

DECREE THREE, GC 34

Our Mission and Justice

50 1. In response to the Second Vatican Council, we, the Society of Jesus, set out on a journey of faith as we committed ourselves to the promotion of justice as an integral part of our mission. That commitment was a wonderful gift of God to us, for it put us into such good company--the Lord's surely, but also that of so many friends of his among the poor and those committed to justice. As fellow pilgrims with them towards the Kingdom, we have often been touched by their faith, renewed by their hope, transformed by their love. As servants of Christ's mission, we have been greatly enriched by opening our hearts and our very lives to "the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men and women of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted."¹

51 2. And we have done so in many ways. The promotion of justice has been integrated into traditional ministries and new ones, in pastoral work and social centers, in educating men and women for others, in direct ministry with the poor. We also acknowledge our failures on the journey. The promotion of justice has sometimes been separated from its wellspring of faith. Dogmatism or ideology sometimes led us to treat each other more as adversaries than as companions. We can be timid in challenging ourselves and our institutional apostolates with the fullness of our mission of faith seeking justice.

52 3. Therefore we want to renew our commitment to the promotion of justice as an integral part of our mission, as this has been extensively developed in General Congregations 32 and 33. Our experience has shown us that our promotion of justice both flows from faith and brings us back to an ever deeper faith. So we intend to journey on towards ever fuller integration of the promotion of justice into our lives of faith, in the company of the poor and many others who live and work for the coming of God's Kingdom.

53 4. For the vision of justice which guides us is intimately linked with our faith. It is deeply rooted in the Scriptures, Church tradition, and our Ignatian heritage. It transcends notions of justice derived from ideology, philosophy, or particular political movements, which can never be an adequate expression of the justice of the Kingdom for which we are called to struggle at the side of our Companion and King.²

New Dimensions of Justice

54 5. The struggle for justice has a progressive and gradually unfolding historic character, as it confronts the changing needs of specific peoples, cultures, and times. Previous congregations have called attention to the need to work for structural changes in the socioeconomic and political orders as an important

dimension of the promotion of justice.³ They also urged working for peace and reconciliation through nonviolence; working to end discrimination against people based on race, religion, gender, ethnic background, or social class; working to counter growing poverty and hunger while material prosperity becomes ever more concentrated.⁴ Each of us may focus our efforts in only one or other of these dimensions, but all of them are of continuing importance in the Society's overall mission of the promotion of justice.

55 6. More recently we have become increasingly aware of other dimensions of this struggle for justice.⁵ Respect for the dignity of the human person created in the image of God underlies the growing international consciousness of the full range of *human rights*. These include economic and social rights to the basic necessities of life and well-being; personal rights such as freedom of conscience and expression and the right to practice and share one's faith; civil and political rights to participate fully and freely in the processes of society; and rights such as development, peace, and a healthy environment. Since persons and communities are intertwined, there are important analogies between the rights of persons and what are sometimes called the "rights of peoples," such as cultural integrity and preservation, and control of their own destiny and resources.⁶ The Society, as an international apostolic body, must work with communities of solidarity in supporting these rights.⁷

56 7. In our times there is a growing consciousness of the *interdependence* of all peoples in one common heritage. The globalization of the world economy and society proceeds at a rapid pace, fed by developments in technology, communication, and business. While this phenomenon can produce many benefits, it can also result in injustices on a massive scale: economic adjustment programs and market forces unfettered by concern for their social impact, especially on the poor; the homogeneous "modernization" of cultures in ways that destroy traditional cultures and values; a growing inequality among nations and--within nations--between rich and poor, between the powerful and the marginalized. In justice, we must counter this by working to build up a world order of genuine solidarity, where all can have a rightful place at the banquet of the Kingdom.⁸

57 8. *Human life*, a gift of God, has to be respected from its beginning to its natural end. Yet we are increasingly being faced with a "culture of death" which encourages abortion, suicide, and euthanasia; war, terrorism, violence, and capital punishment as ways of resolving issues; the consumption of drugs; turning away from the human drama of hunger, AIDS, and poverty. We need to encourage a "culture of life." Measures to do this would include the promotion of realistic and morally acceptable alternatives to abortion and euthanasia; the careful development of the ethical context for medical experimentation and genetic engineering; working to divert resources from war and the international traffic in arms towards providing for the needs of the poor; creating possibilities for lives of meaning and commitment instead of anomie and despair.

58 9. Preserving the integrity of creation underlies growing concern for the *environment*.⁹ Ecological equilibrium and a sustainable, equitable use of the world's resources are important elements of justice towards all the communities in our present 'global village'; they are also matters of justice towards future generations who will inherit whatever we leave them. Unscrupulous exploitation of natural resources and the environment degrades the quality of life; it destroys cultures and sinks the poor in misery. We need to promote attitudes and policies which will create responsible relationships to the environment of our shared world, of which we are only the stewards.

59 10. Our experience in recent decades has demonstrated that social change does not consist only in the transformation of economic and political structures, for these structures are themselves rooted in sociocultural values and attitudes. Full human liberation, for the poor and for us all, lies in the development of *communities of solidarity* at the grass-roots and nongovernmental as well as the political level, where we can all work together towards total human development.¹⁰ And all of this must be done in the context of a sustainable, respectful interrelation between diverse peoples, cultures, the environment, and the living God in our midst.

Urgent Situations

60 11. As a congregation gathered from all over the world, we have become aware of critical situations affecting hundreds of millions of people which call for special concern in the Society. We do not mean to present an exhaustive list or to divert our efforts from unjust situations closer to each one of us. But the following are especially relevant to the Society as an international apostolic body and cry out for our urgent attention.

61 12. The *marginalization of Africa* in the 'new world order' renders an entire continent paradigmatic of all the marginalized of the world. Thirty of the world's poorest countries are African. Two thirds of the world's refugees are African. Slavery, colonial and neocolonial subjugation, internal problems of ethnic rivalry and corruption have all created an 'ocean of misfortunes' there. Yet there is also much life and great courage in the African people as they struggle together to build a future for those who will come after them. The general congregation asks the universal Society to do whatever it can to change international attitudes and behavior towards Africa.

62 13. The recent collapse of totalitarian systems in *Eastern Europe* has left behind devastation in all areas of human and social life. The people there are grappling with the difficult task of reconstructing a social order through which all can live in authentic community, working for the common good, responsible for their own destinies. In years past, many people, including Jesuits, gave magnificent witness to solidarity, fidelity, and resistance. Now they need the cooperation and familial assistance of the international community in their

struggle for a secure and peaceful future. The Society must do everything possible to stand by them.

63 14. *Indigenous peoples* in many parts of the world, isolated and relegated to marginal social roles, see their identity, cultural legacy, and natural world threatened. Other social groups--an example would be the *Dalits*, considered "untouchables" in some parts of South Asia--suffer severe social discrimination in civil and even ecclesial society. The general congregation calls on the whole Society to renew its long-standing commitment to such peoples.

64 15. In many parts of the world, even in the most developed countries, economic and social forces are *excluding* millions of people from the benefits of society. The long-term unemployed, young people without any possibility of employment, exploited and abandoned children of the streets, the aged who live alone without social protection, ex-convicts, victims of drug abuse and those afflicted with AIDS--all these are condemned to lives of dire poverty, social marginalization and precarious cultural existence. They require of us the attention which our biblical tradition demands for "the orphans, widows, and strangers in your midst."

65 16. There are over forty-five million *refugees and displaced persons* in today's world, 80 percent of whom are women and children. Often lodged in the poorest of countries, they face growing impoverishment, loss of a sense of life and culture, with consequent hopelessness and despair. The Jesuit Refugee Service accompanies many of these brothers and sisters of ours, serving them as companions, advocating their cause in an uncaring world. The general congregation appeals to all provinces to support the Jesuit Refugee Service in every way possible. And we call on the international Society to join efforts with other international institutions and organizations to combat the injustices which uproot peoples from their land and families.

Implementation

66 17. The promotion of justice requires, before all else, our own continuing personal conversion--finding Jesus Christ in the brokenness of our world, living in solidarity with the poor and outcast, so that we can take up their cause under the standard of the Cross. Our sensitivity for such a mission will be most affected by frequent direct contact with these "friends of the Lord," from whom we can often learn about faith. Some insertion into the world of the poor should therefore be part of the life of every Jesuit. And our communities should be located among ordinary people wherever possible.

67 18. During their formation, young Jesuits should be in contact with the poor, not just occasionally, but in a more sustained manner. These experiences must be accompanied by careful reflection as part of the academic and spiritual formation and should be integrated into training in sociocultural analysis. Living

contact with other cultures and a style of life in which at times they feel some effects of poverty will help them grow in solidarity with the poor and with the other in our richly diverse world.¹¹ Continuing formation of older Jesuits should also foster such experiences of different social and cultural realities.

68 19. In each of our different apostolates, we must create communities of solidarity in seeking justice. Working together with our colleagues, every Jesuit in his ministry can and should promote justice in one or more of the following ways: (a) direct service and accompaniment of the poor, (b) developing awareness of the demands of justice joined to the social responsibility to achieve it, (c) participating in social mobilization for the creation of a more just social order.

69 20. Forming men and women for others is appropriate not only in our educational institutions but in ministries of the Word and the Spiritual Exercises, in pastoral apostolates and communication. Social centers and direct social action for and with the poor will be more effective in promoting justice to the extent that they integrate faith into all dimensions of their work. Thus each Jesuit ministry should work to deepen its particular implementation of our full mission of faith and justice, which cannot but be enriched by efforts towards a more effective dialogue and inculturation.

70 21. Jesuit institutions can use the following means to help in implementing our mission: institutional evaluation of the role they play in society, examination of whether the institution's own internal structures and policies reflect our mission, collaboration and exchange with similar institutions in diverse social and cultural contexts, continuing formation of personnel regarding mission.

71 22. Each province should evaluate its apostolic planning using the Ignatian criteria found in the Constitutions, read in the light of our mission today.¹² When understood in the light of the faith which seeks justice, the criterion of "greater need" points towards places or situations of serious injustice; the criterion of "more fruitful," towards ministry which can be more effective in creating communities of solidarity; the criterion of "more universal," towards action which contributes to structural change to create a society more based on shared responsibility. After decisions are made, it is of crucial importance to evaluate the process of implementation. Annual review of the accomplishment of objectives during the year can help determine objectives for the coming year. Serious and regular review of effectiveness in carrying out our mission will give credibility and realism to our province and institutional planning.

72 23. At the interprovincial and international levels, the Society must continue to find ways to collaborate with other national and international groups or organizations, both nongovernmental and official, for a part of our responsibility as an international apostolic body is to work with others at the regional and global level for a more just international order. The Society must therefore examine its

resources and try to assist in the formation of an effective international network so that, also at this level, our mission can be carried out.

73 24. Above all, we need to continue with great hope on our journey towards the Kingdom. As servants of Christ's Mission,¹ we base our hope ultimately in Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, to preserve, direct, and carry us forward in our service of faith and promotion of justice.¹³ And we can thus keep seeking justice insistently.

The Society continues to insist on the promotion of justice. Why? Because it corresponds to our very spirituality. . . . The promotion of justice signifies a call for the Society to insert ourselves even more profoundly in the concrete lives of peoples and nations² as they actually are and not as we think they ought to be.¹⁴

74 Thus our pilgrimage will lead us again to sharing more and more deeply in the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of all God's people.

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1. Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 1. Cf. GC 33, D 1, n. 41. [Return to text](#)
 2. Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical letter *Centesimus Annus*, n. 25. [Return to text](#)
 3. Cf. GC 32, D 4, nn. 20, 40; GC 33, D 1, nn. 32, 46. [Return to text](#)
 4. Cf. GC 32, D 4, n. 20; GC 33, D 1, nn. 45f. [Return to text](#)
 5. Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, n. 26. [Return to text](#)
 6. Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical letters *Redemptor Hominis*, n. 14; *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, n. 29. [Return to text](#)
 7. Cf. number 10, below. [Return to text](#)
 8. ¹But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind¹ (Luke 14:13; cf. Luke 16:19-31). Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, n. 33. [Return to text](#)
 9. Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical letter *Centesimus Annus*, n. 37. [Return to text](#)
 10. Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical letters *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, nn. 27ff.; *Centesimus Annus*, n. 49. [Return to text](#)
 11. *Const.* [287]. [Return to text](#)
 12. Cf. *Const.* [622f.]. [Return to text](#)
 13. *Const.* [134], [812]. [Return to text](#)
 14. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, ¹Our Mission Today and Tomorrow,¹ op. cit., p. 49. [Return to text](#)