

STUDIES

IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS

FIFTY YEARS OF LIVED EXPERIENCE:
REFLECTIONS ON DECREE 4 OF THE
32ND GENERAL CONGREGATION OF THE
SOCIETY OF JESUS

J. PETER BISSON, SJ
DAVID HOLLENBACH, SJ
FRED KAMMER, SJ
BRIAN A. STRASSBURGER, SJ
MARTIN R. TRIPOLE, SJ

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Faith and Justice in 2025: The 50th Anniversary of the 32nd General Congregation's Decree on "The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice"

David Hollenbach, SJ

Fifty years ago, in March, 1975, the 32nd General Congregation of the Society of Jesus issued its decree number 4, "Our Mission Today: The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice." The central affirmation of the decree was this: "The mission of the Society of Jesus today is the service of faith, of which the promotion of justice is an absolute requirement."¹ This statement echoed what the same congregation stated in its decree 2 on "Jesuits Today," which affirmed that to be a Jesuit today is "to engage, under the standard of the Cross, in the crucial struggle of our time: the struggle of faith and that struggle for justice which it includes."² A distinguished historian of Jesuit affairs who served as a delegate to this congregation, the late John W. Padberg (1926–2021), wrote, on the eve of this congregation's twentieth anniversary, that, despite the congregation's significance, we could not yet assess its full importance.³ Today, however, our ongoing experience of the congregation's impact enables us to make a compelling evaluation. Recent history also supports the contribution of

¹ GC 32, d. 4, no. 48; *Jesuit Life and Mission Today: The Decrees and Accompanying Documents of the 31st–35th General Congregations of the Society of Jesus*, ed. John W. Padberg, SJ (Saint Louis, MO: Institute of Jesuit Sources [IJS], 2009), 298.

² GC 32, d. 2, no. 12; *Jesuit Life and Mission Today*, ed. Padberg, 291.

³ John W. Padberg, SJ, *Together as a Companionship: A History of the Thirty-First, Thirty-Second, and Thirty-Third General Congregations of the Society of Jesus* (Saint Louis, MO: IJS, 1994), vii.

another distinguished Jesuit who also attended the congregation, the late Jean-Yves Calvez (1927–2010), who held that the congregation’s proclamation on faith and justice had extraordinary significance.⁴ Indeed, I think that the issuing of this decree constitutes one of the most formative events in the history of the Jesuit order.

With this background for context, I will sketch in what follows some ways in which the decree described the prevailing challenges both to faith and to justice when written fifty years ago and how these challenges have developed more recently. It then will outline some of the theological and ethical reasons for which the decree insisted that the service of faith and the promotion of justice should play a central role in the mission of Jesuits and the institutions in which they serve. Finally, it will indicate several areas in which the service of faith and promotion of justice have developed in Jesuit efforts during the past fifty years. These areas include the importance of faith and justice in Jesuit education and in other areas where Jesuits work, notably in the growth of the Jesuit Refugee Service. While my comments here surely will not give a full account of the importance of decree 4, they hopefully might enable us to mark its fiftieth anniversary with gratitude.

1. Social Analysis in Decree 4 and Today

The importance of the Jesuit mission in the service of Christian faith arises, obviously, from the fact that the Society of Jesus is rooted in its members’ relationship with Jesus Christ. All who believe are called by Christ to serve true faith by bringing the Gospel to all: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:19). The congregation stressed that this mission of evangelization raises deep challenges today, for “more than two billion human beings have no knowledge of God the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ.”⁵ The congregation also insisted, however, that many, despite their lack of explicit faith, “feel an increasing

⁴ Jean-Yves Calvez, SJ, *Faith and Justice: The Social Dimension of Evangelization* (Saint Louis, MO: IJS, 1991), 1.

⁵ GC 32, d. 4, no. 50; *Jesuit Life and Mission Today*, ed. Padberg, 298.

hunger” for God.⁶ By helping people come to faith in Christ, Jesuits not only help increase the number of Christians in the world but also respond to the deeper longings and hopes of many who are not Christian.

The 32nd General Congregation also stressed the challenge of the decline of faith among an increasing number of persons, especially in the traditionally Christian countries of Europe and North America. Thus, the congregation echoes social thinkers who support the secularization hypothesis.⁷ This view attributes secularization to the rise of modernity, which appears in this context as an essentially nonreligious condition—an overall decline of the percentage of people who believe in God and the privatization of a religious influence restricted to interpersonal and familial relations.

However, other thinkers, such as José Casanova, a distinguished sociologist of religion, differ. Casanova argues that the data show that the percentage of the religious believers in the world is not declining and that recent decades have seen a notable deprivatization of religion.⁸ Similarly, an important survey of the role of religion worldwide conducted by the Pew Research Center affirms that the percentage of the world’s population not affiliated with any religious community will decline from 16.4% in 2010 to 13.2% in 2050 while the percentage of Christians will remain constant at 31.4%. In contrast, the decline of religion in the United States and Western Europe has increased significantly. In the US, from 2010 to 2050, the Pew study predicts that the percentage of the population with no religious faith will rise from 16% to 29% while the percentage of Christians will drop from 78% to 63%. From this perspective, the secularization hypothesis seems more valid for the US and Western Europe than for the world in general.

⁶ GC 32, d. 4, no. 50; *Jesuit Life and Mission Today*, ed. Padberg, 298.

⁷ See, for example, Thomas Luckman, *The Invisible Religion: The Problem of Religion in Modern Society* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), and Ronald F. Inglehart, *Religion’s Sudden Decline: What’s Causing It, and What Comes Next?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022).

⁸ José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

Despite these disputes, the congregation clearly got it right in pointing to the large number of people in the world today who have neither belief in God nor faith in Jesus Christ. This absence of faith in turn can lead to a lack of a sense of direction in one's personal life and to a loss of orientation in society and politics at large.⁹ On this note, Ronald Inglehart cites Scandinavian countries to indicate his hope that a broadly humanistic ethics without religion or belief in God can provide the psychological and social orientation needed. At the same time, he raises the question of whether very secular Nordic countries will remain immune from personal and social disorientation. Here, he asks whether the lack of religious faith might even tempt Sweden to fill with commitment to xenophobia and authoritarianism the gap that the decline of religion leaves.¹⁰ Indeed, the very recent rise of anti-immigrant attitudes in Scandinavian countries suggests good reason for these fears.¹¹ From this perspective, the decline of religion may have notable negative social effects. And in addition, a major international multidisciplinary study of human flourishing has suggested that regular attendance at religious services correlates with a sense of overall well-being and flourishing, which may imply that secularization has negative consequences.¹²

In any case, the 32nd General Congregation surely knew of the psychological and social disorientation that can arise from the absence of faith. On this point, it noted that lack of faith and distorted interpretations of religious traditions can lead to religious oppression and interreligious conflict.¹³ For this reason, it insisted that service to faith should be free of "every form of exploitation" and should "rec-

⁹ Inglehart, *Religion's Sudden Decline*, 17–18.

¹⁰ Inglehart, *Religion's Sudden Decline*, 144–62.

¹¹ Chris Horwood, "The Chill Factor: The Changing Politics of Immigration in Nordic Countries," Mixed Migration Centre, May 14, 2024, <https://mixedmigration.org/the-changing-politics-of-immigration-in-nordic-countries/>.

¹² Tyler J. VanderWeele et al., "The Global Flourishing Study: Study Profile and Initial Results on Flourishing," *Nature Mental Health*, April 30, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s44220-025-00423-5>. For an op-ed that briefly states some of this study's conclusions, see Byron Johnson, Tyler J. VanderWeele, and Brendan Case, "The Happiest Country in the World Isn't What You Think," *New York Times*, April 30, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/04/30/opinion/happiness-economic-development.html>.

¹³ GC 32, d. 4, no. 75; *Jesuit Life and Mission Today*, ed. Padberg, 304.

ognize and respect the rights of all, especially the poor and powerless.”¹⁴ The fact that religious faith can have negative as well as positive consequences for the justice and peace of society follows as an important conclusion from some major studies of the contemporary social consequences of religion.¹⁵

Nevertheless, the 32nd General Congregation did not envision the service of faith and the promotion of justice simply as side-by-side commitments in Jesuit spirituality and mission. Rather, it saw faith and justice as integrally related to each other, similar to the declaration emerging from the 1971 synod of bishops that “action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel.”¹⁶ Promotion of justice thus plays a constitutive role in the service of faith, just as service of authentic faith issues forth in the promotion of justice. In this view, the fact that the secularization thesis seems inaccurate today can generate some hope for Jesuits and their institutions as they seek to serve faith today.

The congregation also emphasized the reality of global poverty and the suffering it causes. On this note, decree 4 recognized the “millions of men and women suffering from poverty and hunger, from the unjust distribution of wealth and resources.”¹⁷ Furthermore, it saw this poverty as a result of the “economic, social, and political structures that dominate the life of nations and the international community.”¹⁸ The promotion of justice calls Jesuits to solidarity with these “men and women who live a life of hardship and who are victims of oppression.”¹⁹ For this reason, solidarity with the poor

¹⁴ GC 32, d. 4, no. 67; *Jesuit Life and Mission Today*, ed. Padberg, 301.

¹⁵ See, for example, R. Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000).

¹⁶ Synod of Bishops, 1971, no. 6, in David O’Brien and Thomas A. Shannon, eds., *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 306.

¹⁷ GC 32, d. 4, no. 69; *Jesuit Life and Mission Today*, ed. Padberg, 302.

¹⁸ GC 32, d. 4, no. 52; *Jesuit Life and Mission Today*, ed. Padberg, 298.

¹⁹ GC 32, d. 4, no. 97; *Jesuit Life and Mission Today*, ed. Padberg, 309.

should mark the lives of all Jesuits and their communities as well as the work of all Jesuit-affiliated institutions.²⁰

Given these realities, the task of addressing the reality of global poverty and injustice can seem massive and even overwhelming and as such will inspire little confidence that anything can be done to alleviate the problems. However, recent data offers some hope that well-directed action can make a noticeable difference. For example, World Bank data indicates a significant reduction in the number of people living in extreme poverty—that is, on less than \$2.15/day—down from 36% of the world’s people in 1990 to 9.7 % in 2020. During this period, over one billion people escaped extreme poverty, which surely provides hope that we can make a difference.²¹ Yet despite this hope, it remains clear that injustice marks even the apparent improvements. For example, almost 70 million people still live in extreme poverty and more than half of these live in sub-Saharan Africa. If current trends continue, then, 90% of those in extreme poverty will live in Africa. And despite the great wealth of the United States, severe poverty exists there as well. On this point, the Nobel Prize winning economist Angus Deaton has pointed out that the effects of poverty on human well-being can be more severe in regions of the US such as Mississippi or Appalachia than they are in Bangladesh.²²

Taking all of this into consideration, contemporary social analysis suggests grounds for hope that we can alleviate injustice as well as some reasons why that this alleviation will not come easily. Social data also suggest that faith can support human flourishing and that distorted interpretations of religious traditions can have harmful social consequences. In other words, these studies support the congregation’s mission of the service of faith and the promotion of justice.

²⁰ GC 32, d. 4, no. 97; *Jesuit Life and Mission Today*, ed. Padberg, 309.

²¹ World Bank Group, Poverty, April 7, 2025, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/overview>.

²² See the interview of Deaton in Annie Lowrey, “Is It Better to Be Poor in Bangladesh or the Mississippi Delta?” *Atlantic*, March 8, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2017/03/angus-deaton-qa/518880/>.

2. Theology and Ethics at the Link between Faith and Justice

The foregoing analysis further suggests that we can benefit from some consideration of what the congregation said about theological and ethical reflection on the link between faith and justice. This matters especially because some critics have maintained that the decree gave such strong emphasis to the promotion of justice that it unacceptably minimized the deepening of faith. For example, in 1990, at a major conference on the ministry of Jesuits in higher education, the distinguished theologian and later cardinal Avery Dulles (1918–2008) expressed a fear that the decree in effect issued a call to all Jesuits to commit themselves exclusively to social ministry. He worried, for example, that the congregation's directive would have an adverse effect on Jesuit work in higher education and could marginalize Jesuit engagement in the sciences, the classics, and the arts. In other words, Dulles felt that the promotion of justice overshadowed Jesuit commitment to explicitly faith-advancing ministries by minimizing our historic work in the arts and sciences and rejecting, implicitly, the groundedness of this work in Christ.²³

I personally responded to Fr. Dulles at the conference where he presented his objections, and readers here may find it helpful for me to restate why I found his views on the decree inadequate. My argument drew on the thought of another distinguished Jesuit theologian, Michael J. Buckley (1931–2019), who had insisted that the concern for justice aligns fully both with the service of faith and with the advancement of human well-being for which a faith-based humanism calls. In this vein, he argued that authentic Christian humanism should foster deep concern not only for great human achievements but also for the misery and suffering that mars the lives of so many in our world. Such care for those who suffer would in turn grow into a critical effort to understand how we might help alleviate their misery. In other words, it would lead to an effort to secure justice

²³ Avery Dulles, SJ, "Faith, Justice, and the Jesuit Mission," in *Assembly 1989: Jesuit Ministry in Higher Education* (Washington, D.C.: Jesuit Conference, 1990), 19, 25. For this same concern expressed in book length, see Martin R. Tripole, SJ, *Faith Beyond Justice: Widening the Perspective*, rev. ed. (Chestnut Hill, MA: IJS, 2024).

for all for whom human action or failure to act causes suffering. As Fr. Buckley put it, this “care to develop a disciplined sensitivity to human misery and exploitation, is not a single political doctrine or a system of economics. It is a humanism, a humane sensibility to be achieved anew within our own times and as a product of an education whose ideal continues to be that of the Western *humanitas*.”²⁴

For Fr. Buckley, then, a humanism inspired by Christian faith will include efforts to overcome the human suffering that injustice causes and to advance the human flourishing whose realization depends on justice in human interaction and social institutions. In this way, promotion of justice integrates the service of faith for Jesuits and indeed for all Christians, such that we can think of the Christian humanistic approach as linking faith and justice.

But perhaps the strongest indication that the decree commits itself firmly to the importance of faith appears in its citation of a passage from the Jesuit *Constitutions* where St. Ignatius states that “the means which unite the human instrument with God . . . are more effective than those which equip it in relation to men.”²⁵ Apparently, then, St. Ignatius and, following him, the 32nd General Congregation strongly affirm that all Jesuit ministry, including the ministries that promote justice, requires union with God. The vision of Christian humanism that in Fr. Buckley’s view includes commitment to find ways of aiding people who are suffering thus presents a humanism unambiguously grounded in God. To put this another way, faith in God relates reciprocally to working for justice.

This Christian humanism finds theological support in the conviction that all human beings are created in the image and likeness of God—a faith-based claim with scriptural foundations (Gn 1:27). In

²⁴ Michael J. Buckley, “The University and the Concern for Justice: The Search for a New Humanism, *Thought* 57 (June, 1982): 223; “Christian Humanism and Human Misery: A Challenge to the Jesuit University,” in Francis M. Lazarus, ed., *Faith, Discovery, Service: Perspectives on Jesuit Education*, (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1992), 77–105; *The Catholic University as Promise and Project: Reflections in a Jesuit Idiom* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1998), 105–28.

²⁵ GC 32, d. 4, no. 61; *Jesuit Life and Mission Today*, ed. Padberg, 299.

addition, it relies on the belief that the promotion of justice flows from the liberation and reconciliation that Christ brought. For these theological reasons, there can be no promotion of justice apart from the gifts that God gives to humanity through the grace of Christ. In the decree's words, "The injustice that racks our world in so many forms is, in fact, a denial of God in practice, for it denies the dignity of the human person, the image of God, the brother or sister of Christ."²⁶

From a secular perspective, the congregation's vision finds also support in Immanuel Kant's argument that the inherent dignity of all human persons means that they ought to be treated as ends in themselves and never as means to other goals.²⁷ Following this logic, one cannot communicate the Gospel effectively without the promotion of a goal that to some may seem quite secular—namely, the goal of justice. The congregation thus envisioned humanistic ends as both deeply Christian and very much of this world—simultaneously both religious and secular—drawing simultaneously on both faith and reason in a very Catholic way in its contribution to Jesuit ministry.

Other critics of the decree have observed that it does not define the justice that it sees as central to the Jesuit mission. Yet while the decree does not offer any formal definition of *justice*, it says much about its key elements. Specifically, the congregation's emphasis on the way justice requires special concern for the poor and marginalized resembles what the US Catholic bishops, in their 1986 pastoral letter *Economic Justice for All*, called "basic justice."²⁸ Of course, the concept of justice has many facets and as such has fallen subject to intense debate from classical times.²⁹ The US Bishops sought to address this complexity by proposing

²⁶ GC 32, d. 4, no. 78; *Jesuit Life and Mission Today*, ed. Padberg, 305.

²⁷ Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1960), 47.

²⁸ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for All: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the US Economy* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1986), no. 77, <https://www.usccb.org/resources/economicjusticeforall>.

²⁹ On the complexity of justice, see Michael J. Sandel, *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009). I have treated the meaning of *justice* from a Catholic standpoint in "Modern Catholic Teachings Concerning Justice,"

an understanding of “basic justice” as the moral norm that “demands the establishment of minimum levels of participation in the life of the human community for all persons.”³⁰ Conversely, they described ultimate injustice as a situation that excludes a person or group of people from social participation. This emphasis on basic levels of inclusion and participation in social life as required by justice appears throughout the decree, which regards social exclusion or marginalization as a sign of injustice toward the poor and other excluded groups.

To expand on these points, the call of justice to overcome exclusion also finds theological grounding in the duty of Christians to show love toward all their fellow humans, given that the creation of community requires love. Furthermore, the overcoming of exclusion receives secular support from the understanding of human beings as essentially social. From this perspective, both Christians and non-Christians can share the conviction that no person can thrive on his or her own—a conviction that calls Jesuits, Jesuit-sponsored institutions, and the entire human community to work to overcome forms of marginalization and exclusion that cause poverty and oppression.³¹ Finally, overcoming exclusion calls all people to work to enable the poor and marginalized to achieve greater dignity through fuller participation in social, economic, and political life.

On these bases, the decree explicitly invites Jesuits into “solidarity with the poor.”³² Though it does not use the phrase “preferential option for the poor” that both Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis have strongly endorsed, the decree’s call for solidarity clearly supports this option. In addition, it affirms that Jesuit vows respond to the Gospel’s call to build a community based on sharing rather than greed and on

in John C. Haughey, ed., *The Faith that Does Justice: Examining Christian Sources for Social Change* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), 207–31. This volume intended to clarify the theological dimensions of the decree whose anniversary this essay commemorates.

³⁰ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for All*, no. 77.

³¹ For the importance of social participation as essential to justice and human dignity, see my *Human Rights in a Divided World: Catholicism as a Living Tradition* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2024), 46–62.

³² GC 32, d. 4, nos. 65, 69, 96–99; *Jesuit Life and Mission Today*, ed. Padberg, 300, 302, 309–10.

service rather than the exclusion that results from domination or exploitation. Here, too, we find an explicit recognition that faith in the redeeming power of Christ's cross invites us to share the struggles of the suffering. In this sense, both faith and justice call for Jesuit commitment in all their ministries to address the realities of poverty and exploitation.

Of course, such commitment will take different forms in different ministries—sometimes as direct work with and for the poor, at other times through efforts to change the social institutions that lead to unjust poverty, and in other contexts through affective and communal support of those engaged with more direct service. The decree insists, however, that justice for the poor and marginalized should engage all Jesuits and Jesuit-sponsored institutions. On this point, it states that the commitment to justice by Jesuits and their institutions, especially justice for those excluded from basic levels of participation, should be total, corporate, rooted in faith and experience, and multiform.³³ While this agenda surely may seem daunting, the decree provides religious and ethical resources that can inspire efforts to respond to the challenge today.

Note, too, that subsequent general congregations have affirmed strongly the 32nd General Congregation's commitment of the Society of Jesus to the faith and justice agenda. For example, the 33rd General Congregation (1983) acknowledged that the implementation of decree 4 had not happened without difficulties. Quoting the Society's general superior, Fr. Pedro Arrupe (1907–1991), the congregation confessed that Jesuit readings of the previous congregation had sometimes seemed "incomplete, slanted and unbalanced," perhaps due in part to how some Jesuits had come to see the justice call in a way the minimized the mission to serve faith. But the text of the congregation's decree suggests that the tendencies to an inadequate approach to implementation had come about even more from the dangers of a "discarnate spiritualism" that failed to recognize that the call to promote justice is "the embodiment of God's love and saving mercy."³⁴ And while some Jesuits in Spain and elsewhere had resisted the mission, the 33rd General Congregation strongly reaffirmed the preceding congregation's decree when it called

³³ GC 32, d. 4, nos. 53–55; *Jesuit Life and Mission Today*, ed. Padberg, 298–99.

³⁴ GC 33, d. 1, nos. 35–36; *Jesuit Life and Mission Today*, ed. Padberg, 448–49.

the Society to an “integration of the service of faith and the promotion of justice in one single mission” and to a recognition of “the universality of this mission in the various ministries in which we engage.”³⁵

Note, too, that the 34th General Congregation (1995) insisted even more strongly on the centrality of both faith and justice to the Jesuit mission. On this point, it declared that “there is no service of faith without promotion of justice” and “no promotion of justice without communicating faith.”³⁶ This congregation also saw the promotion of justice as rooted in the original charism of St. Ignatius that had led to the founding of the Jesuit order, noting how the Jesuit who served as secretary to St. Ignatius, Fr. Juan Alfonso de Polanco (1517–1576), wrote under Ignatius’s guidance that “so great are the poor in the sight of God that it was especially for them that Jesus Christ was sent into the world.”³⁷ It thus should come as no surprise that the 34th General Congregation devoted decree 3 entirely to the mission for justice, given that it had seen the good effects of the earlier calls to work for justice in Jesuit life, including new friendships with poor people and with those who work to overcome injustice. Indeed, the faith of the poor has touched many Jesuits whom their hope has renewed and their love has transformed.³⁸

The congregation went on to stress several additional dimensions of ministry that experience has shown indispensable to the advancement of both faith and justice. These include adaptation of the Christian message for better reception in non-Western cultures—what we call *inculturation*—and engagement of faith with religious traditions other than Christianity—what we call *interreligious dialogue*. In summary, the congregation deepened and broadened GC 32’s proclamation that all Jesuit ministry should serve faith and promote justice.

³⁵ GC 33, d. 1, no. 41; *Jesuit Life and Mission Today*, ed. Padberg, 451.

³⁶ GC 34, d. 2, no. 46; *Jesuit Life and Mission Today*, ed. Padberg, 529.

³⁷ GC 34, d. 2, no. 33; *Jesuit Life and Mission Today*, ed. Padberg, 525.

³⁸ GC 34, d. 3, no. 50; *Jesuit Life and Mission Today*, ed. Padberg, 530.

3. Response to Some Urgent Issues Today

Since its publication fifty years ago, decree 4 of the 32nd General Congregation has shaped the work of the Society of Jesus. In this section, I will highlight just a few of the ways it has done so, in hope that these examples will illustrate the continuing importance of the decree today.

Given that most people probably know the Society best from its work in education, I will begin by highlighting a few ways in which the commitment to faith and justice has had an impact in that sector. On the feast of St. Ignatius in 1973, when the Jesuit general Fr. Pedro Arrupe addressed the alumni of Jesuit schools in Europe, he acknowledged that these institutions had not done an adequate job educating their students for their roles “in the promotion of justice and the liberation of the oppressed.”³⁹ At that moment, Fr. Arrupe called Jesuit schools and universities to recognize that “the paramount objective of Jesuit education” should involve the formation of its graduates as “men [and women] for others” who give themselves to the service others in the promotion of justice.⁴⁰ In 2000, Fr. Arrupe’s successor, Fr. Peter Hans Kolvenbach (1928–2016), repeated this call to Jesuit educators at Santa Clara University when he exhorted Jesuit universities to develop new ways to address the challenges to faith and the scandalous injustices of our world in a “university way.”⁴¹

Subsequent Jesuit generals have renewed this call: Fr. Adolfo Nicolás (1936–2020) in Mexico City in 2010 at a conference on Jesuit higher education in the context of globalization, and Arturo Sosa on many other occasions. Likewise, the theme appeared as a central priority in the universal apostolic preferences that the Society presented

³⁹ Pedro Arrupe, “Men for Others: Training Agents of Change for the Promotion of Justice—Address to the International Congress of Jesuit Alumni of Europe, Valencia, Spain, July 31, 1973,” in Pedro Arrupe, *Justice with Faith Today: Selected Letters and Addresses II*, ed. Jerome Aixala (Saint Louis: IJS, 1980), 124.

⁴⁰ Pedro Arrupe, “Men for Others,” 123–38.

⁴¹ Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, “The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice in American Jesuit Higher Education,” *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 31, no. 1 (January 2001): 13–28, at 28.

in 2019 to shape all its ministries.⁴² These priorities have played a central role in the assemblies on justice in Jesuit higher education that have taken place regularly at Jesuit institutions of higher education in the United States—Santa Clara University (2000), Loyola University Chicago (2003), John Carroll University (2005), Creighton University (2013), Seattle University (2017), Georgetown University (2021), and again at Loyola Chicago (2024).

The universal application of these orientations appears in that the service of faith and the promotion of justice also play a central role in Jesuit secondary education. The Jesuit Schools Network (JSN), based chiefly in the US, has developed frameworks to enhance secondary education that promote a deepening of faith and a greater commitment to justice among its students.⁴³ And these frameworks in turn have developed from collaboration with Jesuit educators more globally. For example, the *Fe y Alegría* network of primary and secondary schools that began as a Jesuit initiative in Latin America has since expanded to other parts of the world where popular education addresses a basic need among the poor. While this network began before the 32nd General Congregation and is not run under the auspices of the Society, the Jesuits promote this work in collaboration with others who have committed themselves to the construction of a more humane and just world. Today, the JSN reaches over 750,000 students through 30,000 teachers in 22 countries.⁴⁴ As such, this remarkable range of educational service for the poor offers a prime example of what the 32nd General Congregation envisioned when it advocated the promotion of justice in Jesuit-related work.

A further international emphasis on justice in Jesuit education came in 2018 with the founding of the International Association of Jesuit Universities (IAJU) to foster collaboration in the apostolates of teaching

⁴² See Jesuits, *Universal Apostolic Preferences*, <https://www.jesuits.global/uap/introduction/>.

⁴³ Jesuit Schools Network, “Ignatian Frameworks,” <https://jesuitschoolsnetwork.org/resources/frameworks/>.

⁴⁴ *Fe y Alegría*, “Popular Education,” [https://www.feyalegria.org/la-educacion-popular-es-nuestro-camino/#](https://www.feyalegria.org/la-educacion-popular-es-nuestro-camino/#;); “Fe y Alegría in Figures,” <https://www.feyalegria.org/>.

and research among its member institutions around the world. Its goals include the expansion of access to higher education for the disadvantaged; the promotion, guided by Catholic social teaching, of the education of civic and political leaders; and the teaching and advocacy of economic and environmental justice.⁴⁵ From this perspective, we can see the IAJU as a development of the commitment to faith and justice that the Society made fifty years ago and that illustrates how this commitment continues to help shape Jesuit ministry.

This investment in faith and justice has appeared as well in a range of other sectors, including the establishment of centers devoted to research and advocacy on issues related to both faith and justice. To cite just one example, the Jesuit Center for Theological Reflection (JCTR) in Lusaka, Zambia, began in 1988 to serve faith and promote justice in Zambia, in the African continent more widely, and in the world in general.⁴⁶ As such, the JCTR has accomplished much, perhaps most notably in the key role it has played in addressing, in the Jubilee 2000 campaign, the economic crises that many of the world's poorest countries have faced due financial debts to the global north.⁴⁷

But perhaps the most significant Jesuit initiative for the promotion of justice over the past fifty years has involved the founding of the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) by Fr. Arrupe in 1980. When the US military conflict in Vietnam ended in 1975, large numbers of Vietnamese fled their homes in small boats launched into the South China Sea. Many did not survive, and additional conflicts in Southeast Asia drove many more people from their homes. In response, Fr. Arrupe invited Jesuits from around the world to come to the assistance of these displaced people in Southeast Asia. This response in turn led to the development of the JRS—an agency small in size, compared to some major humanitarian organizations, but that, in 2023, was serving over a million displaced

⁴⁵ International Association of Jesuit Universities, "Our Priorities," <https://iaju.org/>.

⁴⁶ Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection, <https://jctr.org.zm/en/>.

⁴⁷ Elizabeth A. Donnelly, "Making the Case for Jubilee: The Catholic Church and the Poor-Country Debt Movement," *Ethics and International Affairs* 21, no. 1 (March 2007), 107–33.

people in over 50 countries.⁴⁸ Of course, this initiative represents a modest contribution facing the magnitude of the forced displacement taking place today where, in June of 2024, over 120 million people worldwide have left their homes against their will.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, it represents a significant response to the general congregation's call to justice.

4. Conclusion

I hope this short essay has revealed that GC 32's invitation to Jesuits to see their ministry as the service of faith and the promotion of justice has made a real difference in the world. In addition, I hope it shows that the decline of faith in some parts of the world points out the importance of the Jesuit commitment to spreading the Gospel and calling people to belief. On this note, the fact that secularization has not spread as extensively as some social thinkers maintain can lead to renewed confidence that Jesuit efforts to preach the faith can make a positive difference. Likewise, the oppression and poverty of today's world indicate that the Jesuit commitment to promoting justice matters deeply, while the fact that radical poverty has notably declined shows that we can make progress in practical justice. Surely, Jesuits engaged in education have taken notable steps to advance both faith and justice through their schools and universities as have those working in more direct forms of social ministry, including the JRS. Overall, therefore, we can claim with confidence that the general congregation of 50 years ago launched the Society of Jesus and its members on an important and productive path that we can trust will continue to bear fruit.

⁴⁸ Jesuit Refugee Service, *Annual Report 2023*, p. 9, https://jrs.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/JRS_annual-report-2023_Eng_compressed.pdf.

⁴⁹ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Figures at a Glance," <https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/overview/figures-glance>.