit and known or not. The worst is usually the non-neutrality hidden under the appearance of neutrality. In this, we must also be Ignatian masters of suspicion.

### The internal assets of university activity

On the one hand, the internal or inherent goods of teaching-learning<sup>1</sup> (i.e. university education) are intrinsically tied to student development and refer to their comprehensive formation to be competent professionals and individuals of moral character.

As an internal good, it is the telos of a praxis. In this case, the internal good has as its background a question: what kind of person and professional do we want to form? The Society of Jesus has answered this question through the centuries with a dynamic model of university pedagogy (which we call the Ledesma-Kolvenbach model). It is presented through its most authoritative voices: Fr. Kolvenbach says that the application of the central axis of the mission as "service of faith and promotion of justice to the university context" leads to the fact that the criterion of evaluation and the project of any Jesuit university must be and is what "its students become"<sup>2</sup>, the horizon of reference being the 'whole person' who has "a well-informed solidarity" and "an adult Christian responsibility with which he works in favour of his neighbours and his world". Moreover, Fr Nicolás has expressed it eloquently: "In Jesuit education, the depth of teaching and imagination encompasses and integrates intellectual rigour with reflection on the experience of reality, together with creative imagination to work for the construction of a more humane, just, sustainable and faith-filled world"<sup>3</sup>.

The achievement of these student goals places requirements on both the educational practices carried out by teachers in interaction with students and on institutions, which must provide the means for the internal goods to be reasonably attained. I find MacIntyre's call not to confuse practices and institutions most valuable because they are different, although they are intimately connected: chess, physics and medicine are practices, while chess clubs, laboratories, universities and hospitals are institutions. These sustain practices in their orientation to internal goods and are typically and necessarily committed to what MacIntyre calls external goods, which are structured in terms of hierarchy and power and distribute money, power and hierarchy as rewards<sup>4</sup>.

On the other hand, there are the **internal assets of the investigation** that have to do with:

- The search for a significant advance in the field of knowledge or its application; the fundamental impulse is given by the search for truth in the field and according to the method of each science.

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<sup>1</sup> This article understands by practice "any coherent and complex form of cooperative human activity, socially established, through which the goods inherent to it are realised while attempting to achieve the models of excellence that are appropriate to that form of activity" (A. MACINTYRE, *Tras la virtud, Crítica, Barcelona 1987*, 233). On these notions X. Etxeberría has made suggestive contributions for which I am grateful and for which I am mindful.

<sup>2</sup> P.-H. KOLVENBACH, *The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice in Jesuit Higher Education*, 5-8 October 2000, Santa Clara University (California).

<sup>3</sup> Adolfo Nicolás, S.J., "Depth, Universality and Learned Ministry: Challenges to Jesuit Higher Education Today," Mexico City, April 23, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> A. MACINTYRE, *o. c.*, 241.

- The application of knowledge from research to production is known as “development”, and that which implies a significant advance in production is usually called “innovation”. Both concepts are generally united in the R+D+i triplet.
- Understanding that many new contributions, when appropriately transferred, have a transformative impact of some kind: the responsibility for this and the service to society is part of the internal good of research.
- Further realising that research is only complete when its results have been made available to the scientific community and exposed to criticism, for which publication is a sine qua non-condition.

It is essential to distinguish between big and medium research projects, applications of research results, and dissemination, which is not strictly research. Everything is important and must be valued, but not with an identical value.

**The moral conditions for this internal good to be realised are:** On the one hand, the freedom and rigour of the research, without interference in the search for the truth. Researching with pre-dictated and unquestionable answers, which the results must necessarily support, falsifies the dynamics inherent to the internal good and subjects it to an external interest. On the other hand, it is a sine qua non condition for achieving internal good that the work is oriented towards defending and promoting human dignity since research that serves unjust interests or inhuman proposals of meaning corrupts its dynamics.

If motivation is essential to push forward research, the art is that internal goods and not external ones (prestige, teaching promotion, remuneration) are the ones that win the game and set the tone. The domain of external goods sometimes negatively influences the research results and always affects the selection and what and for whom of what is investigated.

This article sheds some light on the complex issue of how Ignatian mission influences university research. The reflection on the goods of research in a Jesuit university and how they can reasonably be achieved will consist of four preambles and seven themes.

#### **Four location preambles**

**First preamble.** The tremendous underlying issue is the search for truth, which includes advancing knowledge and activating teaching and learning. Everything we teach or learn, research or transfer, receives its value from our passion to tirelessly seek the truth. Without that passion, we would lose the vital drive to do well what we have professed to do as universities because in that search lies the telos that give shape and meaning to our activity. Without the search for truth, there is no rock on which to support the University nor where to find the moral life of people and societies. Without truth, moral conscience would be nothing more than a pure name without substance or purpose because it is an “original memory of good and truth. Seeing the disorientation of the present time, we need to recover the capital importance of truth both in discourse and in existence: truth in what we think and say and truth in personal life, where it goes hand in hand with integrity, coherence and authenticity.

Supported by these firm convictions, this paper will address some of the implications of the essential relationship between discourse, life and truth, applying them to our activity as university students. It gained momentum in the call that Pope Emeritus Benedict addressed to us university professors in August 2011 in El Escorial: "I encourage you to never lose sensitivity and enthusiasm for the truth; not to forget that teaching is not a brief communication of content, but rather a training of young people whom you must understand and love, in whom you must arouse that thirst for truth that they deeply possess and that desire to improve. Thirst for them, stimulation and strength". Because no one infects with their teaching a passion for the truth just because they know the subjects they teach very well, they have attitudes that instil love, such as respect, closeness, humility, perseverance and interest in getting the best of each student, ensuring that talent is well-spent. Moreover, if we focus on research, what we have to do is investigate "is nothing other than setting out on a path trying to reach the truth, which is never entirely given to us, but as we get closer to it, it offers us new and broader perspectives."<sup>5</sup>

One of the contemporary Jesuits who best knew how to think and live the University's commitment to the truth, putting into it intelligence and love for God and neighbour to the point of giving his life in the effort, was Father Ignacio Ellacuría, SJ, Rector of the UCA of El Salvador. Ellacuría called the University a "laboratory of truth", but he was not referring to a truth that is found as if by magic, but rather to a truth that is built and is made among those who genuinely seek it: a truth that is sought and that, when searching for it, more than finding it, it finds us. The truth in question must be "an operational truth, although without forgetting that the action to make the truth a reality must be true; that is, not alien to the intellectual task. This totality of truth and realisation is what justifies the university's meaning."<sup>6</sup>

Thus, **the search for truth to be genuinely scientific** cannot fail to become praxis; consequently, it must be **ethical**. Furthermore, to be ethical within the horizon of the Christian faith, it must consider the preference of the Gospel for the poor<sup>7</sup>. This does not mean – Ellacuría explained – that "it is the poorest who should begin their studies at the university, nor that the university should stop cultivating all that academic excellence that is needed to solve the real problems that affect their social context. It means rather that the university must be incarnated among the poor, intellectually, to be a science for those who have no voice."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> J. R. BUSTO, *El edificio de las letras y el modo de usar de ellas*, Universidad Pontificia Comillas, Madrid 2012, 93.

<sup>6</sup> ELLACURÍA, "Discurso de la Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas", en: *Escritos universitarios*, San Salvador 1999, 23.

<sup>7</sup> "Our option for the poor is not ideological, but is born from the Gospel. The situations of injustice and poverty in today's world are innumerable and dramatic, and if it is necessary to commit to understanding and combating their structural causes, it is also necessary to go down to the very heart of man to fight within him against the deep roots of evil, against "the sin that separates him from God, without forgetting to respond to the most pressing needs in the spirit of the charity of Christ". BENEDICTO XVI, "Alocución en la audiencia concedida a los miembros de la Congregación General 35 de la Compañía de Jesús" (21 febrero 2008).

<sup>8</sup> Remembered by Father Kolvenbach in his speech at the University of Santa Clara., in P. H. KOLVENBACH, *Discourses university* (selection by M. Agúndez, SJ), Madrid 2008, 178.

For example, it means that teachers, in the development of their functions and students throughout their training, let "the disturbing reality of this world enter their lives, in such a way that they learn to feel it, to think about it critically, to respond to his sufferings and to engage with them constructively. They would have to learn to **perceive, think, judge, choose and act in favour of the rights of others**, especially the most disadvantaged."<sup>9</sup>

The search for truth asks us university students to live our commitment to the field passionately and according to the method of each science without losing sight of the whole. There appears the "polyphonic" and "interdisciplinary" character of truth, to which we must return.

Furthermore, the search for truth is never axiologically neutral since knowledge – both its generation and application – always implies values and a certain conception of the human being.<sup>10</sup> Also, in universities that seek to locate themselves in the impossible terrain of estimative asepsis, what in our culture is usually called "secular" terrain. Every institution and every investigation is compromised, whether explicit or not, whether or not one is aware of it. Of course, a Jesuit university is no exception to this, nor does it pretend to be. On the contrary, it celebrates non-neutrality.

In that sense and following what we have been saying, **there are two aspects** that, in Ellacuría's opinion, constitute the being of every University: the most obvious is that the University deals with **culture, knowledge and intelligence**. The second one, not so clear but just as central, is that the University is a **social force** that has to respond to the reality of the society in which it exists, illuminating and transforming it. How does the University do that? There is no abstract and generally valid answer since the University cannot do the same thing always and everywhere it is.

However, what is clear is that a University must be incarnated with academic depth in the historical reality to which it belongs. A University must always seek to be an intellectual community that analyses the causes, uses imagination and creativity to discover solutions to specific problems, and trains its students to be competent professionals and people of conscience who, based on their freedom, are determined to be agents of social transformation. A University must distinguish itself as an academically excellent and ethically oriented educational institution.

This is how Fr. Nicolás, former Superior General of the Society of Jesus, expressed it in an interview he gave at the meeting of the Jesuit European provincials: "As a social institution, the university has a function towards society... Through the university, we want to help a particular society in its values, perspectives, and vision of what is good for people... and therefore, if we are in a university, we must continually ask ourselves if we are developing this social function... I believe the university is the best place to invite politicians to have deeper dialogues..."

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>10</sup> International Meeting of Higher Education of the Society of Jesus, Rome, 5/27/2001, n. 27.

**The second preamble** is whether **teaching and research** are complementary or competing, whether they correlate or not<sup>11</sup>. On this, there are opinions for all tastes and studies that instead point out the non-correlation, except for teaching at the doctorate, where there is little room for discussion since the doctoral students are “researchers in training”, as, for instance, the latest Spanish Decree on the organisation of the doctorate of February 2011 has highlighted.

In the case of Spanish universities, in recent decades, the importance of research has been placed so much in the centre of attention that it would have eclipsed the teaching function. University professors are valued for their research work and their work for the industry. However, some lucid people are beginning to be aware that this research dedication, when poorly balanced with teaching, can bring more or less severe distortions and take its toll on the university.

Once again, in the case of our Jesuit universities in Spain, it would not be wise if looking at the weaknesses of others (whether those who neglect teaching or those who fail to investigate) prevented our universities from recognizing our own. Our weaknesses are not too much in teaching or training competent professionals but in research closely tied to development and innovation.

At other times, the Society of Jesus' higher education institutions could limit themselves to offering quality teaching. Perhaps today, they can do it in other geographical areas; however, in Europe, a Jesuit university, to fulfil its mission, must carry out research and, therefore, must contribute something new to the advancement of knowledge of the scientific community and make it reach those who have the means to make it productive. Without research, we will not only do poorly in rankings or public recognition, but we will also lack a significant avenue of service to faith and justice. Therefore, it must be encouraged, even if certain goals cannot be achieved. At least in our universities, we must remember that teaching and research constitute an indivisible good in our university's action to provide an excellent service to society.

By fully valuing teaching and research functions, it may be convenient that different "styles" are accepted among professors. However, it must be clear that every faculty member must constantly update his or her knowledge (if he/she privileges teaching) and a particular teaching dedication (if he/she privileges research). This arrangement between teaching and research could be seen as an exercise of resignation based on a certain sceptical realism, but it can also contain healthy prudence. Perhaps we must set high horizons that pull all teachers towards research, knowing that reality will lower the pretensions. Setting the bar high for the young people joining our centres seems essential. Between utopia and reality, human growth occurs.

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<sup>11</sup> Experimental studies show that teaching and research "do not correlate" either positively or negatively. That is, teachers who research, for the sake of research, are not better teachers, although they are not worse either. Cf. J. HATTIE - H. W. MARSH , "The Relationship between Research and Teaching", *Review of Educational Research*, 66 (1996) 507-542.

**Third preamble:** People's motivation and institutions' support in research. Motivation includes, of course, a person's vocation to research. Although the vocation or personal inclination is essential, it cannot be considered sufficient to investigate, especially in the current circumstances. In any case, along with the motivation or actions to foster it, institutions that want to increase their research outcomes must design the corresponding policies (this will involve the constructive tension between practices and institutions).

It is up to the institution to:

1. Guarantee the external goods attached to the research task;
2. Offer the institutional support through organisational help and resources that are necessary for carrying out good research: Given the expense of research and the limitations of the funding sources of our Jesuit universities, this implies a discussion on what topics and areas will be investigated, taking into account the fundings available what is possible (forcing the possible);
3. By organisation, this paper means not mere sporadic support for the spontaneous research initiatives of professors but an authentic *research policy* that includes articulated guidelines and support and that involves stable research teams (mono or interdisciplinary, depending on the topic).

Planning and coordination are essential for research to exist: research has a great enemy in improvisation. For research teams to work, they must have a sufficient critical mass of researchers and resources. Likewise, teams will make researchers flourish. A researcher who is alone or snipers-style without a team is either gone or is in a row to extinction.

The answer to how many and which research groups a university has to support depends on budgetary, structural and human resources and the priorities and purposes. For a team to be effective in research, it must have sufficient critical mass and small or medium-sized universities often cannot have this. That is why sometimes it will be helpful – or even essential – to create inter-university networks, sometimes even international, with professors from similar areas of knowledge. Considering the scope of priorities or purposes, it seems reasonable that these networks are formed, privileged, in a non-exclusive way, among groups and research centres of Jesuit universities.

Each university professor should schedule his or her research each year within a horizon of several years and have a clear answer to questions such as in which team of people he/she will work?, in which line of research?, in which project(s) ) specific(s)? How much time will he/she dedicate to the project? What resources will he/she use? What research outputs will be achieved in the next three years?

This paper argues that when a research team has realistic and well-planned objectives, the results are positive: the project bears fruit, fosters the team's self-esteem and the recognition of the institution and the scientific community and facilitates getting new resources to undertake further objectives. It also makes it possible for some doctoral students or new researchers to join the team and make future projects possible. Here, it is also true that whoever has will be given, and whoever does not have, the little they have will be taken away.



**Fourth preamble** - the conditions or "infrastructures" necessary for the development of teaching and research functions: It is clear that teaching and research, especially with all the conditions required at present, are only possible by using all the necessary services and infrastructure of a university or centre. Every administrative leader, faculty member, administration and service staff member is essential for a university centre to fulfil its mission adequately. That is why it is essential not to consider some jobs more worthy than others.

The different positions in a university can be more or less stimulating (which is very difficult to judge in theory and general) or more or less rewarding, but they are all necessary. It seems that the degree of satisfaction they give to the person has less to do with how stimulating or rewarding the task is but rather with the motivation and interest of the person who performs it. That is of the internal and external good of the activity that one carries out and the experience that each one may have of vocation in their profession and specific task.

The distinction that Jesuits make between "mission" and specific tasks or jobs that one performs may shed light on this point. The mission is profound: the participation in the sending that Jesus received from the Trinity and that he shares with them (Jesuits considered themselves "servants of the mission of Christ ") makes them feel graced and grateful. For their part, the tasks are straightforward from the mission; they can be very lofty and complex or simple, but if they are lived from the sense of mission, even the most humble task becomes exciting. Francisco Gárate, to remember a Jesuit born in the hamlet next to the monastery of Loyola in the Vasque Country, was no less significant as a Jesuit for being a goalkeeper of the Colegio Apóstol Santiago or the University of Deusto than the great theologian of the 20th century, Karl Rahner. Not even Saint Alonso Rodríguez, in his goal at the Montesión school in Palma, was less decisive for the mission of justice that springs from faith than Saint Pedro Claver, the apostle of the Indies, slave of the black slaves.

All of the above leads us to ask with what conscience do we live our dedication at the university, as a "mission with tasks" or as "tasks without a sense of mission"? Do we feel superior, inferior or equal to others depending on what we have to do in our jobs? Here, some questions certainly affect the culture of the institutions, but also, and no less, the self-awareness of people and their relationships with colleagues, whether they are counterparts or not. We must not tolerate the undervaluation of any colleague by another(s) nor of some jobs compared to others (and in an institution dedicated to knowledge, it could certainly happen). Nevertheless, we must distinguish what comes from a lack of respect from others from a lack of self-esteem and self-worth for the work one does. Often, the key is more in the self-awareness of one's value than in the social basis of self-respect (which depends on institutions).

### **Seven themes showing the relationship between research and mission**

**First**, there is the **discerning selection** of what makes up research in our universities. A university cannot conduct research in all branches of knowledge, in every one of the



disciplines it teaches, nor in every possible line of research in these disciplines, much less in every problem or project. We must take this fact seriously in our centres. The need to prioritise begins by analysing a university's real research possibilities within the national system's framework in which it carries out its activity, focusing on its fundraising capacity and generating alliances that enable and strengthen research.

The research priorities can and should be defined considering the human and financial resources available or possible, criteria of opportunity and possibilities and options regarding the benefits for Society. However, they can also consider a reflection on purposes and values. First, we will discuss them and then the "what" to investigate.

In the certainty that knowledge is not neutral, it is not true that some institutions do secular and, therefore, neutral research while other institutions, based on our mission, do or want to do research committed to a particular religious and moral cosmovision.

All institutions and all research are committed. Whether it is explicit or not, whether it is conscious or not. Jesuit and Church universities are no exception and must, therefore, choose what they want to devote their resources to, just as researchers must choose what they want to do with their academic life.

Consequently, priorities must also be established based on identity and mission. To do this, our universities, each of our research teams and each of our researchers must ask themselves: Why do they want to investigate this? Or, put another way, **what or who are we serving with our research?** In Ignatian terminology, the Jesuit universities and their researchers must discern what they choose, why, and what they give up in their research. We will try to qualify the rules of discernment further:

- It is legitimate for the university to privilege some lines over others and enhance them. However, regarding academic merits, all the research done by professors must be valued, including those not considered in the priority lines.
- It is advisable to consider the public projection of all research from the moment it is planned, with the understanding that this projection must be "university-style."
- Although the research should not always be conditioned on obtaining external funds (both public and private funding), it will generally resort to **external financing** to have the necessary resources and for the research to be publicly recognized. For this, we must have permanent research teams with robust and, if possible, accredited research. We will not obtain external, public or private financing based on "ideas", no matter how brilliant they may be. It is necessary to know that there is knowledge and research on that topic at the university and that the research team has done relevant research in a specific field. In cases where failure to find funding may lead to significant gaps in essential and strategic fields, co-financing should be implemented.
- Now, all of this brings us directly to the topic of **priorities**. Our institutions can only research a few themes and can only count on a few research programs. Therefore, it

is **reasonable only to prepare doctoral theses in fields in which research acquires critical mass**. In the case of Spain, with the changes in the Doctorate law, this has regained strength and relevance. Likewise, the universities of the Society of Jesus can establish networks and research alliances, which, in fact, are being established, although we cannot deny the difficulties that this implies.

**Second**, let us discuss further refining the "what". Assuming that the university mission's perspective is considered in research and includes an adequate research policy that contemplates research priority in line with **faith-justice-culture-dialogue**, there is the issue of **what to investigate**. However, the "what" is not narrow or confined to very confessional topics. In all epistemological fields, some "what" can be done according to the mission. When quoting the Ex Corde Ecclesiae n. 32, Fr General Adolfo Nicolás mentioned the following thematic areas for research: "dignity of human life, the promotion of justice for all, the quality of personal and family life, the protection of nature, the search for peace and political stability, a fairer distribution of the world's resources, and a new economic and political order that better serves the human community at the national and international level.

The "what" is not only part of the ethical-bioethical issues; it includes the socioeconomic realities of businesses, the role of the law, health, education, or issues that concern poverty and social conflicts and violence, the phenomena of exclusion and marginalisation, the North-South problems, migrations, asylum, family and minors, ecology and the environment... Also, it includes the broad field of fundamental values (peace, justice, solidarity, freedom, sustainability, etc.) and human rights. In fact, all research priorities should have to do with the "frontiers" where faith meets science, culture and justice, always seeking depth and universality from the "greatest service" and therefore thinking about its usefulness and the transformative effects that what we investigate can have on people's lives, especially those most in need. Many contributions that come from research, when adequately transferred, have a transformative impact of some kind: the responsibility towards it and, ultimately, the service to society entails; we have said that they enter in this way into the internal good that directs the action of the University.

However, it should not be inferred from this thematic breadth that everything has the same value. Not all mission-related issues can become priorities in each centre. It is necessary to choose in order to act accordingly. "Choosing" is at the heart of Ignatian spirituality, and the criteria are "the greatest good and the most universal", where there is "the greatest need and the greatest urgency", always with the realism of taking into account the concrete circumstances, for here too the principle that "reality is superior to the idea" applies. This may mean that we must give up the brilliance of specific results to prioritise the practical effect of the knowledge we have gained.

Nevertheless, we should aim for the ideal aspiration of combining good results with transformative effects. In general, they should not be at odds with each other. For example, if one publishes an article in the best journal in its area (with a significant impact on the scientific community) and it is a work that has an adequate horizon of searching for good and

justice, that will undoubtedly be preferable to publishing it in a magazine without repercussion, although the social commitment of the researcher is similar in both cases. We must aspire to the maximum and persevere to achieve it since the most challenging thing is usually to start, but knowing that the maximum is achieved through commitment to the minimum. Rarely can a genuine option for the poor be legitimately used to justify the lack of results. Besides, our commitment to the poor requires the most outstanding excellence in our work, and that – whether we like it or not – in research is achieved, to a large extent, with the quality of the publication.

For many years, as a former President and Vice-Rector for Research at the Pontifical Comillas University, I thought about "what" research we do at Comillas from these points of view and what research we should do. Practically, the vast majority of the lines that appear in our most active research centres (Institutes, Chairs and groups) form part of the most pressing and frontier questions for the mission. The crux is not only "what" but "for what", "for whom", and "how". They all make sense, although we cannot make decisive contributions to all pressing issues because of the limited realities of our human and material capital resources. Therefore, not all of them can be considered a priority.

**Third**, the search for truth is carried out through commitment in the field and according to the method of each science without losing sight of the whole because the truth is "polyphonic" and requires interdisciplinary dialogue.

A quote by John Henry Newman in an 1855 conference on University and scientific research illustrates this point, we can remember it: "It does not seem to me," he said, "that I am making a crazy request when, in the name of the University, I ask those who write about religion and to jurists, economists, physiologists, chemists, geologists and historians who calmly and like good neighbours follow their respective paths of reflection, research and experimentation, with full faith in the coherence of that multiform truth that they all share, and with a trust generous in that, ultimately, each and everyone will be coherent in the sum of their results, although there may be momentary collisions, delicate situations, abundant fear of problems, prophecies of conflicts and, at all times, things that surprise the imagination, but not to reason."<sup>12</sup>

Following this line of reasoning, the mission perspective is also an important advantage over other universities with more resources: the possibility of doing interdisciplinary research that breaks with the fragmentary vision of the disciplines and offers truly integrated knowledge. This "implies a spirit of collaboration and dialogue between specialists from different disciplines within the university itself and with those from other universities" (CG 34, D. 17.10). Also, Fr General Kolvenbach emphasized this issue of interdisciplinarity and said that "Each discipline, beyond its necessary specialization, has to commit appropriately to society, to human life, to the environment." Our universities, as institutions committed to the search

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<sup>12</sup> J. H. NEWMAN, La idea de la Universidad II, Encuentro, Madrid 2014, 237.

for truth, can " maintain a sustained interdisciplinary dialogue of research and reflection, a continuous sharing of everyone's knowledge."<sup>13</sup>

For research to follow an interdisciplinary approach, it is essential to enable bridges between the different sciences for mutual enrichment and interconnection. This approach moves away from narrow and counterproductive specialism, which creates technocrats and officials, not innovators, creative people who advance knowledge and serve Society above ideologies or particular interests. Indeed, none of the major problems can be addressed by the academic galaxy of isolated disciplines.

In interdisciplinarity, there is a whole horizon of possibilities on which to focus our universities' research. We can find a plus based on solid roots in the history of interdisciplinarity, developed mainly in university settings and in the university itself, the most interdisciplinary social institutions. Here, the adjectives "Catholic" and "Jesuitic" also have something significant to contribute.

At this point, it is necessary to clarify that although the horizon of the search for truth passes through **interdisciplinarity**, that does not mean that there cannot and should not be monodisciplinary research, which is sometimes only feasible. Nor should we idealize interdisciplinarity as if practising it were simple or if bringing together specialists from different disciplines was the only requirement for doing interdisciplinary research. The reality shows how challenging it is to create effective collaborative research among researchers (individuals and groups) who are experts in different disciplines. Many of the collaborations that are sometimes labelled as interdisciplinary are, in fact, "pure" or "multidisciplinary" in nature. The difficulties come not only from the researchers' individualistic tendencies or the lack of the attitudes required for teamwork but also from methodological reasons: interdisciplinary interactions and integrating the different epistemologies in the research process must be clearly defined and integrated.

**Fourth**, interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity complement each other. This is not a play on words but a horizon that wants to designate the intertwining and cross-fertilization that, on certain occasions, is generated between disciplines or subjects, including the emergence of new methods, new languages, new paradigms and even new branches of knowledge. The pioneers of transdisciplinarity<sup>14</sup> refer to it as "thought and inner experience, science and consciousness, effectiveness and affectivity"; and they conceive it as "the science and art of the bridges both between the different fields of knowledge and between the different individuals that make up a community."<sup>15</sup> This "art of bridges" appears in the apostolic constitution *Veritatis Gaudium* 4d for the first time in an ecclesial document, with a strong call for the universities and faculties of the Church to pay due attention to it.

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<sup>13</sup> JUAN PABLO II, Mensaje a la Universidad Católica del Sagrado Corazón, Milán, 5 Mayo 2000, n.7.

<sup>14</sup> B. NICOLESCU, E. MORIN y otros, Carta de la Transdisciplinariedad, Convento de Arrábida (6-11-1994); E. MORIN, Introducción al pensamiento complejo, Gedisa, Barcelona 2009 y Pensar la complejidad, Universitat de València, Valencia 2010.

<sup>15</sup> Vid. B. NICOLESCU, La transdisciplinariedad, Du Rocher, Paris 1998.

Seven aspects highlight the conjunction of inter and transdisciplinarity: 1) the growing and increasingly firm conviction that today it is essential to have approaches that -without annulling disciplinary developments- transcend the classical fields of knowledge to be able to account for the complexity of the phenomena we seek to comprehend. 2) the need to invite the community and different social actors and integrate their knowledge into the systematized scientific and academic knowledge: the need for dialogue between the scientific and social fields. 3) In the tendency of all systems towards pragmatism, utilitarianism and fragmentation, we recognize the need to commit to broadening the horizons of rationality. 4) the ethical reflection on the ways, means and ends of knowledge, from the firm conviction that science and technology are not neutral and exempt from ethical and normative responsibilities (the axiological terrain), as was believed during the past centuries. 5) inter-transdisciplinarity and its application must be stimulated and trained, as they are not inherent in the minds of teachers and researchers: they require serious epistemological and methodological learning processes and technical support, in which knowledge institutions must be involved, as well as high doses of some precious virtues, such as humility, patience, listening skills and persevering effort. 6) inter-transdisciplinarity exercise calls on its practitioners to continually revisit tradition with a righteous will to purify memory and discernment. 7) theology takes place in the entire process, and to be an active and constructive participant, it has to rethink its epistemology and method.

In sum, for transdisciplinarity to occur, openness to the concrete social reality (horizontal) and some depth of meaning (vertical)<sup>16</sup> must occur. That is why theology and philosophy should not be absent in many transdisciplinary experiences. Theology and philosophy are indispensable in order not to renounce the fundamental questions of human beings; if they are eliminated, "then the only function of knowledge will be the manipulation of knowledge," and "technoscience becomes a blind machine, which, without awareness of itself and its powers, comes to dominate progress".<sup>17</sup>

Focusing first on the horizontal dimension of transdisciplinarity, we discovered that the Society of Jesus's mission offers enormous possibilities for connecting our teams with the teams working on the ground in the Third Sector, in social centres and NGOs. It also opens ways to combine being rooted in the local and open to the global. Being connected to the concrete life of people and social groups is very important to maintain our strength between the demands of the market and those of the State.

F. General Kolvenbach expressed this idea very well: "To ensure that the real needs of the poor find their place in research, professors need organic collaboration with those who, in the Church and society, work among the poor and favour of them, actively seeking justice. "They should be involved with them in all aspects." Alternatively, he said that "only when teachers opt for interdisciplinary dialogue and socially engaged research in collaboration with

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<sup>16</sup> J. L. MARTÍNEZ, "Inter(trans) disciplineriedad y ética", en: J. M. CAAMAÑO (ed.), *La tecnocracia*, Sal Terrae-Universidad Pontificia Comillas, Madrid 2018, 95-128.

<sup>17</sup> E. MORIN, «Epistemología de la complejidad», en D. F. Schnitman (ed.), *Nuevos paradigmas, cultura y subjetividad*, Paidós, Buenos Aires 1998, 421-442, en p. 425, II.

social apostolate platforms, are they exemplifying and modelling a type of knowledge that is service and serve the student as teachers of life and of moral commitment.” And General Congregation 35 has given support to this orientation by stating that “our **intellectual apostolate** provides us with invaluable help to establish these bridges, offering us **new ways of understanding in depth the various mechanisms and interconnections of current problems**. Many Jesuits in educational, social promotion and research institutions and other people directly dedicated to working with the poor are already involved in this task. Others have helped the growth of corporate social responsibility, the creation of a more humane business culture and economic development initiatives with the poor” (CG 35, D. 3, 28). In this connection with the direct and applied work of knowledge to the social, business, legal, educational, psychological, pastoral world... there is the “trans” dimension, which complements the “inter” dimension. Both arms are necessary.

Indeed, there are already direct and fruitful links between our universities and the social centres of the Provinces of Spain. We will have to continue working along these lines and strengthen them as much as possible with the horizon of the new united province and the apostolic platforms, which are the new spaces for organizing the apostolic mission.

**Fifth**, giving a further twist to “inter transdisciplinarity”, we can – even more so, encourage **interaction between applied research and thinking about the foundations of life, feeding interdisciplinary networks with theological and philosophical research**.

The sciences provide essential truths that interpret the world in their areas of knowledge, but they are partial since they have yet to give us their ultimate meaning. When the researcher extrapolates the results of his search as the ultimate explanation of reality, he is exceeding the boundaries of his science and making illegitimate leaps, especially when he takes advantage of his celebrity in his field of knowledge to gain the prestige of his considerations outside he.

It is part of the effort of the believing intellectual that the sectoral truths open to the encounter of the Truth of which they are a reflection and path, and this from the very dynamics of the sciences and making them advance not only forward but towards the depths of themselves. Hence, a first requirement of research from the perspective of the mission is that the sciences remain open to the ultimate Truth of things and, therefore, to transcendence. The Second Vatican Council expressed it in an unforgettably beautiful and accurate way: “The mystery of man is only clarified in the mystery of the Incarnate Word” (GS, 22), making a clear defence of the autonomy of temporal reality (GS, 36). By the very fact of creation, all things are endowed with their consistency, firmness, Truth and goodness and with their laws and order that man is obliged to respect. Respect is made effective by recognizing the method specific to the sciences or arts. This respect opens up a dialogue between disciplines, and although proceeding according to these criteria of respect seems to lead to the contradiction between science and faith, in the end, it can never lead to a definitive opposition.

All the above considerations have an underlying current that nourishes them: **the Christian message itself** is the one that "obliges us to work with a global sense of interpretation of knowledge, transcending in the universal the partiality of each of the disciplines, without violating their methodological requirements or falling into a deforming relativism, in search of the understanding of the full meaning of man, his culture and his history. Philosophy and theology (...) developed in this perspective of global interdisciplinarity are called to render an irreplaceable service in this work style"<sup>18</sup>.

This is how Pope Benedict XVI expressed himself in his speech to the university professors in El Escorial: "It is no coincidence that it was the Church that promoted the university institution since the Christian faith speaks to us of Christ as the Logos by whom everything was made (cf. Jn 1:3), and of the human being created in the image and likeness of God. This good news contemplates the rationality of everything created and contemplates man as a creature that participates and can come to recognize that rationality. The university embodies, therefore, an ideal that should not be distorted either by ideologies closed to rational dialogue or by servility to a utilitarian logic of a simple market, which sees man as a mere consumer"<sup>19</sup>.

Also at the core of the Ignatian tradition is the personal encounter with God, who liberates, commits and sends, respecting the mediations of reality and its legitimate autonomy. The God who starts and takes the initiative in the encounter is not outside of mundane reality but is in the world and the world in Him. Saint Ignatius emphasizes in his writings "finding God in all things." God can be found in every person, place, and everything. "To God in all loving and all in Him," asks for a positive attitude towards life. These expressions of Contemplation to attain Love of the Spiritual Exercises rest on the conviction that "God dwells in all creatures, in the elements, in plants, in animals, in men [in myself]" and "works and work for me in all created things on the face of the earth." Likewise, by emphasizing the humanity of Christ, he invites us to see that everything human, including science, can serve for the encounter with God.<sup>20</sup>

**Sixth**, a brief remark on the **relationship between research and ethics**: underlying all the above elements is the concern for ethical problems and the ethical dimension of all problems. This means discovering the relationship that various theoretical and practical knowledge has with the human person and how it affects the orientation of disciplines and research. We must not fall into the trap of being satisfied with putting ethics as a mere addition in some appendix or footnote or of understanding ethics only as deontology.

In many of the discourses on ethics, there needs to be more accurate knowledge of what this dimension of human life and reflection on it entails. It is fine to bring it up as long as it is not

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<sup>18</sup> P. H. KOLVENBACH, *Discursos universitarios*, UNIJES, Madrid 2008, 109.

<sup>19</sup> BENEDICTO XVI, "Discurso en el encuentro con profesores universitarios jóvenes" (19 de agosto de 2011), en: *Jornada Mundial de la Juventud 2011. Discursos, homilías y mensajes*, BAC, Madrid 2011, 65.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. A. UDÍAS, "Jesuit Scientific Tradition and Ignatian Spirituality", *Lo Sguardo. Rivista di filosofia* 10, 2012 (III) 207-219.



taken too seriously and does not complicate our lives. It is infrequent for ethics to be instrumentalized in terms of external goods and with apparently rigorous procedures and strict formalities. Sometimes, it is left to committees where those participating barely know what ethics means but have become technical in language and procedures.

In addition to this fundamental relationship between ethics and the search for truth, of which research is part, or the moral conditions for achieving the internal goods of research activity, the question of the freedom to do research, its possibilities, limits and conditions, is also ethical. At this point, the primordial conviction, perhaps deeply rooted in our public culture, is that everything we can do because of our physical, psychological or scientific capacity or power, we must do it because science cannot be stopped and stopping scientific-technical advances is backwardness and a sign of obscurantism. However, it is precisely the ethical perspective that problematizes this approach according to which "everything that can be done, must be done"; ethics says that not everything that can be done must be done if it goes against human dignity.

Technological postmodernity unceremoniously decrees that we must do everything we can technically do because science cannot be stopped and because stopping the advances that can bring happiness to many people would be a sign of obscurantism. The so-called "technological imperative" rests on an instrumental conception that maintains the neutrality of technology and, at the same time, its civilizing power that automatically tends towards increasing the freedom and rationality of human beings when obstacles are not placed on it to its advance. Many decisions in the political and economic spheres, protected under apparent technical reasons, lack the necessary moral dimension, although they are playing with people's lives. Factors such as mere usefulness, effectiveness, and functionality take precedence, subverting the very meaning of science and technology and the relationship between ends and means by granting the latter a rank that does not humanly correspond to them. Thus, they want to hide injustice and alienation with the mask of purely technical decisions they want to remove from reflection and discernment. One of the big questions we face is how to ensure that technology does not abduct the human but rather protects and enhances it. Technology helps us decide, but in the end, it is always the person who chooses, and ethics come into play, even if it is based on scientific criteria.

This temptation of technological masking hides fundamental choices that must be reflected upon and morally chosen by individuals and communities in the various economic, scientific, medical, political and media fields. Giving value to any extraordinary technological revolution without considering its social context, social use, and outcome is a mistake with incalculable consequences. Just at the turn of the millennium, according to the paradigm of complexity, Edgar Morin, the French philosopher who is now over 100 years old, calls for a "rethinking of thought", and in his essay *We are on a Titanic*, he says: "The concept that was common for many years was the idea that economic techno-scientific development was enough to tow, like a locomotive, the cars of the whole train of human development, that is, freedom, democracy, autonomy, morality. However, we see today that these types of development have often led to mental, psychic and moral underdevelopment". Moreover, if Morin's words

do not shock us, perhaps we would be shocked to know that Geoffrey Hinton, Princess of Asturias Award for Scientific and Technical Research 2022 and Turing Award 2018, considered the father of deep learning that machines in an attempt to emulate the human brain, says he deeply regrets his contribution to the progress of a technology that he now believes to be dangerous and that is growing out of control.

Let us look at the following reflection by Professor Castells, one of the most lucid interpreters of globalisation, on genetic engineering, where he “shows the error that would be to give value to any extraordinary technological revolution without taking into account its social context, its social use and its social result. It is hard to imagine a more fundamental technological revolution than having the ability to manipulate the codes of living organisms. “Nor can I think of a more dangerous and potentially destructive technology if it is dissociated from our collective ability to control technological development in cultural, ethical and institutional terms”<sup>21</sup>. In short, the dream of invulnerability, so central to the modern project and dear to past and present empires, quickly becomes immoral because it dehumanises.

Another example could be genetically modified organisms (GMOs). There we see the ambivalence of biotechnology since, although its use can lead to economic growth that helps solve problems, it has other essential difficulties that should not be relativized, namely: technological dependence, the concentration of productive lands in the hands of few, loss of biodiversity or the ecosystem network (LS, 134). That is why it is necessary to “ensure a scientific and social discussion that is responsible and broad, capable of considering all the information available and calling things by their name” based on “lines of free and interdisciplinary research” (LS, 135 ).

The therapy so that science or politics do not lose their authentic meaning involves, among other things, making operational a latent primordial conviction: from the ethical perspective, power is not necessarily duty. Moreover, this means challenging an instrumental mentality that maintains the neutrality of techno-science and, at the same time, its unquestionable power for progress when obstacles are not placed on its advance. Relying only on techno-science to solve all problems means “hiding the true and deepest problems of the world system” (LS, 111), given that techno-scientific advance does not necessarily equal “advancement of humanity and history.” (LS, 113).

Following such a mentality is still a flight forward (usually by compelling interests), the consequences of which can be irreversibly disastrous for humanity. If the cinematic license is allowed, the forward flight from technocratic unconsciousness can lead us to the “nonsense” contained in that old image from a Marx Brothers film: burning the wood of the wagons to feed the locomotive boiler. It works in the short term but is disastrous in the medium and long term.

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. M. CASTELLS, “Epílogo” a P. HIMANEN, *La ética del hacker y el espíritu de la era de la información*, Destino, Barcelona 2002, 179.

**Seventh**, looking back to whether these criticisms do not come from the fact that in a Catholic university, we are constrained not to investigate certain things because they are considered immoral. Expressed in the form of questions: do the ethical boundaries of faith research come? Are there things that cannot (should) be done at one of the Society of Jesus universities and that can be done at others? The answer is not, since we believers can and must investigate everything - to investigate is to know - obviously in a lawful way, and what cannot be investigated lawfully - respecting the dignity of the human being - should not be investigated by non-believers either. Nothing human is foreign, but that which threatens human dignity must be foreign to us.

The classic reasoning that expresses this rational reality is that God wants good because it is good, and people can discover it through reason that is not opposed by faith. To the point that it is so that “not acting according to the Logos (reason) is going against God” (Benedict XVI). That is, **the Christian faith does not suppress rationality** but must take it as a fundamental starting point and as a method of approach to treating ethical issues. Catholic morality “cannot be fundamentalist, based on biblical texts taken literally, or on esoteric religious values, inaccessible to those who do not participate in that faith; “You must also use the same tools of rational ethical discourse.”<sup>22</sup>

From our believing perspective, we must fully support “daring to know” and “not being afraid of reason”, but not the imperative to do everything technically possible for the mere fact that it is possible. This, without falling into catastrophism, since the Christian trusts in the human capacity for conversion and in the responsible freedom of man to progress and straighten out negative situations both on a personal and social level. Nevertheless, neither does it deny any limit to power under the guise of good, that is, of scientific progress that so often camouflages the selfish interests of those who can do the most.

Is there tension in this? Yes, without a doubt, but it does not have to be destructive; rather, it can and should be constructive and fruitful as long as we seek the truth and proceed with integrity and prudence. Despite what it may seem at times, “what the Church expects of us is sincere collaboration in the search for the full truth to which the Spirit leads us, in total adherence to faith and teaching.” of the Church..., **which must also be manifested in our institutions as a characteristic note of its identity”** (CG 35, D. 1, no. 7).

Moreover, it is undoubtedly not too bold to say that the enormous need for resources for university research raises the question of whether the preferential good is the expansion of knowledge (internal good) or sometimes it is the economic profit of companies and universities (external good), which have become more like money-making machines than spaces where truth is sought.

The words of John Paul II in n. 106 of the encyclical *Fides et ratio* are helpful to recall:

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<sup>22</sup> J. GAFO (ed.), *Bioética y religiones: el final de la vida*, Madrid 2000, 35.

“I also address a few words to scientists, who with their research offer us a progressive knowledge of the universe as a whole and of the incredibly rich variety of its elements, animate and inanimate, with their complex atomic and molecular structures. The path taken by them has reached, especially in this century, goals that continue to amaze us. In expressing my admiration and my encouragement towards these valuable pioneers of scientific research, to whom humanity owes so much of its current development, I feel the duty to exhort them to continue in their efforts, always remaining within the **sapiential horizon** in which the achievements Scientific and technological are accompanied by philosophical and ethical values, which are a characteristic and essential manifestation of the human person. The scientist is very aware that the search for truth, even when it concerns a limited reality of the world and man, never ends, it always refers to something that is above the immediate object of the studies, to the questions that open access to the Mystery.”

## Conclusion

In sum, the research of our Jesuit universities done in the Ignatian spiritual tradition should be identified with and proceed taking into account the characteristics that succinctly exposed in this article: (a) oriented to the practical transformation of society; (b) having ethics always present; (c) without losing the perspective of the poor and the victims; (c) aspiring to the integral and interdisciplinary vision; (d) with philosophical-theological depth; (e) uniting "action, reflection and life"; (e) with participation of and connection with the social actors (organizations, enterprises, social centres and NGOs, etc. ) in the process (the "transdisciplinary"); f) and with a selective character, according to the Ignatian criteria of the "greatest good" and the "most universal and necessary service"...; and, finally, g) we cannot dedicate ourselves to everything and we must choose what is most important based on values and needs, for which it is essential to have a clear vision and mission and ask some crucial questions: both the "for what" and the "by whom" and "why".

Based on our universities' experience, the road we have travelled, our intimate convictions and our incredible potential, research in Jesuit universities could be oriented by an approach that combines the what, the from where and the for whom without diminishing freedom. At the same time, incentives should be established to prioritize participation in lines considered a priority. This does not mean tensions disappear but that our complex and self-sacrificing work finds a more profound meaning beyond money or prestige.

It is encouraging to know that the university cannot respond to society without research. Promoting lines of research, promoting reflection and study, publications, institutes, magazines, and meetings..., is an essential way to say a word about the problems of the world: who we are, where we come from, where we are going, why and for what purpose we are here, how to build a just society, a sustainable world, in which there can be a balance of peace, development...

This paper has argued that it is possible to adequately combine two dynamics: The **nobler one** that comes from the **impulse of the mission and the trained** and good people within our university institutions, who live their vocation, know their field of speciality, transmit concerns and proposals to society. Moreover, **the most practical** and even prosaic, although essential, socially situates the university and provides it with the **means** to carry out its function. It is a process of synergy in which we need to maintain the critical capacity and the sense of healthy Ignatian suspicion: it is useless to encourage if there is no initiative from the people; it is not possible to develop the initiative if it does not support the institution and there is a realistic response.

Despite our limitations and modesty, we perceive in many of our people the concern as university students for the society to which we owe ourselves, to respond in the best possible way to the challenges of **Faith-Justice-Culture-Dialogue**, and to do so from the heart of the mission in the exciting times we are living.