



THE PORTAL TO JESUIT STUDIES

Our Four Apostolic Priorities, Pedro Arrupe (1970)

Based on an address he delivered at the conclusion of the Congregation of Procurators in Rome in October 1970, Pedro Arrupe issued the following letter to the provincials of the Society of Jesus. The letter articulates the Jesuits' four "apostolic priorities," as determined by their superior general. The four prioritized areas are, in order, theological reflection, the social apostolate, the apostolate of education, and the mass media apostolate. For each, Arrupe notes how he had established secretariates at the Jesuit Curia in Rome "developing and coordinating the activities necessary in each of those fields." The opening of the text refers to a recently completed Sociological Survey of the Society, which began in 1966.

Introduction

In recent years some studies have been made to determine what works and ministries in our day can contribute more to the greater glory of God, in other words, to the greater service and good of our neighbor.

A sociological survey was conducted recently, and though of necessity it is subject to some limitations (not surprising for a project carried out for the first time in the whole Society), it nevertheless produced elements of great value for determining the actual state of ministries in the Society and indicated criteria and opinions of Ours on the choice of ministries.

Such a choice of ministries should be considered a more urgent necessity in the Society today. For the Society is essentially apostolic, and our true 'identity' ought to be manifested through the apostolate of the Society; the apostolic work of the Society is the visible form which expresses its invisible spiritual charism, while at the same time it determines the concrete life of each one of us.

Therefore, keeping in mind the Ignatian principles for selecting ministries, and taking into account the experience gained in these last years, especially by means of the survey, and considering the actual situation in the whole Society, I would have to make the following proposals to you:

I. Theological Reflection

In my judgment the first of all ministries that must be mentioned now is *theological reflection on the human problems of today*.



You know how important these problems are. The world does not know where to go. Notwithstanding the constant technological development, peace does not exist among men, nor justice between nations and social groups, nor equality between human households or between single individuals. God, the alpha and omega, the beginning and the end, seems to be far away from human associations.

Besides, new methods of scientific development have been begun, there are keener demands in historical criticism, speedier means of human communication; international associations of peoples ask that concrete answers be given for new problems, which rest on fundamental human values, and which in the end open the way to God, the necessity of whom the men of today feel more and more deeply, though for most men it may still be a question of the "unknown God," whom they cannot find.

I would like to believe that the Society of Jesus can and ought to render this service to the Church and to the world. Furthermore this has been earnestly requested of us by the Holy See itself, by many Bishops, by many persons in different regions of the world. The very end of the Society demands this, desiring that in preference to others those ministries be chosen, which are directed to the greatest service of the Church and mankind.

And perhaps it should be said that the Society is more suitably equipped for this ministry of theological reflection, when we consider its many theological faculties, the large number of theologians among Ours, or even its broader competence in the whole range of human sciences.

But if this ministry is to be seriously understood and assumed, it is certainly necessary that the Society devote itself more earnestly day by day to biblical and strictly theological studies, and to a many-sided philosophico-theological investigation, through which divine solutions may be sought for the human problems and difficulties of today. It is necessary also that the Society devote itself to the fostering of those sciences which can open the way to theology, such as anthropology, psychology, sociology and others. These sciences of man and the human environment offer material for theological reflection, and along with theology can effect a certain substantiality in difficult questions, which greatly trouble all mankind today. And indeed haste is of the essence: we may not wait, for men are constraining us!

Only in this way, that is to say, by scientific competence, will the Society be capable of aiding the minds and thoughts of men in that arduous journey towards God. The publication of books, articles in magazines, scientific congresses, lectures in universities, personal conversations, all these will be so many means in this theological apostolate of our Society today.

I would earnestly ask all our young men to consider seriously before God their own responsibility on this point, and not hesitate to give their full attention and the whole man to philosophical and theological studies, since only by these studies seriously made will they be able to satisfy in their future ministry the expectations of men today.



II. The Social Apostolate

I would say that the *social apostolate* comes second in the order of precedence among the ministries of the Society today.

This surely will need no amplification, since we have before our eyes not only that multitude of men, “which no one can count,” that lack the means necessary to live a life worthy of man, but also the unjust oppressions, the defective social structures, the attitude of indifference of those who live in wealth, and finally the intrinsic difficulty of an apostolate of this kind, in which it is sometimes so hard to determine the limits between the economic, political or social field and the announcing of the Gospel.

Just as in the theological field, so too in the social field it will be the task of the Society, assuming serious and scientific preparation, to be of assistance especially to all those who seek the solution of these problems throughout the world, and at the same time along with them, to discover the nature of the humanism of the technical world, of the true social order, of the meaning of natural values, on which the well-ordered evolution of man is based, finally what is the meaning of the presence of the Church and the priest in the world today. But all these are the products of deep and accurate scientific inquiry; and the danger is present that we may be found unprepared to attain to that summit, where the learned debate, as something beyond our reach.

In the social apostolate it is not a question of some local problem, but of the truly universal problem of man living below the level of human dignity (who, we commonly say, are living a “marginal” existence), a problem which affects all nations, rich and poor, since everywhere is heard that cry, “much weeping and wailing,” which rightly demands the advent of another better world, which can be truly said to be and actually be “a kingdom of justice, love and peace.”

Our Society is bound to think this problem through, and seriously toil by its study, its industry, its influence on all those who govern nations and make laws, especially on those who take part in international organizations, also by its testimony of poverty, simplicity of life and generosity, by its sense of true justice and love towards the poor and the abandoned, sometimes even by its sharing in the labor, in the indigence, in the anguish of men: it is bound, I say, to toil seriously that the human condition of the whole world may become better day by day, and be transformed profoundly for the better.

This ministry of ours will be by no means easy, because it also demands great personal abnegation, but if the charity of Christ urges us, we will see more clearly than light its importance and its ‘undeferable’ necessity.



We have of course Social Centers in many Provinces: let us not readily think that the social apostolate is to be entrusted to them alone, since it pertains to each and every one of us. Indeed there are nations and peoples so poor that the work that must be done in them does not brook delay. But it can be said that an equal responsibility rests on the wealthy nations, which possess the power of finding true solutions for establishing economic equilibrium and for securing and attaining speedy development.

III. The Apostolate of Education

So we come to our third point, which is the *ministry of education*. Today we need especially men endowed with strong willpower and solid preparation, men who are capable of spending their lives for others, of helping others, of directing others; men rooted and founded in the charity of Christ.

There will be no one who does not understand the duty and the importance of that true education. And the Society has been persuaded for centuries that the ministry of forming the minds of youth and fashioning their Christian morals is a most excellent one. Besides a large part of Ours devote their efforts to this ministry, and I have no doubt that from this ministry even now abundant fruits are gathered in the Society of the present day.

Still I would like to exhort all to subject to a close examination the new forms of education, which meet modern techniques, and for this reason tend to fashion men such as actual circumstances demand, capable of offering the service which the human family now urgently needs. Necessarily they differ in different regions. We must give them Christian principles that are not abstract and impersonal but concrete and of such a kind that they may attain to true religious experience. Their social consciousness must be enkindled and developed, and an authentic bond with other men in charity and justice must be inculcated.

For education such as this will not exist unless it touches the whole man, makes him a witness of the truth of Christ and renders him a useful worker in the new order. The new order in the world today must be effected by new men, who have been called for that reason to receive a new education. I know well how many of Ours, assigned to the ministry of education are today concerned about the necessary adaptation of education to the new circumstances of present-day life, and to the new necessities that arise.

I would not wish to omit mentioning here how necessary it is that no labor be spared for this end, that in our Colleges and Universities, whether by help obtained from the Government or by other economic means that have been found there exist no distinction between our students from an economic and social aspect. Nor is it advisable that we confine our educational work to our Colleges alone, but in so



far as it is possible, we should spend ourselves in others also, either in those so-called official or national colleges, or in private colleges, that in this way the truth of our faith may reach more young students. Finally, we must not neglect any cooperation on our part in the study and preparation of those education plans which are being made ready now in so many nations for the purpose of meeting better present-day circumstances.

IV. The Mass Media Apostolate

There is a fourth type of ministry, which we must say is at once a means of diffusing ideas and of promoting education in the world of today, and which now exercises the greatest influence on our contemporaries, and appears to be an excellent way of preaching the Gospel itself in a more effective manner. I speak of those so-called *Mass Media*, which exercise essential roles in all human association, and on which no small portion of mankind depends for information, entertainment, and their way of thinking and acting. The importance of this human invention escapes no one, but we must confess that we, as sons of the Society, have not yet become truly conscious of our undoubted responsibility in the face of this manifest reality. We have the means ready at hand whereby we can reach a countless multitude of men, if we know how to use it patiently.

In the sixteenth century our Society did not hesitate to adopt fully and use the culture and technical means of that age. Our Fathers and the schools of the Society fostered the humanities, oratorical skill, scenic representations, technical development of every kind in that time, rejecting nothing but rather using all means for the purpose of gaining the world for Christ. What Ignatius, Xavier and so many others of our Fathers did, we too ought to do.

Our Society ought to ponder this point seriously and diligently, that it may not so be weighed down by old practices that it loses the flexibility of its original charism.

To your consideration, my dear Fathers, and through you to the consideration of your Provinces, I would like to commit this solicitude of mine, whereby I would judge that we can accomplish much more for the service of souls if we learn how to use rightly these modern instruments of the apostolate, if we consider those Mass Media and all who toil in them as part of our present-day apostolate, if finally we offer our cooperation in preparing, aiding, directing those numberless men who devote their efforts to means of communication of this kind.

It does not escape you how useful these means can be for the formation and instruction of Ours, as experiments conducted in some Provinces clearly prove.

I know the matter does not lack difficulties and that it is impossible without careful study, but it is well known how rich are the rewards of this labor, provided only it is done in the right way and suitable means are used to pursue the purpose we intend.



*

These are the four ministries which seemed to me to be necessary at this particular time in the Society, and I would offer them for your consideration.

Theological reflection regards our priestly mission in the Church of God: the other three types of apostolate of which I wished to treat are urgently demanded by the very historical circumstances of the day, and imply our positive involvement in the historical reality surrounding us.

I judge them of such vital importance that I resolved, as you know well, to establish special Secretariates in our Curia for developing and coordinating the activities necessary in each of those fields of our apostolate: namely, a Secretariate of the social apostolate, a Secretariat of Education, a Secretariate of the Means of Social Communication, whose directors I ask to be willing to share with us this discussion of ours on the apostolate of the Society today.

Before concluding this allocution of mine I would like to mention also that precious instrument for forming Christian men, which we received from Saint Ignatius as part of the Ignatian charism. The *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius are the most effective means of the apostolate and an excellent way to obtain more collaborators, who, forgetting the things that are their own, seek those of Christ Jesus.

I was very pleased in this morning's session to hear you speaking at such length on the Spiritual Exercises. In them I put my confidence of our genuine renewal of the Society and of a total consecration to God, and I express the hope in behalf of Ours and of externs that they will obtain from the Exercises that manifold divine grace, which is necessary for us to attempt and perform so great a task as the Church of Christ rightly expects from our Society and from all our lay collaborators.

In this consultation, which for me is of great value, I look forward gladly to your suggestions on all these topics.

Original Source (English translation):

Other Apostolates Today: Selected Letters and Addresses – III, ed. Jerome Aixala. St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1981, "Our Four Apostolic Priorities," pg. 1-8.

Provided for research, teaching, and private study. All rights reserved by the copyright holder, pursuant to the Portal's policies.