By Joaquín Gogorza, Shared Space/Espacio Compartido

Envisioning higher education in the 21st Century: A conversation with Juan José Etxeberria, SJ, at Deusto University of the Society of Jesus

Visualizando la educación superior en el siglo XXI: una conversación con Juan José Etxeberria, SJ., de la Universidad de Deusto de la Compañía de Jesús.

Envisager l'éducation supérieure au 21^e siècle: Une conversation avec Juan José Etxeberria, SJ, à l'université Deusto de la Société de Jésus

Donna Fernández Nogueira
University of Deusto, Spain

Jon Igelmo Zaldívar
Complutense University of Madrid, Spain

Visitación Pereda Herrero
University of Deusto, Spain

This interview with the Vice-Rector for University Community, Identity and Mission of the University of Deusto, Juan José Etxeberria, S.J., provides an opportunity to learn about the situation facing higher education establishments of the Society of Jesus in the 21st century, specifically the University of Deusto. The nearly 500 years of experience gained by Jesuits in higher education should pay special attention to the arguments maintained by Basque Jesuits within a context of social, economic, and cultural change in which Western societies are being shaped by plural ways of coexisting (Berger, 2014).

Fr. Juan José Etxeberria occupies a privileged position within the hierarchy of the University of Deusto, from which he can examine this changing context. The university establishments attached to the Catholic Church are facing the challenge of ensuring that her particular voice is heard within the full competitive spectrum of higher education in a globalized world. To enable the reader to take full advantage of the words transcribed from the interviewee, this interview includes a brief introduction that covers three points: a concise description of the history of the Society of Jesus and its contribution to higher education, a brief history of the University of Deusto, and an outline of Fr. Juan José Etxeberria's academic career.

The Society of Jesus was founded as a religious order by Ignatius of Loyola in 1534. Official approval of the order came six years later in 1540, in Rome (O'Malley, 1993). Historically, the Society has pursued its missionary activity in India, China, Japan, Canada, the

ISSN 2560-8371

Date of submission: 2017-09-26
Date of acceptance: 2017-12-01

<http://doi.dx.org/10.24908/eoe-ese-rse.v18i0.6931>
© *Encounters in Theory and History of Education* 151

United States, and in Latin America, including countries such as Bolivia, Paraguay, Mexico, and Argentina. Active participation in theological disputes and its confrontation with the Enlightenment are also major events in the Society's history. However, the Society's contribution to the field of education, and in particular to higher education, is perhaps one of the Jesuits' most distinguishing features. The main outcome of the educational and intellectual apostolate, which has evolved since the 16th century, is the large network of schools and universities that Jesuits run across five continents.

Attention should be drawn to the leading role played by the Jesuits in the problems experienced by the Catholic Church in the 20th century. We want to highlight here the development of the *nouvelle théologie* consolidated in France as a result of the work of theologians such as Jean Daniélou and Henry de Lubac (Mettepenningen, 2010). These last two scholars, who were initially received with suspicion within the papal Curia, became a reference point during the theological debates that determined the essence of the Second Vatican Council.

The Society faced new challenges in 1965 when Pedro Arrupe became Father General of the Society of Jesus (Valero, 2007). On the one hand, Jesuit numbers started to drop considerably, but, on the other hand, there was also the consolidation of liberation theology in Latin America, in which a large number of Jesuits took part. Moreover, the Second Vatican Council gave the Society the chance to re-orient its apostolate. The General Congregation 32 of 1975 was crucial for consolidating the Society's mission and structuring it around two clear pillars: faith and justice. These two pillars would form the backbone of the mission of higher educational establishments run by the Jesuits, in addition to inter-religious dialogue and dialogue with other cultures.

The University of Deusto was founded in 1886. The Enseñanza Católica (Catholic Teaching) company was in charge of buying land in the then municipality of Deusto and the construction of the first university building. This company was established in 1883 by wealthy partners from Bilbao (Sáez de Santamaría, 1978). Within the first few decades of its founding, the new site would not only become a symbol of the role of the Society of Jesus in Basque society in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but also of the growing social, cultural, and economic development in Vizcaya (Biscay) at that time.

Today, the University of Deusto has six Faculties: Economics and Business Administration, Social and Human Sciences, Law, Engineering, Psychology and Education, and Theology. The university project is in accordance with specific guidelines that define the nature of the institution:

The University of Deusto aims to serve society through its contributions with a Christian approach to today's realities.

As a university, its guidelines are love of wisdom, desire for knowledge and rigour in scientific research and methodologies. Therefore, its main focus is on achieving excellence in research and education. Another objective is to provide the background for free persons, who are responsible citizens and competent professionals, equipped with the knowledge, values and skills needed to take on the commitment to foster learning and transform society. (University of Deusto, 2015)

On 8 June 2015, at the main hall of the University of Deusto, Fr. Juan José Etxeberria took office as Vice-Rector for University Community, Identity and Mission. It can be said that Fr. Etxeberria's trajectory within the Society of Jesus has been a wide-ranging one. He entered the Society in 1984 and was ordained a priest in 1995. He pursued his academic training in top educational establishments for Jesuits in Europe, such as the University of Deusto (The Basque Country, Spain), the Catholic Institute of Paris (France), and the Gregorian University (Rome). He obtained his PhD in Canon Law from the Gregorian University. In February 2008, Fr. Etxeberria was appointed Provincial Superior of the Jesuits in the Province of Loyola by the Superior General of the Society of Jesus, Fr. Adolfo Nicolás. Furthermore, he has wide experience teaching young Jesuits, has been a lecturer in the Faculties of Law and Theology at the University of Deusto, and has held the post of Vice-Dean of the Faculty of Law.

Visitación Pereda Herrero and Jon Igelmo Zaldívar: *What is the mission of Catholic universities today?*

Fr. Juan José Etxeberria Sagastume: An accurate response to this question can be found in the document *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (14) about Catholic universities, published by John Paul II in 1990: "it is evident that besides the teaching, research and services common to all Universities, a Catholic University, by institutional commitment, brings to its task the inspiration and light of the Christian message" (John Paul II, 1990).

VPH & JI: *To be more precise, how is higher education integrated into the apostolate of the Society of Jesus?*

JJES: The mission of the Society of Jesus nowadays involves the service of faith and the promotion of justice, as well as dialogue with culture and other religious traditions. Within that context, the intellectual apostolate has developed a basic apostolic field of our mission from its beginning. That's why the history of the Society of Jesus advocates university work as being one of the main tasks that can be developed by the Society itself, so as to serve its purpose in the service of God and the best benefit for humanity. This is nothing new, because right from the start St. Ignatius himself insisted on the fact that Jesuits should, above all, be present in places others might find more difficult to reach. Therefore, the Jesuits, since the time of the first companions, who were "masters in arts," have pursued many fields of knowledge and we continue to do so today. This is part of a long tradition.

And this remains the case. The 35 General Congregation¹ pointed out that "the intellectual apostolate has been a defining characteristic of the Society of Jesus from its beginning. Given the complex yet interrelated challenges that Jesuits face in every apostolic sector, GC 35 calls for a strengthening and renewal of this apostolate as a privileged means for the Society to respond adequately to the important intellectual contribution to which the Church calls us" (GC 35: 3, 39). Likewise, both previous Father Generals have placed the intellectual apostolate (hence including the university mission) among the five priorities of the universal Society of Jesus. On the other hand, taking a look at our European milieu, there are hardly any university establishments or forces existing that are attached to the Church – even fewer that are governed

¹ A General Congregation (GC) is the highest legislative body of the Society of Jesus.

by the guidelines of the Society of Jesus. The latest General Congregation, 36, also takes into consideration this issue: “The intellectual apostolate should be strengthened to help in the transformation of our cultures and societies” (GC 36: 134). In the documentation of this General Congregation there is also a letter of gratitude from Fr. Federico Lombardi to Fr. Adolfo mentioning the importance of this issue for the Church and the world: “You reminded us that the intellectual apostolate must continue to be one of the characteristics of the Society's service to the Church and to the world, and you effectively encouraged the commitment of our whole Order in supporting the institutions and missions which the Holy See has entrusted to her in Rome for the good of the universal Church” (Society of Jesus, 2017).

VPH & JI: *Therefore, can it be said that the very identity of the Society is historically intertwined with higher educational establishments?*

JJES: The Society of Jesus pays special attention to its contribution to the university field within the current context. The Company's motto of service to faith and promotion of justice, being in the frontiers, and building bridges for dialogue with diverse cultures and religious traditions still remains valid. And doing so through the universities remains valid, both by training professionals as well as generating knowledge that may help to offer an answer to current problems and transform reality.

Identity, in the case of a Jesuit university, does not only refer to the number of Jesuits, but rather to its identification with the mission of promoting values, contributing to analysis, research, and transferring knowledge when faced with our modern-day challenges. Without a doubt, the origins of higher education within the Society are linked to its charisma: serving others. The Jesuits' scientific tradition is explained by its Ignatian spirituality, which seeks to find God in all things, in the blend of work and prayer, and a preference for working at the frontiers.

The entire university should be at the service of the construction of the Kingdom of God, of the transformation of our society in which everyone – without exception – can live with their human rights respected, and this should be done on a universal basis. This fact is very much present in Ellacuría's thought (Sobrinó & Alvarado, 1999).

VPH & JI: *The Society has experienced times of change over the last 50 years since the time of the Second Vatican Council. It can be understood that the impact on the intellectual apostolate and higher educational establishments has been considerable, especially in the years since the Council met.*

JJES: First, I want to mention the General Congregation 31 of 1965. There are two decrees issued by this General Congregation that I would like to draw attention to regarding the intellectual apostolate. One of these decrees is No. 28, entitled “The Apostolate of Education.” This decree recognises the doubts that exist about this apostolate. It points out that “there are some members of the Society, however, who think that our educational institutions in certain parts of the world have become practically useless and should therefore be given up” (Society of Jesus, 1967a). On the other hand, it reinforces the fact that our Society “may think with the Church concerning the paramount importance and effectiveness of the educational apostolate,

particularly in our times.” It also states that the Jesuits “have a high regard for the apostolate of education as one of the primary ministries of the Society.”

Also from the GC 31, in the decree related to the intellectual apostolate (No. 29, “Scholarly Work and Research”), for the first time a decree was devoted to the field of research at a General Congregation. The General Congregation retained the importance of this ministry: “Jesuits should have a high regard for scholarly activity, especially scientific research properly so called, and they are to view this as one of the most necessary works of the Society.” And some reasons were given: “It is a very effective apostolate, entirely in accord with the age-old tradition of the Society from its earliest times. It is a generous response to recommendations that the popes have often repeated, especially during the past hundred years” (Society of Jesus, 1967b).

VPH & JI: *Although it was at the GC 32 of 1975 when the Society, with Father Arrupe at the helm, put the question of social justice at the heart of the apostolate, could it also constitute a major element in reconsidering Jesuits’ work and their higher educational establishments?*

JJES: The option for “faith and justice” was a core aspect of this General Congregation – the main concept of this GC 32 (Decree 4, “Our Mission Today: The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice”). This option reformulated the original mission pursued by the Society by incorporating faith and justice as key elements of all apostolates within the context of the 20th century. It might have been interpreted as showing that the intellectual apostolate had no place in such a formulation, because serving the poor did not imply the intellectual dimension of the Jesuits’ mission. However, this GC highlights the fact that the service of faith and the promotion of justice are linked to the intellectual apostolate. According to GC 32, in its Decree 4, serving faith demands an analysis of “the main problems which the Church and humanity ought to be coming to grips with today,” a renewal of “the structures of theological reflection,” and the need to find “a new language, a new set of symbols” (Society of Jesus, 1975).

There is an interesting document from 1976 by Father Pedro Arrupe about the role of the intellectual apostolate in the Society of Jesus (Superior General from 1965 to 1983). In this text, he defends the fact that to make the intellectual dimension part of a Jesuit’s preferential apostolic options, there is a need to work on research and scientific tasks.

VPH & JI: *In this sense it could be understood that the mandates of the former Father Generals, Kolvenbach (1983-2008) and Nicolás (2008-2016), are a continuation of the period in which Fr. Arrupe led the Society, although there are some different aspects in the definition of intellectual apostolate that would be interesting to comment on.*

JJES: During his 25 years leading the Society, Fr. Kolvenbach showed an interest in the university mission pursued by the Society of Jesus. It is necessary to examine the “Ledesma-Kolvenbach” model here. In the 16th century, Fr. Ledesma referred to the four aims of the Jesuit university: *utilitas, iustitia, humanitas, fides* (Agúndez Aúndez, 2008). Fr. Kolvenbach used these aims to speak of the university today.

Fr. Adolfo Nicolás also insisted on the identity and mission of Jesuit universities in his discourse. In his texts several concepts were highlighted as being core today in the process of renewal of our universities: depth, universality, and creativity.

In recent years, there was the publication of an issue of the journal *Promotio Iustitiae*, published by Fr. Patxi Álvarez de los Mozos, SJ, (dealing with the promotion of justice in Jesuit universities). This is an interesting study about the *raison d'être* of Jesuit universities and their orientation towards social justice. Four dimensions of the university are studied in this publication (student formation, university research, social projection, and the university community) from a point of view of the challenges faced and existing good practices (Álvarez de los Mozos, 2015).

Moreover, the recently appointed Father General, Arturo Sosa, has also spoken about this topic at the University of Antonio Ruiz de Montoya (Peru) in March: “What we call the *intellectual apostolate* is central to the mission of the Society today, as it has been from its inception. The complexity of the world’s problems makes intellectual reflection even more urgent and central, in order to render quality service to humanity, starting from the mission of the Church” (Sosa, 2017).

VPH & JI: *After this interesting look back on what the years following the Second Vatican Council have meant to the Society of Jesus, what do you think are currently the distinguishing features of Catholic universities and, specifically, of Jesuit universities in the 21st century?*

JJES: It is relevant to reflect on the meaning and mission of Catholic universities if we wish to improve the service they provide within the current context – both locally and globally. To understand this aspect the university’s three classic functions should be considered: teaching, research, and social projection. According to Fr. Ignacio Ellacuría’s school of thought, working in teaching, research, and social projection is eminently practical, even though it may appear theoretical – in other words, the objective is to offer a fundamental contribution to the social transformation of the country as a whole.

To answer this question, it is worth returning to the Ledesma-Kolvenbach model mentioned earlier. In this model; there are four aims proposed by the Spanish Jesuit, Fernando Ledesma, Rector of the “Colegio Romano” in the 16th century: *humanitas*, *utilitas*, *iustitia*, and *fides*.

The first concept – *humanitas* – refers to the intellectual training of the human being. The commitment to intellectual activity is a characteristic of the Society of Jesus. Official Jesuit documents insist on the need for an intellectual dimension of all ministries within the Society and for the university intellectual apostolate. Nowadays, different types of thought can be distinguished in the Educational Model of the University of Deusto (MAUD): analytical, systemic, critical, creative, reflective, logical, analogical, practical, deliberative, and team thinking. These different types of thought are very important general competences for the student’s intellectual development.

Utilitas refers to the practical nature of the mission and university education. Being aware of students’ future needs is something common to Jesuit universities. For instance, in 2006, in his speech to the university faculties of Notre Dame de la Paix, Peter Hans Kolvenbach expressed that Jesuit education should be eminently practical, ensuring that students acquire the knowledge and competences necessary to be outstanding in their area of knowledge (Kolvenbach, 2008).

University reforms that have taken place since the Bologna Process have focused on the need for proximity to the world of business and employability. There are degrees that ensure a high level of employability and have a great number of students. However, the question remains: is this the only way of determining university strategy? The concept of *utilitas* according to the Ledesma-Kolvenbach paradigm, without a doubt, acts as a counterpoint to “utilitarianism.”

The third feature of the classical Jesuit education refers to *iustitia*. This dimension incorporates ethical training, values, and the search for truth as part of the academic life of all universities. In the apostolic constitution *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, John Paul II wrote: “The present age is in urgent need of this kind of disinterested service, namely of *proclaiming the meaning of truth*, that fundamental value without which freedom, justice and human dignity are extinguished” (John Paul II, 1990). Social, cultural, political, and economic problems need to be present within the university framework of teaching, research, and social projection. That’s why there is so much insistence today in documents of the Society of Jesus about the matter of the university being at the service of justice.

The fourth feature – *fides* – is related to the promotion of faith in the public domain. Within a Catholic confessional university context, this consists of academic training and critical thinking about Christian faith. In other words, being able to reason and explain one’s freely chosen faith and values in a cultured language, and one which is coherent with our contemporary culture. Within a non-confessional or multi-religious context, the *fides* dimension depends on the meaning of life and focuses on intercultural competences. Understanding other ways of thinking, learning to respect them, and creating channels for inter-religious and intercultural dialogue are new challenges for the times in which we are currently living.

VPH & JI: *How significant is social projection within Jesuit higher education projects?*

JJES: There are many university activities that are not directly linked to the classroom or publications. Rather, their approach is clearly defined by their relationship with the milieu. Since the end of the last century, there has been a rising awareness of social projection as a function of the university. This matter came to be known under different names: *social engagement*, *community engagement*, *civic service*, *social responsibility*, etc.

These functions are linked to the university’s relationship with the business, associative, and institutional fabric. Our research should not simply serve the purpose of being published for the sake of being published or entering academic publishing groups. It should also seek to have an impact on the milieu, on the social context, on the nearby institutions and businesses. The expression “valley of death” is sometimes used to refer to the gap or insurmountable distance existing between what certain technology centres or universities produce and their real usefulness to companies. The needs of nearby institutions should be taken into consideration in the issues being dealt with by the university.

The university may also foster agreements with companies in the form of internships, and agreements with social institutions to promote “service-learning” experiences, in which there is a

supervised experience that involves student immersion in areas of injustice and direct contact with the individuals who suffer most in society.

VPH & JI: *It could therefore be understood that social projection has a specific weight in the field of research. How do you think social projection and research can be articulated through the university?*

JJES: In the field of research and the transfer of knowledge, the mission of Jesuit universities takes on a preferential option for the poor. It is a commitment that means in-depth knowledge and wisdom about reality. That is, a frontier research incarnated in reality and facing society's current challenges.

VPH & JI: *Recently, as a consequence of the so-called Bologna Declaration (1999), European universities have been compelled to undertake a series of transformations in order to come into line with what is referred to as the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Could it be said that these changes have been in harmony with the mission of Jesuit universities, or are they contrary to it?*

JJES: Indeed, the changes have affected the three classic university roles already mentioned: teaching, research, and social projection. Thanks to their previous experience in student mobility, the Experiential Learning Model, and relations and research with institutions and social agents, Jesuit universities have not only managed to adapt to new EHEA demands but have also led work teams from different international universities. For example, the Tuning Project, coordinated by the Universities of Deusto (Spain) and Groningen (Holland), has been a reference point to establish a credit system to measure work (ECTS), study, as well as general and specific competencies for each discipline and thematic area.

VPH & JI: *Focusing the interview on the geographic context common to the University of Deusto, how does the Vice-Rector of Identity and Mission consider the university's performance within the context of the Basque Country?*

JJES: The role of the university is essential for a country's development. On many occasions, the discussion clearly focuses on a negative appraisal of the university system – for instance, the usual discourse stating that the university system is insufficiently developed and little connected to society and the world of business. Well, concerning this issue, it's possible to make three points.

Firstly, the lack of connection and cooperation shows the fragility of the system in general. Cooperation depends on the will of a set of agents and on the mechanisms that encourage the system. In the Basque Country, to be able to understand the current situation of the university system, many factors need to be borne in mind: the way the Basque science and technology system is structured, the functions entrusted to each type of agent, and the level of public investment.

Secondly, and continuing on from the previous point, one could say that the university has, in some way, seen the scope of its role in the system reduced, especially focusing on the training of

professionals and citizens as well as basic and applied research. nevertheless, in both areas, the Basque university system performs well. Both the skills of graduates and their level of employability show the extent to which the university is connected to society and the world of business.

Lastly, I would also like to draw attention to the fact that most of the Basque universities, and obviously the non-state universities, have made and continue to make major efforts to remain close to the production system and social institutions using their own resources.

VPH & JI: *What are the research requirements and challenges for the University of Deusto?*

JJES: Firstly, I would like to point out that the Basque Country, as a region, has an extensive network of science and technology agents, which is a strong asset in the fields of science, research, and development. However, there are needs and research areas that are not sufficiently covered.

Of course, there are traditional priorities, but there is a certain lack of long-term vision in niches of opportunity. Indeed, traditional priorities linked to the country's industrial development are needed, although perhaps there should be a more solid long-term vision for research capacities to be strengthened – not only in traditional sectors, but also in those niches of opportunity linked to the area.

Another matter is that of research on challenges and social transformation. There is a need to support action-research projects aiming at the social transformation of the area – issues such as creative industries, organizational innovation, citizens' empowerment, participative design of policies and strategies, social transformation, demography and aging, employment niches, and innovative cities and territories. These are aspects in which the University of Deusto has the capacity to work and develop.

Lastly, it's important to mention financial support for research. It is significant that, although a 2% growth in public budget has been announced for the next few years, and 4% for the following four-year period, this is not reflected in a firm commitment to the development of universities—especially in the case of non-state institutions—when other budgets have increased significantly.

VPH & JI: *It is well-known that there have been significant changes within the political context in the Basque Country since 2010. What is the positioning of the University of Deusto regarding the new political scenario following the definitive ceasefire announced by ETA?*

JJES: To start with, I should like to point out that reconciliation is a fundamental dimension of the mission of the Society of Jesus. Among our documents there can be found one called “Reconciling the estranged” (Formula of the Institute, 1550 as cited in O'Malley, 1993). The General Congregation of 2008, No. 35, expressed the mission of the Society of Jesus in terms of re-establishing relations as “we become able to bridge the divisions of a fragmented world” (Society of Jesus, 2008: 3, 17). Reconciliation and working for peace are something very common to our mission, taking into account the disputes, division and suffering existing in our society.

Referring to the historical issue, the Basque Country has experienced many vicissitudes and there was growing turbulence during the 20th century. Without attempting to delve in-depth into the causes – which have been subject to much debate, but about which there is no social consensus – the fact is that the diversity of different cultures and national political projects both confront and divide our society. This has had serious consequences for coexistence as well as causing other basic problems regarding approaches to social justice: to receive recognition from others, to the right to one's own identity, to be able to express yourself in your own language and culture, and to a right to reparation, not forgetting the suffering this situation has caused.

More steps have been taken in matters of justice than in those of peace. There has been little systematic work done in favour of peace, and there has not been a shared view in this respect. This lack of definition, combined with the plurality of visions, has been a step back in the area of reconciliation. The conflict has been studied at the University of Deusto, previously in the Faculty of Humanities and now in the Centre for Applied Ethics. There has been mediation between victims and victimisers, and a constructive view of the conflict has been made public, pursuing justice for the victims as well as encouraging reparation and reconciliation.

VPH & JI: *Sometimes there is the feeling that the political conflict has concealed or set aside other conflicts that have reshaped Basque society in recent decades. Such is the case with migratory movements that, in the case of the Basque Country, have had a major impact over the past two decades.*

JJES: The arrival of immigrants in the Basque Country is a new phenomenon in comparison to other countries in Europe. During the decade prior to the economic crisis in Spain, the Basque Country had experienced the highest growth rates in terms of the percentage of foreigners in Europe, rising from zero to 10 or 20%, depending on the region.

It is true to say that in spite of the rapid development of this phenomenon, there have been no outbreaks of violence linked to this problem. However, the situation of migrants is one of considerable marginalization and high poverty rates, stigmatization in the media, and they have had serious difficulties living with dignity. All this is caused by legal and administrative obstacles to regularize their stay and problems accessing public services. The religious question is also an issue, particularly for believers of Islam.

The Society of Jesus has informed and tried to raise awareness about the network of migrations in the Basque Country in a project about showing and systematizing experiences as well as publishing a catalogue of good practices – which are interesting rather than excellent – that incorporate three dimensions: inclusive education in diversity, promotion of responsible citizenship in conditions of equality, and the defence of religious pluralism.

Nowadays, it is a question of social emergency in which our credibility as a society, capable of fraternity, is at stake. It is shocking to see the natural way in which individuals of great social and political importance take for granted the deaths of people on the southern borders of Europe.

VPH & JI: *At a sociological level, a phenomenon that has emerged in Basque society is that of secularization. One could even speak of a rapid secularization process that has been taking place over the last few decades of the 20th century and the early 21st century. How has this rapid secularization affected a Catholic higher educational establishment such as the University of Deusto?*

JJES: Secularization is an issue of great importance within the current context of Basque and Spanish society. According to data submitted by Professor Javier Elzo² at a conference, the percentage of Basques who consider themselves either atheist or non-believers is 28%, higher than the number of practicing Catholics, calculated at 19%. The total number who say they are Catholics, whether practicing or otherwise, is 67% – a slightly lower percentage than that provided by the most recent Barometers at the Centre of Sociological Research (CIS) for Spain. Percentages are clearly higher among women. Moreover, this percentage is higher in Alava than in Vizcaya, and the lowest figures are in Gipuzkoa.

Data confirm the importance of the secularization process over the past fifty years in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country. Thus, while 50% of the population over 65 claim to be practicing Catholics, this figure drops to 5% among young people between 18 and 29. In other words, 51% of young people claim to be atheists or non-believers, while 7% of those over 65 state this.

It can be seen that there is a growing secularization that rejects whatever is religious and tends to conceal and confine faith to private circles. The social environment encourages ways of behaving that make faith difficult to maintain, such as individualism, consumerism, and materialism. In addition, the Church inspires distrust, although Pope Francis has considerably improved its image.

As a result of this situation, there is a call for evangelization, for inculturating faith within the current context, so as to help people experience it by means of new plural scenarios. The role of the Church is becoming diminished within current contexts at an alarming rate. Religious practice is in constant decline, and our churches are frequented by an increasingly small number of elderly people. That's why the question that comes to mind is the following: Will we be able to pass on Christian faith to the coming generations? This question can't be easily answered – personal faith can be a somewhat treacherous discovery.

VPH & JI: *It is obvious that the 21st century presents considerable challenges for the Catholic Church, and therefore, also for the Society of Jesus and its educational and intellectual apostolate. It is also true to say that the current Pope, the Jesuit Jorge Bergoglio, has given significant hope to major sectors of the Church that in recent years had felt rather removed from official Church discourse and particularly that of the Curia. What's your opinion about these events?*

JJES: Our ecclesiastical life may also have areas of conflict, and Pope Francis can help us to overcome possible dichotomies within the ecclesiastical community.

² The data belong to the Basque Government Sociometer and were provided by personal request to the Sociological Research Office of the Basque Government in November 2013.

Speaking about the feeling the Jesuits have for the Church, Father Adolfo Nicolás invited us to exercise pastoral responsibility within different cultural and ecclesiastical contexts. Among the questions raised, special mention should be made to the following: How can we reinforce the Church's credibility in places where it has been discredited? How can we ensure more solid and profound faith among different types of believers who are facing very diverse cultural challenges? How can we Jesuits, in all our apostolic institutions, reach out and act as bridges in the Church, especially in local churches that suffer from polarization and lack of unity?

A new era has arrived with Pope Francis. It could be a good idea to speak about some features of the Church that Pope Francis is considering.

The Pope demands a Church for the poor. In the homily of the inaugural Mass of his papacy on 19 March, he insisted on the fact that genuine power derives from service, especially serving the poor, the weakest, and the least important. Therefore, there is a great desire for absolute, affective, and effective commitment on the part of the Church to the poor.

Another feature considered by Pope Francis refers to a compassionate Church close to the people – *Miserando atque eligendo* (looking at him/her with mercy, he chooses him/her). This was the main idea in his first homily on 17 March, to which he alluded in his first Angelus: “I think and I say it with humility – that this is the Lord's most powerful message: mercy” (Francis I, 2013). In the words of the Pope himself: “It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugars! You have to heal his wounds. Then we can talk about everything else. Heal the wounds, heal the wounds.... And you have to start from the ground up” (Fr. Spadaro, 2013).

Likewise, Pope Francis talks about a Church that is open to new paths incarnated in the reality of our times, and which enable us to avoid the spiritual disease of a self-referential Church without losing sight of its necessary decentralisation.

Lastly, from Francis's papacy there is the notion of a Church engaged in dialogue, in discernment and at the frontiers. Dialogue here refers to the conviction that the other person has something good to say, considering their point of view, their proposal, and, of course, avoiding relativism. Humble, open-minded intelligence seeks God in all things via spiritual discernment. And it is important to maintain this dialogue and discernment across the social, geographic, and religious frontiers of the time.

VPH & JI: *Returning to the question of discernment, stated as one of the most important aspects of Pope Francis's papacy, discernment is also of great significance to the Jesuit intellectual apostolate, mentioned at the beginning, and can be viewed as a matter of great importance for higher educational establishments attached to the Society of Jesus. What do you think?*

JJES: Discernment means being alert in three areas. Firstly, priority values that need to condition decisions and policies: the dignity of the individual and their rights, as well as justice (Mollá, 2014).

Secondly, there is the use of language, which is by no means innocent. A striking example of this perverse language is to refer to the razor wire fences of the Melilla border as “concertinas.” Hardly anyone knew what these “concertinas” were all about; if you look up the word in the dictionary, you will see that “concertina” is a type of accordion. Speaking of concertinas, making use of this unknown word, is a way of concealing and disguising words that represent social problems such as walls or razor fences.

A third aspect refers to half-formulated statements that only contemplate part of the problem under consideration. This is the case with currently-used expressions such as “unemployment is going down and there is more staff hiring.” But what type of hiring?

It is our duty to reveal the deceptions in society and the prevailing discourse from an in-depth spiritual perspective, while at the same time discovering real trends in life which enable us to commit ourselves to inviting others to do the same. The Church has many platforms available to make this possible. Her communities (parish, lay, and religious) are privileged places for contemplation and common discernment. Her social and educational platforms are spaces for commitment that offer hope; places to express mercy, construct fraternity, and express one’s citizenship.

References

- Agúndez Agúndez, M. (2008). El paradigma universitario Ledesma-Kolvenbach. *Revista de fomento social*, 252, 603-631.
- Álvarez de los Mozos, P. (Ed). (2015). *Promotio Iustitiae*, 117, 2015/1. Retrieved from http://www.sjweb.info/documents/sjs/pj/docs_pdf/PJ_117_ENG.pdf
- Berger, P. L. (2014). *The many altars of modernity: Toward a paradigm for religion in a pluralist age*. Berlin, Germany: De Gruyter.
- John Paul II. (1990). *Apostolic Constitution of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II on Catholic Universities (Ex Corde Ecclesiae)*. Retrieved from http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_jp-ii_apc_15081990_ex-corde-ecclesiae.html
- Francis I (2017). *Angelus*. Retrieved from https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/angelus/2013/documents/papa-francesco_angelus_20130317.html
- Kolvenbach, P. H. (2008). *Discursos universitarios*. Madrid, Spain: UNIJES – Provincia de España de la Compañía de Jesús.
- Mettepenningen, J. (2010). *Nouvelle théologie-New theology: Inheritor of modernism, precursors of Vatican II*. New York, NY: T & T Clark International.
- Mollá, D. (2014, 26 January). *Claves de espiritualidad cristiana para tiempos de sufrimiento*. Conference at the Bilbao Loyola Centre. Retrieved from <https://centroloyolavitoriagasteiz.files.wordpress.com/2014/01/claves-de-espiritualidad-cristiana.pdf>
- O’Malley, J. (1993). *The first Jesuits*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Sáez de Santamaría. (1978). *Historia de la Universidad de Deusto*. Bilbao, Spain: La gran enciclopedia vasca.

- Sobrino, J., & Alvarado, R. (1999). *Ignacio Ellacuría: Aquella libertad esclarecida*. Santander, Spain: Sal Terrae.
- Society of Jesus. (1967a). General Congregation 31, Decree 28: “The Apostolate of Education.” Retrieved from http://www.sjweb.info/documents/education/CG31_D28_ENG.pdf
- Society of Jesus. (1967b). General Congregation 31, Decree 29: “Scholarly work and research.” Retrieved from http://www.sjweb.info/documents/education/CG31_D29_ENG.pdf
- Society of Jesus. (1975). General Congregation 32, Decree 4: “Our Mission Today: The service of faith and the promotion of justice”. Retrieved from http://www.sjweb.info/sjs/documents/CG32_D4_eng.pdf
- Society of Jesus. (2008). General Congregation 35: Decree 3: “Challenges to our Mission Today Sent to the Frontiers.” Retrieved from http://www.sjweb.info/sjs/documents/CG35_D3_eng.pdf
- Society of Jesus. (2017). General Congregation 36: Rowing into the deep. Documents of General Congregation 36 of the Society of Jesus. Retrieved from https://jesuits.eu/images/docs/GC_36_Documents.pdf
- Sosa, A. (2017). Speech at the University of Antonio Ruiz de Montoya. Retrieved from http://www.sjweb.info/documents/assj/2017.03.23_Peru_ENG.pdf
- Spadaro, A. (2013). Interview with Pope Francis. Retrived from https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco_20130921_intervista-spadaro.html
- University of Deusto. (2015). *Identity*. Retrieved from <http://www.deusto.es/cs/Satellite/deusto/en/university-deusto/information-about-deusto/the-university/history-0>
- Valero, U. (2007). La Compañía de Jesús después del Concilio Vaticano II. In J. I. Tellechea Idígoras, et al., *Jesuitas: una misión, un proyecto* (pp. 107-130). Bilbao, Spain: Universidad de Deusto.