

## Summary

### **“Renewing Our Commitment to a Faith that does Justice”. Social Justice and Ecology Secretariat, Rome General Curia, 2005.**

This summary focuses on the document's most relevant sections to higher education. Not all topics are included, as the aim is to highlight areas with the most significant impact on higher education institutions and their mission.

**Section 1, "Spiritual roots and fruits,"** focuses on the deep connection between faith and the commitment to justice, particularly in service to the poor. The document underscores that the work for justice is deeply rooted in and sustained by a vibrant spiritual life, emphasizing that serving the poor and marginalized is an act of justice and a spiritual encounter that deepens one's faith.

#### **Key points include:**

- a) **Spiritual Roots:** The section highlights the importance of grounding the mission to serve the poor in solid spiritual roots. This spiritual foundation enables individuals to see their work as a place of encountering God and interpreting failures with hope. Critical sources of these roots are:
  - **Scripture:** The Bible's call to care for the marginalized, with significant passages such as Genesis 4:9 ("Where is your brother?") and Exodus 3:7 (God's concern for the oppressed).
  - **Contemplation of Jesus:** The life of Jesus as a model for serving the suffering, driven by compassion and solidarity.
  - **Church's Social Teaching:** Documents like *Gaudium et Spes* and the encyclicals of recent popes have provided a framework for understanding and committing to social justice.
  - **Living with the Poor:** Direct experience with the poor is a profound source of religious inspiration, enriching the faith and reinforcing the commitment to justice. The section also acknowledges challenges, such as maintaining spiritual nourishment to avoid losing motivation and facing the realities of failures and setbacks in the mission.
- b) **Dialogue Between Faith and Justice:** The document emphasizes the creative interplay between faith and justice, where faith motivates action for justice, and in turn, working for justice deepens and enriches one's faith. Engaging in justice born of faith produces spiritual fruits, such as a deeper understanding of God's presence in the world, a renewed sense of hope, and the ability to see the Kingdom of God at work amid suffering.

**Section 2. "The Novelty of Our Present Context":** The section discusses significant global changes between 1975 and 2015 and their impact on the Society of Jesus. The section titled "The Novelty of Our Present Context" focuses on these transformations and the challenges they pose:

**2.1. New International Realities:**

- **Decolonization and New Nations:** The decolonization of Africa led to the emergence of new nations struggling with national identity and economic development, complicated by Cold War pressures.
- **Cold War Dynamics:** The confrontation between capitalist and communist blocs defined much of the global political landscape and influenced armed conflicts.
- **Shift in Western Economic Policies:** The economic crisis of the 1970s led to questioning the welfare state model, paving the way for economic globalization under leaders like Thatcher and Reagan.
- **China's Economic Rise (1979):** China's exponential economic growth began, significantly increasing its global influence.
- **Fall of the Berlin Wall (1989):** This event symbolized the collapse of the communist bloc and the rise of corporate globalization as Western capitalism emerged dominant.
- **Environmental degradation.**

**2.2. New characteristics of the Society:** The section outlines several significant changes and characteristics of the Society of Jesus in recent decades. Key points include:

- **Global Awareness and Unity:** The Society of Jesus is increasingly recognized as a "universal body" characterized by stronger currents of mutual support and solidarity. This is demonstrated through Conferences that promote collaborative discernment among provinces and joint planning, leading to greater operational effectiveness.
- **Demographic Shifts:** While the number of Jesuits has significantly declined over the past forty years, there has been a rise in non-Western vocations, resulting in a more diverse Society. This shift has led to more indigenous provinces, particularly in Southern Asia, where one-fourth of all Jesuits now reside.
- **Mission Challenges and Collaboration:** Despite reducing numbers, the mission's demands have increased, particularly in the educational sector. This has resulted in a higher ratio of collaborators to Jesuits within these institutions. Consequently, there is a growing need for collaboration between Jesuits and laypeople, focusing on effective formation and planning to maintain the Jesuit identity of their works.

- **Social Sector Dynamics:** Despite its relatively small size, the social sector has grown in importance to the Society's mission. The sector has expanded significantly, particularly in educational services to the poor, who now make up the majority of students.

**2.3. Institutional challenges for the Society:** The section discusses the institutional challenges the Society faces, focusing on the need for comprehensive planning at various levels to effectively address modern apostolic challenges. These challenges are categorized into three levels:

- **Apostolic Works:** The primary challenge is to ensure the institutions' Jesuit identity and alignment with the Society's mission. This includes strengthening Jesuit identity, forming both Jesuits and laypeople for effective collaboration, planning, and evaluation, and increasing the social dimension in all works.
- **Provinces:** The emphasis here is on strengthening the social sector, effectively planning and evaluating work, and fostering a stronger sense of unity and co-responsibility within provinces.
- **Universal Society:** Challenges at this level include:
  - Restructuring provinces.
  - Developing networks for interprovincial cooperation.
  - Enhancing collaboration among provinces.
  - Ensuring the Society operates as a unified global body.

**Section 3. The Faith-Justice Process:** This section emphasizes that the Jesuit approach to justice is most effective when its five key areas—accompaniment, service, research/reflection, consciousness-raising, and structural transformation—are interconnected in a structured process. These activities are not independent but should reinforce each other. The process starts with accompanying and serving the poor, which then informs research and reflection, leading to increased awareness and driving structural change for lasting social impact. Success depends on collaboration within Jesuit institutions and with external partners, operating both locally and globally, with research and reflection as critical pivot points. Collaboration between the social apostolate and the universities is essential since it allows us to gain new knowledge through research. However, collaboration between the social and university sectors can be challenging due to differing interests and working methods.

By Susana Di Trolio, Spain, August 2024.