

Summary

“The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice in American Jesuit Higher Education”. **Santa Clara University, October 2000**

In his speech, Father General, Peter-Hans Kolvenbach SJ., examines the concept of "**the service of faith and the promotion of justice**" within Jesuit institutions, particularly in the context of education and broader societal roles. The "service of faith" is rooted in the Jesuit tradition since 1540, focusing on proposing Jesus' message in a spirit of love rather than proselytising. The text emphasises that this service is inspired by Christ's "diakonia fidei," or his total service to God.

However, the "promotion of justice" is more complex and often misunderstood. It requires an action-oriented commitment to the poor to foster structural and attitudinal changes for a more just society. The text notes that this has sometimes led to tensions within Jesuit ministries, where faith and justice were treated as separate or even rival tracks of ministry. Over the years, Jesuit institutions have worked towards integrating these two dimensions more effectively.

The Ministry of Education: The text outlines the ideal characteristics of Jesuit higher education, focusing on three key dimensions: who the students become, what the faculty do, and how the universities proceed.

- **Formation and learning:** The ministry of education is highlighted as a critical area where Jesuit ideals can be implemented, forming "men and women for others." Kolvenbach stresses the need for Jesuit education to adapt to modern challenges, emphasising solidarity and social responsibility as core values. This approach aims to prepare students not just for professional success but to become individuals who contribute positively to society. Kolvenbach, quoting the Holy Father, argues that solidarity is learned through "contact" rather than "concepts. He stresses, "When the heart is touched by direct experience, the mind may be challenged to change. Personal involvement with innocent suffering, with the injustice others suffer, is the catalyst for solidarity which then gives rise to intellectual inquiry and moral reflection" (p.10).
- **Research and teaching:** The text emphasises the central role of faculty in Jesuit universities, highlighting their responsibility to seek truth and guide students toward becoming whole persons committed to solidarity and social responsibility. Faculty must engage in rigorous, interdisciplinary research that connects academic knowledge to real-world issues, particularly those affecting the poor and marginalised. The text advocates for faculty to collaborate closely with social ministries, ensuring their research and teaching are aligned with values of justice and faith.

- **How the universities proceed:** The text discusses the essential character and mission of Jesuit universities, emphasising that their mission extends beyond student formation and the work of the faculty to include how the universities operate and impact society. The mission of Jesuit universities should guide their policies, including admissions, hiring, tenure, and the integration of Ignatian spirituality. Jesuit universities are called to be active social forces, using their influence and intelligence to transform the world in line with Gospel values, making them distinct from other academic institutions.

By Susana Di Trollo, Spain, 2024