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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Reimagining our Intellectual Apostolate through the House of Writers

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ABSTRACT

This article reimagines the Jesuit intellectual apostolate by proposing the revival of 'houses of writers' as agile, mission-focused complements to universities. While universities remain valuable for Jesuit education, their institutional 'sclerosis' and bureaucratic demands can limit flexibility and responsiveness. Drawing on the historical role of houses of writers, with a contemporary case study of Brotéria in Lisbon, the essay argues for the establishment of 'houses of public intellectuals' as dynamic spaces fostering hospitality, erudition, and independence. These houses would enable Jesuits to engage directly with society, offering an alternative intellectual model suited to cosmopolitan and urban contexts. The essay advocates a hybrid approach where Jesuit intellectual life can flourish beyond the confines of university structures, enriching the apostolate's reach.

Keywords:
intellectual apostolate, house of writers, Brotéria, public intellectuals, university limitations

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Overview

The essay presented in these pages is speculative in its method, tentative in its object, and prudent in its outcome. It is born out of my understanding that the contemporary intellectual apostolate of the Society of Jesus has been lacking some of the tools and structures that can enable it to deliver all it can offer. Whereas nowadays the Society relies mostly, if not almost exclusively, on the university to fulfill the needs of our intellectual work, I argue that there is a need to reimagine and rediscover some of the traits of what the order's "houses of writers" were when at their best. First and foremost, this is an essay that aims for engagement and discussion about the problem that is raised. No absolute certainty is placed on the solutions advanced, even though they seem to be auspicious if read with an open mind.[1]

The paper is divided into three parts. First, the problem connected to our current intellectual apostolate will be formulated and described—and the pros and cons of universities will be explored. The paper then provides a brief history of houses of writers and presents a modern case study of what one specific contemporary house of writers has achieved. In the third part of the paper, a case will be made for the development of structures akin to the houses of writers. The paper argues that, through the intellectual freedom and scholarly space they grant, these houses of public intellectuals can complement our universities and make important contributions to our work as educators and as a religious order.

The Good and the Bad of Universities

Universities delivered an enormous amount of good for the Society of Jesus in the twentieth century and continue to do so in the twenty-first. Besides their evident merits contributing to the education of men and women around the world, universities are also a place where ideas are exchanged, research is done, and the belief that there is no contradiction between faith and reason can be put into practice. No wonder thus that around the world one can find close to two hundred universities and colleges carrying the Society of Jesus's name. Universities are relevant, useful, and recognized as legitimate places for the development of the intellectual life.

There is a dark side to universities too, and one that is not often explored. That dark side comes from a kind of institutional obesity that per-

1 David Miros, Robert Danieluk, S.J., Michael Simone, S.J., Robert Gerlich, S.J., James Keenan, S.J., Cristiano Casalini, and Casey Beaumier, S.J. all contributed in different ways to the conception of this essay. To them and to the entire team of the Institute for Advanced Jesuit Studies at Boston College I extend my deepest gratitude.

vades the academic world and that can be an obstacle to our intellectual apostolate. Weighty, bureaucratic, focused inward, are also something that universities can become.

The section that follows on the merits of universities is a short one, as they are easy to recall. However, because we have grown so accustomed to them, it can sometimes be difficult to point out the goodness that stands just before our eyes. The section on the problems of universities, on the other hand, is a lengthier one. To point out the glitches and the inefficiencies of universities is a risky endeavor, and one that calls for respectful consideration.

Much Good Exists . . .

A question seldom asked but much needed when it comes to our intellectual apostolate could be phrased as follows: Why do the Jesuits have universities? Universities have five key merits that should be taken into consideration when one assesses them. This is not a systematic approach, but rather the selection of five highlights that seem to be applicable universally when speaking about Jesuit universities.

First, universities educate. That is not a small feat. Both in the Formula of the Institute and throughout the tradition of the last almost five hundred years, the Society's commitment to education is at the core of its mission. Education contributes to the good of the mind, to the good of societies, and to the good of the church. The enormously vast group of alumni of Jesuit institutions is not simply a prestigious statistic useful to impress donors or Sunday magazines. It is rather the visible sign of the understanding that Jesuits have of the importance of the care for the whole person, not dissociating faith and intellect. This understanding remains an important merit of Jesuit universities, and it is amplified when we think not just of the developed world but also of developing countries and of developing societies where the Society contributes to the education of women and vulnerable groups.

A second merit of universities is that they are stable institutions capable of attracting resources that allow for the mission to be sustained over time. The first Jesuit companions offered unstructured education in public town squares, and the first Jesuit missionaries set up unprompted schools in the most surprising places. However, stability is something that was cherished from the early days of the Society. Universities afford that stability with their complex mechanisms that provide for buildings, salaries, research grants, and libraries. And Jesuit universities, through those complex mechanisms, are therefore able to deliver education in the most varied contexts throughout the world.

Third, universities allow Jesuits to be part of a system where the quality of someone's work is assessed by their peers. There are no shortcuts to being acknowledged as someone whose teaching and research is valuable. In universities, the quality of what a Jesuit produces is evaluated according to criteria that are shared by other institutions spread worldwide. Peer recognition of the quality of the work developed shows that someone's career is objectively reliable, fruitful, trustworthy. Jesuits in such positions contribute objectively to the subject they work in and consequently profit the Society.

Yet another merit of universities is the impact they have on humanity's understanding of the world. Regardless of the recognition individual Jesuits may obtain, Jesuit institutions contribute to the development of the most varied subjects: healthcare, finance, hydraulic engineering, philosophy, literature, and history. In a wide array of areas, the research and teaching undertaken in Jesuit universities advances knowledge and improves the life of societies and individuals. It improves our capacity to deal with the concrete problems or challenges our societies face, either from a technical perspective or from an existential one.

The last merit of universities is often ignored, though a crucial one for the mission of the Society of Jesus. Universities allow Jesuits to be close to people. The priestly dimension of the Society's ministry calls Jesuits to proximity to those seeking God, seeking the church, or seeking the kingdom. Proximity in the classroom, for instance, opens doors for the establishment of personal relations that can transform men and women in a deep way.

Whether we decide to highlight these five key merits or any other assortment of qualities that universities have for the intellectual apostolate of the Society of Jesus, there is no doubt that our mission has a fitting tool in that institution. Without universities, the Society's intellectual apostolate would be poorer.

. . . But Not Only Good Exists!

The risk of generalizing too much is an obvious one here. Nonetheless, my personal conviction and claim is that Jesuit universities across the board suffer from four limitations. These limitations are not necessarily vices in a moral or axiological sense. They are rather consequences of universities being institutions in the modern world. All coins have two sides—and so do universities.

The first limitation is size. Because universities are institutions, they require a structure. And structures tend to overgrow, for reasons that have to do with how institutions cope with inefficiency. The academic literature

labels this phenomenon "organizational sclerosis"—a term that describes how institutions or organizations can become inefficient and cumbersome as they grow too large and complex. This is usually a result of increased layers of management, rigid structures, and a tendency for more rules and procedures. It tends to lead to bureaucratic inefficiencies, slower decision-making, and a general decline in flexibility and innovation.

In the case of our universities, this "organizational sclerosis" is visible almost universally in the size of our student affairs offices, or in the size of our alumni secretariats, or in the size of our low-level management team for finances or communication. In certain cases, universities cope with inefficiencies by creating new jobs. A member of staff who has long been with a particular institution, for example, might be retained out of respect for that person even though they are no longer able to fulfil their role, thus keeping them in their position while also requiring a new member of staff to do the older person's tasks. The positive of this way of coping with inefficiency is the ability to avoid conflict that could be damaging to the atmosphere in the workplace. Surely no university president, dean, or provincial can think about a university they are related to without recalling specific names when it comes to the overgrowth of the structure. It is simply the cost of doing business with institutions. But it is a problem, and one that can be accepted, though not ignored.

If all institutions tend to be liable to "organizational sclerosis," why, then, is this a problem? The answer to that question sounds naïve, but it is something that should not be dismissed easily: because the "First Principle and Foundation" also applies to institutions. We want our institutions to use their resources in a way that is responsible. And we want to improve them all the time by using "these things *to the extent* that they help us toward our end," therefore desiring and choosing "only that which is *more conducive* to the end for which we are created." Our resources must thus be used with parsimony, always with reverence for the responsibility we have toward that which is created for our good use, constantly willing to improve and fight to make sure that we are working in a way that is better and fitter. When institutions overgrow, they waste resources. That applies to universities too: the more they overgrow, the more they waste resources. And they do overgrow, not because they are not good and useful but because they are institutions.

The second limitation Jesuit universities face could be called the "who is calling the shots" problem. When considered in its full extent, this is a problem that is directly linked to our vow of obedience and to major superiors being the ultimate directors of our apostolic works. To put it bluntly, since the foundation of the Society of Jesus there has been a direct and

hierarchical relationship between the major superior, that is, the Father Provincial, and the director of each apostolic work of that province (be that apostolic work in a high school, a parish, or a social center). Likewise, ever since the foundation of the Society of Jesus there has always been a direct and hierarchical relationship between the major superior of a province and each Jesuit applied to that province. In Jesuit terms, we say we are all "missioned" to a community and to a work. That mission is reflected in the catalog of each province and expresses the mission the provincial entrusted to each of the people he is responsible for—in the case of Jesuits, their personal mission; in the case of directors of apostolic works, whether Jesuits or lay, their institutional mission. This element of pursuing a mission that is received, not self-ascribed, both to individual Jesuits and to directors of Jesuit institutions is crucial to understand this second limitation. Why so? Because, in all honesty, we Jesuits are not really in charge of much when it comes to the life of universities. In many parts of the world, this is something that has long been on the horizon but that is now becoming unavoidable. Provincials are not calling the shots when it comes to the appointment of university presidents or rectors, for instance. Whether it is because of the structure of boards of trustees or because of different kinds of national legislation, in nearly all cases, it is not left to the provincial to decide who is the director of those apostolic works called universities. The comparison is striking: provincials appoint parish priests but do not appoint university provosts. Likewise, provincials appoint regional Jesuit Refugee Service directors but do not appoint Jesuit professors for particular departments in particular universities. We are not in charge of much when it comes to universities.

All this can be said to be a consequence of impartiality, a key characteristic of universities. Professors teach at universities because of their skills, not because they are friends with the Jesuits. Likewise, Jesuit professors do not teach at universities simply because they are Jesuits. This is a requisite of the impartiality that makes universities a fair ground for the discussion of ideas unbiased by belonging to a particular group that holds power. But it is not promising for the future of the idea of a "Jesuit education." This is the point: Jesuits have a vision for the education of men and women that we want to promote. We do not want to argue for its value in an impartial way. Rather, we are convinced that our Jesuits, when in the classroom, have something to add to the formation of our students regardless of what a board of trustees or a department search committee would deem the best qualifications for a teaching position. Jesuit universities are not Jesuit by being impartial: they are Jesuit because we, Jesuits, have added in the past

and add in the preset a particular way of thinking about the intellectual life that is distinctive—a way of thinking that we want to promote.

Knowing what we want is not a bad thing. On the contrary, it is what distinguishes our education from all other forms of education. As Claude Pavur, S.J. noted in a talk apropos the merits of the *Ratio studiorum*:

> The things studied impact the soul; the soul affects the culture. If you choose to spend your idealistic and passionate adolescent years with Machiavelli and Hobbes rather than with the Gospels and Augustine, you will very likely end up in a different place, and there will eventually be significant consequences in the community. The specific choice of materials and the depth of the communication of those materials was, I believe, an important part of Jesuit success. The reading gave students a wide and deep sense of belonging, meaning, purpose. It communicated a large cultural project of which the youth were expected to become responsible stewards.[2]

Again, Jesuits have an ideal for the education they want to offer and promote. And we have an ideal for how we want our institutions to be structured. Our aspiration is not to be impartial: it is to be rooted in the Jesuit tradition, with all that entails and presupposes. It is difficult to imagine such ideals existing if our structure of missioning Jesuits to particular places in universities is not a real possibility.

If, therefore, Jesuits are not calling the shots at Jesuit universities because of impartiality, at some point the idea of a Jesuit education will become redundant. Universities have many merits, as noted in the previous section. But are we really running them?

A third limitation apparently universal to Jesuit universities is related to the bureaucratization of the teaching role—Jesuits engaged in university teaching spend a significant amount of time pursuing tasks that are not teaching: sitting in disciplinary committees, hiring committees, and tenure and rank committees being some examples.

The main concern associated with this bureaucratization of the teaching role is that it keeps Jesuits away from the classroom. Bureaucratization seems to be something required by the complexification of universities, and something that is hard to avoid. It precludes Jesuit teachers from doing what they often do best: teaching. But it also makes it difficult for Jesuit teachers to find the time to read and write. Reading, writing, and teaching

2 Remarks by Claude Pavur, S.J. given at the final roundtable "Past and Present: Jesuit Educational Institutions in the USA," *Renovatio Mundi: The Jesuits as Educators in History, International Symposium on Jesuit Studies* (Boston College, June 11–13, 2024).

are three things that Jesuits notably know how to do. Also, they are things Jesuits notably enjoy doing.

Monumental texts seem to be a thing of the past. There are copious contemporary examples of Jesuits who publish an extraordinary amount of outstanding research. We did not go from hero to zero. But writing at length is something Jesuits are not doing anymore. Fr. Karl Rahner's *Theological Investigations* or Fr. Frederick Coplestone's *A History of Philosophy* seem to be things of the past. Although they are not too distant in time from us, that kind of multi-volume approach to research and writing that derives from teaching has become increasingly rare. Why is that? My conjecture is that the pace of contemporary university life is not compatible with that kind of intellectual life. Our men have not become uninterested in thinking about issues systematically. There is plenty of talent across the world. But the rhythm of the contemporary university is fast, requires constant publications, and is not comfortable with someone spending several decades working on a particular project that will bear fruit in a time distant from the present one. Bureaucracy keeps us away from the classroom, which is where we work best. I suspect it also makes it more difficult for us to read and write comprehensively.

The last limitation Jesuit universities face is a Wittgensteinian one. As was mentioned above, universities are places where peer recognition of the quality of the work developed shows that someone's career is objectively reliable, fruitful, trustworthy. In other words, universities are reliable because they assess knowledge in an unbiased way. When someone teaching at Georgetown, the Gregorian, or Sophia writes on international politics, Christology, or global studies, their work is likely deemed to be credible. Professors at these universities and in these fields have proved that their research follows the rules of the academic game and is able to resist serious criticism from others playing in the same field. However, some caution is required when thinking about what it means to be credible. Universities do not claim for themselves the monopoly on credibility—and rightly so. But we may unconsciously think of them as possessing that monopoly in our Jesuit life. This is an error and a problem.

The academic life is a particular game regulated by a particular set of rules, as a reading owing to Wittgenstein quickly shows. If someone becomes proficient in the rules of the academic game, the odds are that credibility will be ascribed to that person. However, this does not mean that the university is the only way to acquire credibility in a particular intellectual field. Fr. James Martin in spirituality, Br. Guy Consolmagno in astronomy, and Cardinal Michael Czerny in refugee-related matters are contemporary names that whether one agrees with them or not, despite not being linked

to universities. In the world of the arts, the same could be said about Fr. Frederik Mennekes in Germany, Fr. Andrea Dall'Asta in Italy, and Fr. Saju George in India. The non-academic world can offer an alternative to the pursuit of the intellectual life that is often more rooted in everyday reality than academic life, more agile in revising its arguments than academic life, or more earnest in assuming their bias than intellectual life.

Do we really need to have the university seal to know that a Jesuit's work is good? This might be the case in areas like medicine or chemistry or aerodynamics. But would universities not be too elitist if they claimed the monopoly of credibility? Certainly so—and for Jesuits this is important. Universities give us credibility, but there are other ways of being credible.

What Alternative Do We Have?

Universities are not the only institution the Society of Jesus has used to engage in its intellectual apostolate. With all their pros and cons, universities are a force to reckon with and a tool that has brought much good. But during the twentieth century, an experiment was made with what came to be known as "houses of writers." Often, they had a journal associated with them, although that was not always the case. Most importantly, houses of writers were communities where Jesuits lived and read, wrote, and taught.

What I want to show, through a process that both reads into the historical roots of the "house of writers" and describing a successful modern-day example of one such institution, is that they seem to be promising complements to our universities. Perhaps we need to think of them in a new way. Instead of "house of writers," a name that evokes passivity and inwardness, we should be thinking of these houses as "houses of public intellectuals." However we think about them, though, the name "house of writers" carries historical weight and is inspiring for the argument I am trying to develop here.

Some Traces behind the Houses of Writers

A history of the houses of writers is still to be written. There is no comprehensive monograph on them, nor, so far as I know, do articles published specifically on that history exist. What is available are bits and pieces in articles about the creation of the community engaged with the Monumenta Historica, for instance, as well as some oral testimonies from Jesuits who were involved in this apostolate. No official documents from the curia seem to exist either—or from general congregations, for that matter—that tell of the creation of these houses.

This section does not intend to offer an exhaustive historical account of the creation of the houses of writers. What it aims to do is to look at

some of the intuitions that were present at the time of their foundation, drawing inspiration from those intuitions for the future of our intellectual apostolate. What non-historians like myself know is that at some point, the expression "house of writers" started to be used and to appear in the yearly catalogs. Where exactly it comes from and how exactly it was instituted remains to be studied. Much profit, nonetheless, can be drawn from reflecting on what we do know.[3]

From the beginning of its activity, the Society of Jesus saw in writing a crucial tool both to preserve the unity of the order spread across the globe and to guarantee the apostolic efficiency of its efforts. Robert Danieluk, S.J. notes this twofold purpose of the written word in the context of the early Society of Jesus in an article that is crucial for understanding why the Jesuits ever came to write anything at all.[4] As Danieluk notes, writing was seen as part of the apostolate of helping souls as early as Saint Ignatius's time. Educating the unlettered, together with correcting heretical errors spreading in the sixteenth century, was such an important apostolate that it even allowed "the professed fathers who were preparing books . . . to live in the colleges and benefit from their financial resources," thus freeing them from their strict vow of poverty.[5]

This kind of writing, however, was not the same writing that was used in universities. What Danieluk shows is that the anti-heretical intellectual apostolate was thought by Ignatius to be an informal, or non-institutional, educational model. Jesuits would live, research, and write in universities or colleges, even if they did not teach in them. As a corollary of this, between the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, the first two special communities dedicated exclusively to writing—the Bollandistes and the

3 Indirect clues can be found in the research related to the relevance Saint Ignatius ascribed to the printing press. As Robert Gerlich, S.J. mentioned to me in a private interview, the Reformation was fought and spread with the help of printing. This was so much the case that the early Jesuits secured two printing presses that were used to educate people about the faith and combat "false" doctrine. This way, even though there was no formal "house of writers" until later, individual Jesuits early on were encouraged to spend a considerable amount of time writing and researching—whether integrated into university settings or not. Whatever the formal configuration, what we can see is that Saint Ignatius was himself a record-keeper who valued the power of the printed word and attached great importance to letters, documents, and books that could be used to promote the Society's mission.

4 Robert Danieluk, S.J., "From Manuscript to Print: At the Origins of Early Jesuit Missionary Strategies of Communication," in *Reimagining the Globe and Cultural Exchange: The East Asian Legacies of Matteo Ricci's World Map*, ed. Laura Hostetler (Leiden: Brill, 2024), 45–81, here 46–48, 65.

5 Danieluk, "From Manuscript to Print," 53–54.

Museum Bellarminianum—were born. What Danieluk offers in terms of the beginning of the houses of writers is, however, understandably limited. In one sentence alone, he says that "*domus scriptorum* as a separate Jesuit Community did not appear until the nineteenth century."[6]

In order to progress, one relevant place to look is the history of the Monumenta Historica. At its origins, the Monumenta Historica derived from what was then called "the Historical Institute of the Society of Jesus."[7] To work on this project, in 1930, Superior General Wlodimir Ledóchowski (in office 1915–42) founded what came to be the Canisius "house of writers" in Rome. The purpose was to have a group of Jesuits dedicated to making "known the authentic writings of the Founder and his companions, and the key-documents of the Jesuit apostolate in Europe and the missions."[8] Many of the documents this group worked with were transferred from Madrid to Rome in 1929 in an effort to preserve texts the Spanish Jesuits feared could be seized or destroyed by the republican movement. There was, therefore, an internal motivation in the founding of this Canisius house of writers that was related to preservation and the keeping of memory. There was also a second motivation, one that faced outward. As mentioned by both Cándido de Dalmases, S.J. and the editorial team of the *Yearbook of the Society of Jesus* of 1982, the work done by this house of writers was about providing tools for the world to be able to know the "truth" about the Society of Jesus—whether they were "friends or foes." Service, and not just archivism, was a dimension always present in the labor of the Monumenta Historica.

Other secondary references to other houses of writers are easy to come by, though without any explicit primary account of how those houses came to be formed or the intention behind them. What we can say is that these houses of writers looked to offer Jesuits a certain degree of independence and a certain freedom to write on whatever their intellectual interest was, without the bureaucratic constraints of large institutions. If you want to write, then you need the space to do it, and you cannot be overburdened with an excess of administrative concerns. This much can be seen during the twentieth century in examples of houses of writers like the Colegio San Miguel in Buenos Aires, the America House in New York, or the Civiltà

6 Danieluk, "From Manuscript to Print," 58.

7 A full account of this can be found in Cándido de Dalmases, S.J., "The Historical Institute of the Society of Jesus," *The Jesuits Year Book 1962–1963 of the Society of Jesus* (Rome: Curia Generalizia, 1963): 95–97, at 95–96.

8 "The Jesuit Historical Institute: Fifty Years of Ignatian Service: 1931–1981," *The Jesuits: Yearbook of the Society of Jesus, 1982* (Rome: Curia Generalizia, 1982): 101–6, at 101.

Cattolica in Rome. It can also be seen in Brotéria, in Lisbon, a house of writers that has made groundbreaking contributions to the sciences and the arts in the past and that underwent major transformations over the last decade.

A Case Study Called Brotéria

Given the absence of an in-depth study that can help in extracting the key intentions and characteristics of houses of writers, focusing our attention on a particular case study is helpful. Starting by tracing the historical origins and the original intentions behind the creation of one such institution will, by analogy, provide a template from which more data can be extrapolated. With this in mind, some notes can be added regarding the Casa de Escritores de São Roberto Belarmino in Lisbon, Portugal, a Jesuit residency commonly known as Brotéria.

The current Casa de Escritores de São Roberto Belarmino's roots can be traced to the Colégio de São Fiel, a boarding school the Portuguese Jesuits ran between 1863 and 1910. That school was recognized as a prestigious one from its inception, mainly due to its strong emphasis on the teaching of a wide range of natural sciences. The Colégio de São Fiel, in fact, was a leader in the field of meteorology, with a fully-equipped observatory on the premises, and in botany, with a significant herbarium tallying over five thousand species. Those two areas of investment are not a matter of arbitrary chance. After the 1759 expulsion from the country and the second expulsion in 1834, the Jesuits re-entered Portugal knowing that they faced the accusation of being antimodernists, especially in relation to the teaching of the natural sciences and mathematics. For that reason, both in the Colégio de São Fiel and in the Colégio de Campolide the Jesuits deliberately sought to show that those accusations were not true, as can be seen by the curricula employed in their schools during that period.

In 1902, a group of three Jesuit professors started a publication named *Brotéria: Revista de sciencias naturaes* (Brotéria: Journal of natural sciences). That publication had a number of segments across the twentieth century, most prominently in the areas of botany, genetics, and zoology. The impact it had on the scientific world was considerable, with the Jesuits cataloging and describing close to two thousand new botanical and zoological species. The inauguration of the Portuguese Republic in 1910, however, called for editorial creativity. For the third time in history, the Society of Jesus was expelled from Portugal in that year. Brotéria was no exception, with Jesuits departing mostly for Spain and Brazil and their collections being dispersed throughout the country. The young journal, only eight years old at the time, adapted and continued to be published in exile. It also kept

growing. In 1925, in addition to the scientific series, another branch of the journal came to life—dedicated mostly to what was labeled "scientific divulgation" but was in essence a cultural journal addressing issues of faith and culture.

When the Jesuits started returning to Lisbon in the late 1920s, the Brotéria house of writers returned as well. In 1930, the province acquired a building in Lisbon that became the journal's headquarters for almost ninety years. Between 1930 and 2020, the Jesuits at Brotéria became known in Lisbon for their intellectual work both with the natural sciences and with cultural issues ranging from politics to economics and philosophy to theology. That work was done with the assistance of a large library the Jesuits started collecting in the 1930s that reflected the variety of that Jesuit community's areas of study over time.

The title "house of writers" started being used to describe Brotéria in 1932.[9] Archival work is yet to be done to find out if any surviving documents from the period can explain why that designation was adopted. But the fact is that from 1932 onward, that is how the catalog mentions the community where Brotéria would develop its activities.

Ever since 1902, but especially from 1930 onward, the Jesuit community working with *Brotéria* was a relatively diverse one. Most of these Jesuits worked with the journal and wrote for it. That being said, not everyone in the community worked with the journal, and most definitely not everyone in the community worked on it full time. There was a diversity of ministries and apostolic works that from the beginning were mostly of an intellectual nature, though often also of a pastoral one. Some of these Jesuits taught at a number of different universities, some were members of the National Academy of History or Natural Sciences, and some wrote books that had quite the impact in their respective fields—be that history, genetics, or sociology. Some also became advisors to politicians or ecclesial figures, showing thus the diversity of works in which these men were engaged.

9 According to information gathered with the current archivist of the Portuguese province, the 1910 catalog—the year the Jesuits were expelled from Portugal—does not make any reference to the existence of a house of writers. However, during the time the Portuguese Jesuits moved to Spain, there is a reference to the Pontevedrensis Residentia et Domus Scriptoris. That residence housed Portuguese Jesuits but not the director of Brotéria (Fr. Joaquim da Silva Tavares, who lived in the La Guardia college). When in 1928 Brotéria returned to Portugal, the community was named Olysiponensis Statio Beati Bellarmini. It was only in 1932 that the designation Olysiponensis Domus Scriptorum S. Roberti Bellarmini was used in a catalog for the first time. There is, therefore, evidence of the title "house of writers" being used prior to 1930 and to the moving of the Historical Institute to Rome.

All in all, a crucial point to make is that this house of writers was not a gated community. The Jesuits assigned to it were often recognized as what we would now term public intellectuals. They found freedom in being assigned to this particular house that had one common instrument of apostolate in *Brotéria*, while at the same time allowing men to develop their intellectual talents in other institutions and with other colleagues. This kind of erudite life, which developed the conditions for Jesuits to read, write, and teach, not restricted by a particular institutional setting, was what probably made for the success of this house of writers across the last 120 years. And it is still allowing that same success to continue in the present.

Starting in the late 1980s, the Jesuits at Brotéria looked for an opportunity to bring the community to a more central location than the one acquired in 1930. The process took a long time but finally was made possible due to a partnership with an institution called Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Lisboa. This institution, involved in caring for the poor and the sick, is the current owner of the historical São Roque complex—the Jesuits' first-ever professed house. It so happens that Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Lisboa is also heavily involved in cultural issues and saw in Brotéria a fitting ally to its mission. In 2019, after several failed attempts and almost a decade of preparation, Brotéria moved to a beautifully renovated nineteenth-century palace owned by the Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Lisboa in the vicinity of the São Roque church and opened its doors to a new cultural center in January 2020. The house of writers had now moved from a quiet and exclusive part of town to a much busier one, as had been the desire since the 1980s.

The mission statement said Brotéria wanted to be the place in Lisbon where the tradition of Christian faith meets with contemporary urban cultures. That was the guiding drive. Some ninety years after returning to the country and some 120 years after the journal's foundation, the Jesuits decided this house of writers needed to open itself to new people and a new world. They realized that the Christian faith must come and encounter people where they are, showing what the church can offer to those who look for beauty, new economic models, or political engagement. And finally, these Jesuits accepted that their intellectual life was to be lived publicly and in a most visible way.

What does this new house of writers, in a new location, look like? One way of looking at it is thinking of a community of Jesuit public intellectuals, living in the downtown of a cosmopolitan city, contributing both to the mission they have in common and to an array of other side missions that are entrusted to each individual Jesuit. After opening its doors in this new location in 2020, Brotéria began describing itself as a cultural center. This

cultural center's activity comprises a journal, which publishes ten issues a year; a library holding more than 160,000 volumes and incorporating an office that renovates and restores old books; a gallery for contemporary art that puts on eight exhibitions a year; and a series of cultural events, including close to 160 courses, conferences, book launches, or guided tours each year. In addition, there is a café and a bookstore that also contribute to the activity of the cultural center. So, in a normal year, Brotéria is now receiving close to fifty thousand in-person visitors, with a team of six Jesuits committed to this work joined by upward of twenty lay collaborators doing finances, design, communications, editing the journal, and producing the art exhibitions.

This house of writers meets once a month for a permanent seminar that aims to delve into the mission of Brotéria while at the same time exploring new common concerns for all those involved in this apostolate. The six Jesuits take turns in offering an initial presentation, after which there is time for discussion and other contributions. Presentations often start with insights from each man's area of expertise—theology, history, sculpture, ethics, aesthetics, or philosophy—thereby securing a valuable sense of interdisciplinarity.

Having the opportunity to expose the concerns, hopes, and new insights related to the mission of the cultural center is an integral part of being missioned to this house of writers. Although this is an initiative of the Jesuits that constitute the house of writers, the rest of Brotéria's team is also invited to participate. Attendance is usually high. Unity among Jesuits and a common sense of purpose toward the mission are two of the most important consequences of this seminary.

Characteristics of a Renewed and Contemporary House of Writers

Even if historical sources are scarce, the bits of historical information we have together with the example provided can show that there is a case to make for the reimagination of our intellectual apostolates with recourse to the institution of the house of writers. Creating distinctions within our intellectual apostolate and making room both for formal higher education and for other informal structures that can put Jesuit erudition to use is something that can help us in our ministry. Jesuits need to have a voice in conversations about political science, climate change, and so forth. In some cases, that can be done through universities; in other cases, I argue, we would be better off if this voice was to be pursued in a less institutional setting.

One important thing to remember before even discussing these characteristics of modern-day houses of writers: from the beginning, Saint

Ignatius envisioned the Society of Jesus as something that would be the equivalent of a cavalry that moves lightly, not a heavy artillery unit that moves with difficulty. What this proposal for the renewal of the house of writers purports to do is to bring that agility to our intellectual apostolate. The informality, agility, and flexibility of these institutions can be beneficial for our ministry in ways that will hopefully be positively disruptive.

This final section aims to offer two sets of considerations for the implementation and organization of houses of writers around the world. Both are based on my experience at Brotéria but also on other examples like the Thomistic Institute, the Teachers as Scholars project, the Catherine Project, and the experiences that to a greater or lesser success have been implemented in places like the Mount Street Jesuit Center in London, Cristianisme I Justicía in Barcelona, or the more recent Loyola Institute in Melbourne.

Identity

As a matter of principle, no characteristic seems to be more important for a contemporary house of writers than hospitality. Jesuits often associate houses of writers with a closed attitude toward the world. Houses of writers were, in most provinces, seen as having an elite intellectual status. While there may be admiration for the work produced in those houses, there is also a sense of exclusivity that affects their reputation. In addition, houses of writers were in every single case I know closed to non-Jesuits and worked in a one-directional way: from inside the house, where the writers were, to outside the house, where the readers were. No permeability existed between inside and outside.

This, however, must be strongly countered at the present. If this institution is to be reinvented, hospitality has to be a key feature. These places of reading, writing, and teaching have to be able to establish proximity to those who search for us. The face-to-face element is indispensable. It is not enough to produce a terrific journal or to have an impressive YouTube channel. Jesuits must be approachable, and their houses of writers must be visitable. In most provinces, our houses have substantial libraries. Making them available, offering guidance to those who want to research themes in which we specialize, enriching the erudite life with our expertise, is not a need of the past. In most provinces, too, our men invest heavily in studying particular areas that may be seen as pet peeves. Providing people with the possibility to access this knowledge, to listen to conferences, to participate in short courses, or to interview particular Jesuits is something that can contribute massively to our intellectual apostolate.

Hospitality in our intellectual apostolate can be seen as the counterpart to spiritual direction in our spiritual apostolate. In the same way that spir-

itual direction requires proximity, so does this intellectual direction. In a world that is by and large urban and cosmopolitan for the Society of Jesus, exercising hospitality as a fundamental attitude in our work is crucial in such a way that without it no hope for future houses of writers seems to exist.

A second characteristic from the point of view of identity has to do with agility. As was mentioned earlier, stability is one of the greatest resources of universities but also one of their necessary flaws. Houses of writers can become the institution where our teaching, studying, and writing is the most flexible, the quickest, and the least deterred by bureaucracy. These houses can provide Jesuits a place for informal teaching without having to go through the modern processes of tenure, for instance. It is true, as mentioned earlier, that university procedures give us a particular kind of credibility that these institutions will not have—impartiality. However, not all our research and teaching aims to be academic in its intellectuality. This is not to say that it is second tier compared to what universities do. Rather, it means there are different genres and modes of teaching. And in many cases, agility can be immensely beneficial for what our mission is.

As will be developed in the next section, agility requires light structures. It requires relatively fast decision-making and not burdensome bureaucratic procedures. At Brotéria, this was a major advantage. Agility means that enrollment for courses is easy and does not require a four-year commitment. It means our staff knows how to point visitors to the exact thing they are looking for. It means our Jesuits can propose a course and quickly set a date for it. It means that donors have quick access to the director and not to some donation processing structure. The lighter the structure, the more conducive to the mission. Agility is another attitude our houses of writers cannot do without.

A third characteristic in terms of identity is what could be called non-academic erudition. Houses of writers are not meant to be pastoral centers. Nor are they meant to be mere facilitators of conversation. Jesuits read, research, and engage seriously in the intellectual life. That erudition is not optional for a house of writers. When one thinks of what the *Woodstock Letters* represent, it is beyond obvious that these were texts written by men with a vast literary formation. That, too, is what a house of writers should aim for. Whether our men are interested in the social sciences, the arts, or finance, the possibility to make available the result of our erudite research is vital. That houses of writers are not universities is not an excuse to be less rigorous in one's projects. As I have been trying to suggest, houses of writers are not the same as universities, and so they require different

rules. But the commitment to a serious, rigorous intellectual life is not to be diminished in houses of writers if we want them to be relevant in any way.

Once again, Brotéria's history can come in handy at this point. In its early years, *Brotéria* was described as a journal that did "divulgação científica," something that can be loosely translated as "popular science." The Jesuits working at that house of writers made scientific knowledge accessible that in was otherwise too technical for most readers to understand. They established a bridge between their specialized investigation and their non-specialized readers. This is what contemporary houses of writers can still do, not in the least because there are close to no institutions in our world that offer this non-academic erudition in a hospitable and agile way.

The last characteristic from the point of view of the identity of houses of writers is independence. One striking benefit of an institution like the one I am proposing is that these houses of writers do not owe any dues to anyone other than the church and the Society of Jesus. We do not have to abide by any publisher, political party, or even particular donor. Houses of writers can be autonomous in what they think, write, and teach. In a Jesuit house of writers, Jesuits can eruditely and reasonably write about the Middle East, teach about ecclesiology, or think about race. The issues that have become too 'hot' because of culture wars can be addressed intelligently, serenely, meaningfully. Independence is something without which critical thinking will always be impaired. These houses of writers can be independent in ways that resemble the conditions that gave rise to the likes of Francisco Suárez, António Vieira, or Gerard Manley Hopkins. We can teach, preach, and write, with no sovereign other than our internal rules.

For independence to have real meaning, the Society's hierarchy will need to accept that controversy will be a part of our mission. We live in a complex world, where, to evoke Martha Nussbaum, the *good* is fragile. Such complexity requires making use of announcing and denouncing, two crucial verbs for the recent social tradition of the church. In secular terms, to address this complexity one requires moral courage, that is, the resilience to speak the truth even though that truth might be unpopular with powerful individuals or institutions. While bureaucracy incentivizes blandness, or for a weakening of strong affirmations because they can lead to chastising phone calls from secular or religious figures, independence calls for boldness (though not recklessness) in knowing what to say, how to say it, and when to say the prophetic words the Gospel requires.

Organization

These four attitudes encompass much of what the identity of a contemporary house of writers must be if it wants to succeed. But how does that

identity materialize? How can the organization of such a house of writers be thought of?

In the first place, for a house of writers to work, the Jesuits missioned there have to be present and visible. This is the counter-side of the hospitality that was mentioned earlier. Houses of writers require Jesuits to be missioned to this intellectual apostolate, and that is something only provincials can do. But once missioned, Jesuits cannot just hide behind their desks. Houses of writers should resemble in some ways what in most parts of the world we know vaguely as "cultural centers." That is a wide category that can cover a large range of structural organizations. What it requires is a building from which we operate and where Jesuits can be present and visible. Be visible in your teaching, talk to people when they visit you, be available to be invited for talks and conferences elsewhere. Digital houses of writers may have a place in the modern world, but nothing can replace the personal contact that an actual house with actual people can offer. Our houses of writers can have a policy of a fully- or partially-open door, for instance only visitable when there are events or functions. Without an open door and some kind of Jesuit presence in these houses of writers, it will be more difficult to engage in intellectual exchange.

Second, a house of writers does not need to have all its men dedicated to the same area or even missioned to the same work. Although it would be interesting to enact such an experience, a house of writers does not need to be a house of writers *in* philosophy or a house of writers *in* history. Different Jesuits with different formations can engage in reading, writing, and teaching in different areas. The attitude expanded above is what should distinguish these houses, not their subject or the employment of their men. So, for instance, there should be no problem to have in the same community and as part of the same house of writers some Jesuits who are dedicated to a journal, others who teach occasionally in different universities, and others who are engaged in a long-term writing project involving systematic research in a particular area. Diversity is not only admissible but even, in some ways, desirable. Provincials can mission men with all kinds of formation and areas of work to houses of writers, as long as they show a commitment to an erudite, hospitable, agile, and independent intellectual life.

A third important element of how houses of writers are organized has to do with their financial sustenance. Because there is strength in numbers, universities tend to be able to benefit from scale. Houses of writers do not benefit from that scale. However, they benefit from proximity and scrutiny. Drawing income from enrollment in courses and conferences is not difficult. Private donations are relatively easy to come by when our mission is developed in close quarters with those we serve. At Brotéria, in

a country without a culture of private donations or of corporate responsibility, the amount of support we were able to gather from civil society was surprisingly high. Donors can easily see the impact of their donations. Furthermore, funded projects—for instance by a national government or by a supporting foundation—often require less bureaucracy at the end of a cycle in the case of larger institutions. Accountability and transparency, of course, are key tools if this is to be possible.

The fourth vital goal for a contemporary house of writers to strive for is the quality of its design and graphic materials. Design is not about making pretty posters here and there or choosing between two possible colors for a website's banner. As a discipline, design is a tool for visual problem-solving. It is a way to catch the audience's attention, clearly, but it does more than that: design helps bridge the gap between the message and the receiver. It makes texts easy to read, information easy to memorize, directions easy to follow. A common error with our journals is that we hire designers to improve our covers and to change the size of our fonts. Both online and in person, design plays a role that is central to our communication in that it makes our contents fluid and accessible to the public. In a world saturated with visual information, finding how to best show what we do is a problem that needs to be solved by those who specialize in it. As Brotéria's communications director used to say, Jesuits are great at thinking about substance but not so much at finding the ways to make that substance reach their audience. Without proper quality in our design process and in the production of our graphic materials, we risk having things to say but no one to hear us.

A fifth practical characteristic of houses of writers is to hire surgically, hire well. Agility is a key characteristic of the identity of houses of writers. As such, overgrowth is a temptation to avoid. But in a world as specialized as ours, Jesuits need to make sure they can focus on the things they know how to do while at the same time finding collaboration in areas that are not in their expertise. In some parts of the world, I saw collaborations in design, communications, finances, logistics, events management, library supervision, and text editing. Depending on the configuration of each house of writers, different collaborators may be needed. My personal conviction is that small institutions are easier to run, especially in the beginning. Starting small is an advantage. Growth can come over time.

The sixth characteristic is one of the most difficult to implement, though at the same time one of the most fruitful ones. Jesuits must meet regularly to discuss their work and their common mission. I pointed out earlier that with Brotéria we organized a monthly seminar that allowed Jesuits—and the team—to further our understanding of what we were do-

ing, and how, and why. This is laborious and at times difficult to enforce. Nonetheless, the success of a house of writers in a contemporary urban and cosmopolitan setting can only come if it is the result of a collective commitment. A house of writers should not just be an umbrella building where Jesuits live. That happened in the past, often offering an easy way out for provincials regarding men of difficult temper or character. In our days, we need to make sure Jesuits cooperate in the same apostolic work even if this is difficult to achieve.

Another relevant characteristic has to do with partnerships. Houses of writers can be dense powerhouses of thought, of writing, and of teaching. They can produce extraordinary erudition and make it available in an accessible way. For this to be enhanced, establishing partnerships with other institutions is something not to be dismissed. Universities, dioceses, and businesses are often open to partnering with small institutions that can offer a niche perspective on a particular subject. At Brotéria, we had partnerships with three universities, with a half-dozen foundations, and with a half-dozen companies that wanted to be associated with our work. We were sometimes hired by those companies, for instance, to offer formation to their teams, or to be on the judging panel for a particular arts award. Partnerships bring reputation, and they also bring a venue to maximize our message.

The last and eighth characteristic refers to governance. Because of agility, the fifth characteristic advocated for small teams and for small institutions. The same applies to the governing bodies of houses of writers. These institutions are often not too complex to run. They often do not need a board of directors. Besides, they can be owned by the Society and run by the Society. Although we may need the expertise of advisors, and although we may need to consult with a wide range of people in some situations, keeping our governance structures simple and manageable is helpful to let our writers write, our teachers teach, and our thinkers think. To implement a house of writers, a province needs vision and men. The leaner the mission organization, the easier it will be to make our houses of writers attractive to Jesuits, to partners, and to donors. Structure follows mission, so the saying goes. But mission follows identity, and for our houses of writers the fourfold identity argued for above seems to call for simple models of governance that can be easily managed and accounted for.

A Final Note

At the beginning of this essay, I mentioned that it would be speculative in its method, tentative in its object, and prudent in its outcome. That is indeed what I hope to have done. More than offering a definitive solution to a

problem, what I wanted to show was that our universities have outstanding features for our intellectual ministries but also some limitations; and that the Society of Jesus can find within its own history, the house of writers as a complement to what our intellectual apostolate is. The example of Brotéria in Lisbon, shows how, in that particular case, things came to work out. If other houses of writers are to be implemented in the future, due attention to the idiosyncrasies of every province and culture would have to be born in mind.

There is one final note that also deserves some attention. Whether we want it or not, change in higher education will come. Universities like Harvard, Chicago, and Oxford are already offering myriad courses online—both short and long term. And in some businesses, hiring companies are already hiring students with no formal degrees from universities but rather with certifications and accreditations from a mix of institutions. Most of our universities will hardly be able to compete with the curriculum or employability these international giants offer. What we can compete with, and in which we can even excel, is in the in-person dimension of our teaching. This applies both to universities and to houses of writers. That Jesuits can be seen in the classroom, can be approachable in the corridors, and can be available to engage in conversation with students is what will distinguish our intellectual apostolate in the future. For that reason, that personal aspect is something we need to master and emphasize. The future of our intellectual apostolate rests on this personal element.