

**Summary of the
“Address to the Georgetown University Board of Directors Given at the Pontifical
Gregorian University (Rome – 10 May 2007). Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J.
Superior General of the Society of Jesus”**

This article summarises Kolvenbach's critical ideas on the core principles of Jesuit education and their modern applications, as presented in his 2007 address to the Georgetown University Board of Directors. It highlights the enduring relevance and transformative power of Jesuit education.

Historical Context and Foundational Principles: The Jesuit university's mission and identity have a profound historical and philosophical foundation deeply rooted in the principles established by St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus. He envisioned Jesuit education institutions serving a global mission: to defend and propagate the faith and to train wise and qualified leaders for the Church and society. This vision is encapsulated in the characteristics described by Diego de Ledesma, a significant figure in Jesuit educational history, who articulated four essential purposes for Jesuit institutions: practical benefits, contributions to governance and law, enhancement of human rationality, and the guidance of individuals toward their ultimate end through religion.

Modern Interpretation of Jesuit Education: Kolvenbach references the Middle States Working Group on Jesuit and Catholic Identity (1998), which modernised Ledesma's language for contemporary contexts. The group rephrased the Jesuit educational objectives into four main areas:

- Practical knowledge and skills.
- Value-based education for good citizenship and leadership.
- The celebration of human intellectual achievement.
- A firm grounding in a Christian understanding of the person.

These areas are simplified into four Latin words: *Utilitas* (practical), *Justitia* (justice), *Humanitas* (humanistic), and *Fides* (faith).

- **Utilitas (Practical Purpose):** The practical purpose of Jesuit education, *Utilitas*, is to provide students with knowledge and skills to excel in their chosen fields. However, Kolvenbach warns against allowing this focus to overshadow other essential aspects of education. He advocates for a holistic approach integrating scientific and technological progress with ethical, human, and social implications. Jesuit universities must lead in promoting this comprehensive educational perspective, ensuring that scientific advancements serve humanity.
- **Justitia (Justice):** Jesuit education extends beyond practicalities to address values, educating individuals to be good citizens and leaders committed to the common good. *Justitia* emphasises the need to educate individuals to embrace and

promote just social, economic, and political structures. Jesuit education aims to transform students into individuals who care for others and work collaboratively with others. The contemporary focus on collaboration and networking highlights the importance of Jesuit universities engaging with and enriching global educational systems at all levels.

- **Humanitas (Humanistic Tradition):** Jesuit education aims to develop fully human persons. It celebrates the full range of human intellectual power and achievement, confidently affirming reason, not as opposed to faith but as its necessary complement. Humanitas reflects Ledesma's belief in enhancing human rationality and dignity. This tradition includes the integration of humanities and sciences within a broader educational context, exemplifying a holistic educational approach.
- **Fides (Faith Dimension):** Fides represents the commitment to seeking the fullness of truth through rigorous intellectual activity. Jesuit higher education institutions are expected to integrate Christian values into all operations, presenting them as guiding principles. This religious dimension is not confined to specific religious studies but is embedded in the university's broader mission to help individuals encounter God and understand their vocation and ultimate purpose.
- **Leadership and Partnership:** Kolvenbach underscores the importance of leadership and partnership in maintaining the Jesuit identity of universities. Effective leadership involves continuous evaluation and discernment to ensure the university's mission aligns with Ignatian values. Collaboration between Jesuits and laypersons is crucial, with mutual respect enhancing the educational mission. The increasing involvement of the laity in leadership positions is seen as a positive development, fostering a shared sense of responsibility and commitment to the university's mission.

Conclusion: Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, SJ., argues that the identity of Jesuit higher education institutions remains deeply rooted in the historical principles established by St. Ignatius of Loyola and Diego de Ledesma. These institutions must balance practical education, justice, humanistic values, and the spiritual dimension. Through effective leadership and collaborative partnerships, Jesuit universities continue to form individuals who are knowledgeable, skilled, and deeply committed to serving humanity and promoting justice.

By: Susana Di Trolio, Spain, 2024.