

Adolfo Nicolás, S.J.

Superior General of the Society of Jesus

Networking Jesuit Higher Education: Shaping  
the Future for a Humane, Just, Sustainable Globe—

Journal of Jesuit Studies 3, 010

I AM VERY HAPPY TO BE WITH YOU THIS MORNING, ON THIS REMARKABLE OCCASION, AS COLLEAGUES OF NEARLY ALL OF THE ROUGHLY 200 INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION OPERATING UNDER THE BANNER OF THE SOCIETY OF JESUS GATHER TO CONSIDER THE IMPORTANCE OF JESUIT EDUCATION AND ITS FUTURE. I am happy to greet all of you – collaborators in the mission and ministry of the Society, Jesuits, friends of the Society and of Jesuit higher education, and any students who might be present. I thank Father José Morales, President of the Iberoamericana, and the staff of the Iberoamericana for their hospitality and extraordinary efforts in ensuring all the arrangements for this conference. Finally, I thank all of you for your participation in Jesuit higher education and in this conference, which some of you began before arriving here by authoring the excellent papers that served to stimulate our discussions.

For the sake of simplifying language, I will use “universities” when referring to the wide range of higher education institutions represented in this assembly, ranging from specialized research centers to technical institutes, to colleges and to large, complex universities.

In the past two years in my present service, I have traveled to many parts of the world to encounter Jesuits and our collaborators, and I have always emphasized that I am as eager – in fact, more eager – to listen and to learn, rather than to speak from the lofty – and mythical – heights of Borgo Santo Spirito 4. I bring this same dialogical spirit to this meeting of Jesuit higher education. As I listened yesterday to your discussion of regional challenges and the three frontier challenges that you selected to address, I could see that you already tackle many of the “serious contemporary problems” that Pope John Paul II identified for us in his apostolic constitution, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, and that you are doing so with the depth of thought, imagination, moral passion, and spiritual conviction that characterize Catholic and Jesuit education at its best.

What I wish to share this morning, therefore, should be taken as adding my perspective to what I hope will be an ongoing and ever deeper conversation on the future of Jesuit higher education. My own experience is that university people, especially university presidents, are not shy about sharing their points of view, so I am

The theme of our conference – Networking Jesuit Higher Education: Shaping the Future for a Humane, Just, Sustainable Globe – involves a bold proposal. It suggests that we have today an extraordinary opportunity to have a hand in helping

merchants of consumer dreams flood one's computer screens, or when the ugly or unpleasant sounds of the world can be shut out by one's MP3 music player, then one's vision, one's perception of reality, one's desiring can also remain shallow. When one can become "friends" so quickly and so painlessly with mere acquaintances or total strangers on one's social networks – and if one can so easily "unfriend" another without the hard work of encounter or, if need be, confrontation and then reconciliation – then relationships can also become superficial.

When one is overwhelmed with such a dizzying pluralism of choices and values and beliefs and visions of life, then one can so easily slip into the lazy superficiality of relativism or mere tolerance of others and their views, rather than engaging in the hard work of forming communities of dialogue in the search of truth and understanding. It is easier to do as one is told than to study, to pray, to risk, or to discern a choice.

I think the challenges posed by the globalization of superficiality – superficiality of thought, vision, dreams, relationships, convictions – to Jesuit higher education need deeper analysis, reflection, and discernment than we have time for this morning. All I wish to signal here is my concern that our new technologies, together with the underlying values such as moral relativism and consumerism, are shaping the interior worlds of so many, especially the young people we are educating, limiting the fullness of their flourishing as human persons and limiting their responses to a world in need of healing intellectually, morally, and spiritually.

We need to understand this complex new interior world created by globalization more deeply and intelligently so that we can respond more adequately and decisively as educators to counter the deleterious effects of such superficiality. For a world of globalized superficiality of thought means the unchallenged reign of fundamentalism, fanaticism, ideology, and all those escapes from thinking that cause suffering for so many. Shallow,

Spiritual Exercises – which pedagogy Ignatius later applied to Jesuit education.

One might call this “pedagogy” of Ignatian contemplation the exercise of the creative imagination. The imagination works in cooperation with Memory, as we know from the Exercises. The English term used for the acts of the faculty of memory – to remember – is very apropos.

Imagine a big jigsaw puzzle with your face in the middle. Now Ignatius asks





First, I am sure that all of you will agree with Pope John Paul II who, in Ex Corde Ecclesiae, observed that in addition to quality teaching and research, every Catholic university is also called on to become an effective, responsible instrument

university, working by itself as a proyecto social, is able to accomplish so much good in society, how much more can we increase the scope of our service to the world if all the Jesuit institutions of higher education become, as it were, a single global proyecto social? So it is expanding already the awareness that you and we all have.

Before coming here, I met with the Provincials of Africa in Rome; some other Provincials from Latin America were passing through as well. A couple of them mentioned, "Since you are going to Mexico for this meeting, can you tell the directors and the deans and the universities to share the resources they have? We who have only beginning institutions – if we could access the libraries and resources that are offered in universities with tradition and know-how and resources that we cannot afford, that would be a great, great help."



active Secretary, who is here. And we are now developing a section on social justice and ecology. So this would also be a point of reference in this networking.

Let me end this section by reminding you that universities as such came very late into Ignatius' understanding of how the Society of Jesus was to fulfill its mission in the Church. What is striking is that, in the Constitutions, Ignatius makes clear why he is won over to the idea of what he calls "Universities of the Society": the Society of Jesus accepts "charge of universities" so that the "benefits" of "improvement in learning and in living . . . be spread more universally."<sup>7</sup> The more universal good is

to knowledge in order to grow. Globalization has created new inequalities between those who enjoy the power given to them by knowledge, and those who are excluded from its benefits because they have no access to that knowledge. Thus, we need to ask: who benefits from the knowledge produced in our institutions and who does not? Who needs the knowledge we can share, and how can we share it more effec-





