

WHERE ARE THE WOMEN? A FEMINIST RHETORICAL CRITICISM OF JESUIT DISCOURSE

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Integrating feminism of women into an inherently patriarchal 2,000-year-old religious organization has been one of the tasks of the Catholic church as it has moved into the 21st century. This has been inexplicably complicated by the deity of the faith being a male, celebrated by all but guided by a tradition of a male-only apostolic lineage. How do women, who for centuries were relegated to the domestic sphere, find their place in the church? There are religious orders for women to bind themselves to the Catholic tradition. Yet, they are still a form of domestication with minimal, low-level authority and leadership in the church. What is left for the women who sit in the pews looking up to the altar?

In 1995 at their 34th General Congregation (GC), the Society of Jesus issued decree 14 "Jesuits and the Situation of Women in the Church and Civil Society". The document was a partial answer to integrating women into the Catholic church. It offered eight action steps: "explicit teaching of the essential equality of women and men", "support for liberation movements which oppose the exploitation of women and encourage their entry into political and social life", "specific attention to the phenomenon of violence against women", "appropriate presence of women in Jesuit ministries and institutions", "genuine involvement of women in consultation and decision-making", "respectful cooperation with our female colleagues in shared projects", "use of appropriately inclusive language in speech and official documents", "the elimination of all forms of illegitimate discrimination

between boys and girls in the educational process”.¹ Instead of alienating women from the work of the order, the Jesuits that authored the decree invited them into a camaraderie. The Jesuits identified the oppressive reality for women, mentioned the benefit of their relationship with women, as well as had women edit the document throughout the drafting process. This served as a promotion of self-determination by expressing the Jesuit’s allyship for women’s causes.

Now 25 years removed from the introduction of GC 34 Decree 14, audiences of the Catholic order have to ask, “so what?” Though some Jesuits ears may perk up when Decree 14 is mentioned, there is not much being done with the document by the order’s leadership. It seems to just sit on the shelf of Jesuit organizational life. If this decree was intended to address and act upon the social context of its time, why has there been minimal organizational effort from the Jesuits to do so? Obviously, the topic of women within the Catholic church begs for a feminist rhetorical criticism, but there is more than just the gendered nature that prompts this criticism choice. There has been minimal Communications Studies scholarship that conducts a feminist critique of religious documents. Moreover, there is almost an absence of this critique on patriarchal Christian texts. Since Pope Francis has established a new commission to study the diaconate for women, the question of their role in the church is becoming ever more prevalent. In this essay I explore the dichotomy of women’s advancement and its own moral positioning through the discourse of the Jesuit GC34 Decree 14. Following this, I also examine how this discourse compares to that of the other Jesuit and papal documents while locating the female voices in Decree 14.

The Society of Jesus: Mission and Context

The Society of Jesus was founded in 1534 by St. Ignatius of Loyola in the spirit of finding God in all things and mission themselves *Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam* (For the Greater Glory of God). An exclusively male religious order of the Catholic church comprised of Priests and Brothers, the Jesuits primarily speak with a unified male voice on matters regarding faith and society. However, in their ministry

¹ General Congregation 34, “Jesuits and The Situation of Women in Church and Civil Society.” (1995).

http://www.sjweb.info/documents/sjs/docs/Dr%2014_ENG.pdf

outreach they seek collaboration with others who share their values. Laypersons from all walks of life, including women, are invited to share in the mission of the Jesuits and become part of the extended Jesuit family. Their primary ministry of higher education seeks to educate the whole person – mind, body, and soul – and form them into leaders for a more just world.

There are six charisms that guide the curriculum of Jesuit education, and all other Jesuit ministries. Four that originate with the founding: *Magis*, *Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam*, *Unity of Heart, Mind, & Soul*, and *Cura Personalis*. Two more contemporary charisms include *Men and Women For and With Others*, and *a Faith That Does Justice*. These two emerged when Fr. Pedro Arrupe, who is credited with being the second founder of the Society of Jesus, defined “works of justice” in the early 1970’s and called on the order to make it their prime objective to form Men and Women for and with others in order to seek justice for the ever-growing marginalized populations. At the time, this was a radical change. The Jesuits’ embrace of ‘liberation theology’ was a more leftist perspective within the Catholic Church. They aligned their vision of justice work as being the intention of God himself; God identifies with the poor and the marginalized. Since this adoption of ‘liberation theology’ Jesuits have been characterized as being the more liberal order of the Catholic church, almost dividing them from the more traditional social values and beliefs of the main Catholic clergy.²

A few decades after Fr. Arrupe’s move toward liberation theology, this commitment to justice work was reiterated at the 34th General Congregation in 1995 Decree 3 “Our Mission and Justice”.

“The promotion of justice has been integrated into traditional ministries and new ones, in pastoral work and social centers, in educating ‘men and women for others,’ in direct ministry with the poor. We also acknowledge our failures on the journey. The promotion of justice has sometimes been separated from its wellspring of faith. Dogmatism or ideology sometimes led us to treat each other more as adversaries than as companions. We can be timid in challenging ourselves and

² This ‘leftist’ perception has been a point of criticism for the Society of Jesus. Now with Francis taking on the papal authority as an ordained Jesuit, the perceived liberal mission and ministry of Jesuits has become, in a sense, more mainstream within the Church.

our institutional apostolates with the fullness of our mission of faith seeking justice.”³

Acknowledging the limitations that their mission work faces, the Jesuits were seeking to renew this commitment with a more conscientious focus in 1995 in their embrace of justice that extends to the poor and often marginalized members of our society.

Another important dimension to note is the state of the feminist movement at the time Decree 14 was written. The third wave of feminism highlighted the voices of minorities and women of color who had felt left out of the conversation during the women’s suffrage and reproductive rights movements. This turning point was especially embodied in the United Nation’s 1995 4th Conference on Women when the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action was unanimously adopted by more than 180 countries.⁴ This action plan was designed to promote gender equality across the world with twelve critical areas of concern: women and poverty, education and training of women, women and health, violence against women, women and armed conflict, women and the economy, women in power and decision-making, institutional mechanism for the advancement of women, human rights of women, women and the environment, as well as the girl-child.^{5 6}

The preparation for the 1995 United Nations Beijing Conference engendered opportunities for countries, governments, and other institutions and organizations to respond --including the Catholic Church. About that same time, Pope John Paul II published his open “Letter To Women” and women began to question where their voice was within it. In the letter, John Paul II tried to translate a secular social movement of reclaiming women’s role in society into a Christian context. Yet, of the letter’s 4,200 words ‘sorry’ is only used once and

³ General Congregation 34, “Our Mission and Justice,” (1995).

https://jesuitportal.bc.edu/research/documents/1995_Decree3GC34/.

⁴ “World Conferences on Women,” *UN Women*, accessed May 15, 2020, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/how-we-work/intergovernmental-support/world-conferences-on-women>

⁵ Since the conference, the document has been adapted into national agendas and continually reviewed by the UN council.

⁶ “World Conferences on Women,” *UN Women*, accessed May 15, 2020, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/how-we-work/intergovernmental-support/world-conferences-on-women>

'apologize' is never used. The letter ultimately served as a letter of gratitude for women's gifts. He mentions that the UN's work is being circulated throughout the various conferences of Bishops, but never articulates how the church is tangibly implementing it in its "broader vision...to promote the *cause* of women in the Church and today's world."

A Feminist Criticism of Jesuit GC34 Decree 14

As noted, there is a great contrast between women's advancement and the Church's own moral positioning. It is important for rhetors to recognize both the contexts of their discourse as contingent and building upon one another, as well as the "inherent variability and multiplicity" of their audiences.⁷ Moreover, there is a palpable power dynamic that is present within all these documents and especially Decree 14. Being articulated by authority figures of the Jesuits and the Pope himself, the discourse of these documents is a "political practice through which power ebbs and flows."⁸ Decree 14's argument for a greater inclusivity of women into the Church embodies the Jesuit mission of working with the marginalized, while also challenging the norms of the Catholic church at large to thank women for their gifts. The intersections of gender and religion being historicized "becomes more interesting for critics while its political utility is made less predictable."⁹

I examine the intersections of gender and religion through discourse. Discourses not only characterize the ideas of the rhetors themselves, but the audiences they address.¹⁰ In the case of these documents, that is women. Discourse represents "an analysis of the language seen as a system, as a form of interaction, as the social and

⁷ Bonnie J. Dow, "Authority, Invention, and Context in Feminist Rhetorical Criticism," *Review of Communication* 16, no. 1 (January 2016): 67.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Andreea-Nicoleta Voina and Ada-Maria Țirlea, "Feminist Rhetoric in Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton's Discourse," *PCTS Proceedings (Professional Communication & Translation Studies)*, no. 10 (June 2017): 82.

cultural processes of the language, as the analysis of its social effects.¹¹ In feminist rhetoric, women are not the only ones enabled to produce discourse as men can “circulate messages of feminine nature” and often find credibility and efficiency in doing so.¹² Developing male advocates is integral to women’s advancement as it expands their reach to a wider, more diverse audience than before. Feminist discourse is intended to negotiate “gender identities, advancing an ideology of equality.”¹³ The Society of Jesus has repeatedly conveyed that their mission is to advocate for justice, and with Decree 14 they are striving to extend that allyship to women.

Addressing the power relations of the existing dichotomy allows the Society of Jesus, as an organizational rhetor, to engage in a more feminine discourse. Furthermore, it facilitates a reconceptualization of the identity of their allyship “in terms of discursive categories.”¹⁴ In bringing attention to this, they are allowing for a “transformative potential to challenge existing patriarchal systems and advocate coming up with strategies to gain equal access.”¹⁵ The Jesuits are not shying away from acknowledging male domination in a patriarchal society. Rather, their organizational mission and ‘leftist’ positioning within the Catholic Church make them a unique rhetor of feminine discourse. And yet this discourse has remained stagnant as Decree 14 was not widely circulated.

I utilize a feminist criticism to explore this discourse. I assume that the patriarchal value systems present within our society “are communicated in the language we use.”¹⁶ The patriarchal value system

¹¹ Zoë Garrity, “Discourse Analysis, Foucault and Social Work Research: Identifying Some Methodological Complexities,” *Journal of Social Work* 10, no. 2 (April 2010): 194

¹² Voina and Țirlea, “Feminist Rhetoric,” 84

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Michaela D. E. Meyer, “Women Speak(Ing): Forty Years of Feminist Contributions to Rhetoric and an Agenda for Feminist Rhetorical Studies,” *Communication Quarterly* 55, no. 1 (February 2007): 7

¹⁵ Soumia Dhar and Christopher Brown, “A Feminist Criticism of the Khajuraho Temple,” *Conference Papers -- International Communication Association, 2007 Annual Meeting 2007*, 6

¹⁶ Lisa Gring-Pemble and Cher Weixia Chen, “Patriarchy Prevails: A Feminist Rhetorical Analysis of Equal Pay Discourses,” *Women & Language* 41, no. 2 (Winter 2018): 83

at play is the Society of Jesus within the larger organizational context of the Catholic Church. I also maintain a political agenda by which to delve into the dichotomy of women's advancement and the Church's own moral positioning, to emphasize that gender is intersectional with religions. Moreover, gender itself must be understood within feminist rhetorical criticism "as a condition of possibility and impossibility" for the exercise of a rhetor's authority.¹⁷

Initially, I followed Hoffman and Ford's Neo-Aristotelian evaluative guide to compare rhetorical strategies with the demands of the rhetorical situation.¹⁸ This was done by recording evidence of the artifacts' situational elements. These included the exigencies, the audiences that the rhetoric is catered towards, as well as the constraints and assets that exist to either ease or complicate answering the identified exigencies. Next, I utilized the feminist criticism of Foss to scrutinize Decree 14.¹⁹ Within this method, Foss denotes a dual focus: identifying and explicating strategies of disruption, as well as promoting liberation and transformation. Again, this criticism is not exclusively female but seeks to "eradicate the ideology of domination that permeate" all people.²⁰ Foss delineates three alternative values to this ideology: *equality* to eliminate classifications of superiority and inferiority, *immanent value* to legitimize all peoples' experiences and perspectives, and also *self-determination* to empower individuals to have autonomy over their life choices.²¹

In order to identify and explicate strategies of disruption, I utilize the five that Foss numerates to code Decree 14 for feminist themes.²² The first is *generating multiple perspectives*, which aims to make space for alternative points of view. The second is *cultivating ambiguity*, where the rhetor intentionally drafts a discourse with a potential for multiple interpretations. Techniques for this include repetition with slight

¹⁷ Nathan Stormer, "A Vexing Relationship: Gender and Contemporary Rhetorical Theory," *The SAGE Handbook of Gender and Communication*, 2006, 255.

¹⁸ Mary F. Hoffman, and Debra J. Ford, *Organizational Rhetoric Situations and Strategies*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2010), 115

¹⁹ Foss, Sonja K. *In Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice*. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2009): 142.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid, 143.

²² Ibid, 148.

changes, preventing narrative closure, and preventing the rhetor and the audience from settling on a hegemonic perspective. The third is *reframing* to compose an alternative perspective “to view a situation from a different vantage point”.²³ Techniques like using a new metaphor or redefining a word, phrase, or title indicate this. The fourth is *enactments* in which there is physical action that dispels the current hegemonic view in order to affirm and reinforce a new, different interpretation of a situation. Fifth and finally is *juxtaposing incongruities*, much like an oxymoron, this strategy acts like enactments to “break down existing perceptions and establishing new ones.”²⁴

Together with the initial Neo-Aristotelian read, this feminist critique will reveal the true Jesuit discourse of Decree 14. I then compare these ideas to the established Jesuit/Catholic ideology present within Pope John Paul’s Letter, the other Decrees, and Fr. Arrupe’s address.

A Feminist Read of Jesuit GC34 Decree 14

I structure my analysis in three distinct parts. First, I provide a Neo-Aristotelian read on the broader contextualizing Jesuit documents of the 1973 Fr. Pedro Arrupe address and the GC 34 Decree 3 to reveal the Jesuit ideology that runs throughout them, to better frame my analysis of Decree 14. Second, I analyze the contextualizing papal document, John Paul II’s “Letter to Women”. This is more relevant to Decree 14 as it was written in the same year and it also draws on some general Catholic viewpoints of the woman’s role in the church. Finally, I report on both my Neo-Aristotelian read and feminist critique of Decree 14.

“Reading” the Contextualizing Jesuit Documents

Reinforcing the already established Jesuit educational objectives of “a faith that does justice” and “men and women for and with others”, the aforementioned Jesuit artifacts that contextualize GC 34 Decree 14 seek to further claim rhetorical agency for the Society of Jesus. As a governing and dictating body at the General Congregation, or through the voice of leadership in the Superior General’s address,

²³ Ibid, 150.

²⁴ Ibid, 154.

they identify the exigencies and conflicts that face the Society at that time. Mainly this exigency is about a re-direction for the Society in modern times, a focus on greater inclusion and care for their diverse world. The Arrupe address initially instructs that the central Jesuit objective is one of justice, "...above all make sure that in the future the education imparted in Jesuit schools will be equal to the demands of justice in the world."²⁵ Moreover, he makes an emphatic point that the Society needs to be "...not merely resisting unjust structures and arrangements, but actively undertaking to reform them."²⁶ There is palpable urgency in this remark, and throughout the other documents. It marks the need for education for future generations with awareness and a conscious effort towards justice work.

In GC 34 Decree 3, the Jesuits note that the common charge to do the work of justice "is deeply rooted in the Scriptures, Church tradition, and our Ignatian heritage."²⁷ This builds credibility with an array of the Society's audiences by referring to their doctrinal heritage in accordance with the Jesuit mission and ministry work. They also connect this extensive heritage back to the two contemporary Jesuit charisms of solidarity. "In justice, we must counter [consequences of globalization] by working to build up a world order of genuine solidarity, where all can have a rightful place at the banquet of the Kingdom."²⁸ They trace this work back to their origins through religious language. As a Catholic order it is in their prayers and religious ceremonies that they renew their spirits to be able to work in their ministries. Establishing a bond between a scriptural reference, "kingdom of God", and the work of justice and solidarity solidifies its positioning in the Society's mission. As these documents function as chronological building blocks for one another. Altogether, they build a body of mission-oriented rhetoric to disseminate throughout the Society, its ministries, and even their more diffused audiences.

"Reading" The Pope's Open Letter to Women

²⁵ Pedro Arrupe, "Men for Others." (1973).

https://jesuitportal.bc.edu/research/documents/1973_arrupemenforothers/.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ General Congregation 34, "Our Mission and Justice."

²⁸ Ibid.

Responding to the exigency of the papal situation with the United Nations Women's Conference in 1995, then Pope John Paul II writes this letter as his apology to women. "At the threshold of the Third Millennium we cannot remain indifferent and resigned before this phenomenon."²⁹ Here, John Paul II is drawing on the urgency of acting now for both the sake of future generations, and because of the Catholic church's need to speak to women while the conference drew great attention. He recognized a need for institutional inclusion of women and articulated this in his letter, "[...]in a special way States and international institutions, should make every effort to ensure that women regain full respect for their dignity and role."³⁰ Yet, this inclusion is generalized to institutions at large, not specifically within the Catholic church.

This letter's exigencies are eased with three rhetorical assets. First, John Paul II makes mention of female representation in cultural contexts. "In all these areas a greater presence of women in society will prove most valuable...it will force systems to be redesigned in a way which favours the processes of humanization."³¹ This comes at a time in which more and more women are becoming visible in leadership positions. In the United States Madeline Albright has just become the first female secretary of state, Ruth Bader Ginsburg has just been nominated to sit on the same Supreme Court she had argued discrimination cases in front of. By affirming this cultural shift, John Paul II is aligning himself with a broader female audience beyond the Church.

Second, he calls to mind systemic patriarchal oppression, an appealing point in the context of the third wave of feminism. "Women's dignity has often been unacknowledged and their prerogatives misrepresented; they have often been relegated to the margins of society and even reduced to servitude."³² This also serves to constrain the overall message, as it never explicitly calls systemic patriarchal oppression just that. Third, John Paul II acknowledges women as essential as they "[...]exhibit a kind of affective, cultural and spiritual

²⁹John Paul, "Letter to Women," (1995)

http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1995/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_29061995_women.html.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

motherhood which has inestimable value for the development of individuals and the future of society.”³³ This is specifically meant for the functional audiences of church ministries, especially in educational settings. Their “inestimable value” deems them an asset for the continuity of the Catholic church’s work. Women, overall, is intended for a diffused audience but serves to benefit both his functioning and enabling audiences of consecrated/lay women.

“Reading” Jesuit GC 34 Decree 14

Preceding the letter from Pope John Paul II, GC 34 Decree 14 operates as a preliminary response to the third wave of feminism for the church, especially the role of women in the Society. This begins with recalling the original charge to work for justice, “In making this response we are being faithful, in the changed consciousness of our times, to our mission: the service of faith, of which the promotion of justice is an absolute requirement.”³⁴ The governing and dictating body of the General Congregation is grounding itself in its contemporary missioning, framing this decree as fulfilling that. The authors of this Decree also take the opportunity to offer their gratitude for women, “Many women have helped to reshape our theological tradition in a way that has liberated both men and women. We wish to express our appreciation for this generous contribution of women...”³⁵ This language does everything short of call women an asset to the Society. Authors of the decree took this as an opportunity to publicly and explicitly articulate their gratitude for women's contributions. This is carried by a cogent appreciation for the dynamic work women have done, especially in the phrase “reshape our theological tradition.”

Easing the Society’s ability to answer these exigencies are three rhetorical assets. First, the authors acknowledge the limitation of vocality in the matter as they only speak with a male perspective. “We do not presume that there is any one model of male-female relationship to be recommended...Rather we note the need for a real delicacy in our response.”³⁶ They are subjecting the Society to humble themselves before women in growing their collaborative relationship with them.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ General Congregation 34, “Jesuits and The Situation.”

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

This subservience to the greater knowledge that can be drawn out from collaboration with both men and women, not just men alone, serves as an asset that falls on receptive ears of a wider audience. Second, the authors also acknowledge that this document is only as effective as the audiences' ability to interpret with clarity. "Without listening, action in this area, no matter how well-intentioned, is likely to by-pass the real concerns of women and to confirm male condescension and reinforce male dominance."³⁷ Interpretation of this is dependent upon the cultural contexts from which either the GC delegates themselves are coming from, or the people and ministries to whom they will bring it back. It could either serve to enhance or constrain the Decree's rhetoric. This strong, instructive language either primes the pump in the 'progressive' Western world or incites debate in more female oppressive regions of the globe. Third, the authors individuate the reality of the injustices that have been perpetuated against women. "There is a 'feminization of poverty' and a distinctive 'feminine face of oppression'."³⁸ Here, the Decree is able to characterize women within the context of the Jesuit's ongoing mission of working with marginalized populations. It signals an emphasis on the past state and ongoing treatment of women concurrent with the Jesuit's articulation of their recognition of past state and ongoing treatment of women.

Since the document was crafted with women's issues in mind, GC 34 Decree 14 warrants a feminist critique where I look for the five strategies of disruption of Foss. In *generating multiple perspectives* throughout the document there is definite rhetoric that emphasizes making space for women. Specifically, this is done by identifying alternative points of view by calling to mind limitations of the society. "we are more aware than previously that it is indeed a central concern of any contemporary mission...It has a universal dimension...it cuts across barriers of class and culture. It is of personal concern to those who work with us in our mission, especially lay and religious women."³⁹ Here, the authors actually distinguish that lay and religious women are stakeholders of the Society, who have perspectives needed for its work. They also attempt to situate the reality of women within patriarchal oppression, "It is embedded within the economic, social,

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

political, religious and even linguistic structures of our societies.”⁴⁰ Yet, the Society also cautions that there is not any single dialogue or solution that will remedy this issue. “We do not presume that there is any one model of male-female relationship to be recommended, much less imposed.”⁴¹ The authors of the Decree try to distance themselves from any single narrative or any single point of view by employing this strategy. In doing so, they are able to establish that the Decree, or the Jesuit ideology in general, is not the dominant perspective or the only one available.

In *cultivating ambiguity* within GC 34 Decree 14, there is evident uncertainty in the specific audience the document is trying to address. The authors of the Decree express gratitude for women that serve the interests of the church. “We wish to express our appreciation for this generous contribution of women, and hope that this mutuality in ministry might continue and flourish.”⁴² Is this just to thank women who work in retreat and parish life, or education too? Moreover, is the ministry for women limited to these roles? This incertitude pervades the Decree. The authors go on to repeat this gratitude multiple times with only slight variation. “We thank women for the lead they have given...we thank women religious...”⁴³ There is no direct attribution, but rather it is more spread out to craft a more generalizable address. Also, there is uncertainty in the ways in which Jesuits are meant to implement the calls for inclusion of women that this Decree articulates. “Sensitivity is needed to avoid using any one, simple, measurement of what counts as discrimination.”⁴⁴

By allowing for more individual interpretation, the Society is cautioning against taking any one point of view or perspective. This is reinforced by cautioning Jesuits against falling back into patriarchal division. “We should be particularly sensitive to adopt a pedagogy that does not drive a further wedge between men and women who in certain circumstances are already under great pressure from other divisive cultural or socio-economic forces.”⁴⁵ In stating this, they are calling on the Society to be mindful of the impact of the measures they

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

take. This prevents narrative closure of how to be inclusive of women, even amidst the vulnerable populations that they serve. They also maintain that there is no definitive hegemonic course of action to maintain obedience to this Decree. "In this context we ask Jesuits to live, as always, with the tension involved in being faithful to the teachings of the Church and at the same time trying to read accurately the signs of the times."⁴⁶ Here, the authors are urging their fellow Jesuits to not only attend to the demands of the issue at hand, but to the ongoing work of their vocation in the Society. This implores the Society to enlist in this allyship while also still remaining true to their identity as Jesuits. Yet, they do not mandate specific actions. Rather the authors are underscoring the importance of maintaining their religious heritage by reading Scripture, while also adhering to the contemporary mission of the Society.

In utilizing the disruption strategy of *reframing* GC 34 Decree 14 is working within the rhetorical, and material, situation to redefine two key points. First, is the situation of women themselves. The authors identify that "There is a 'feminization of poverty' and a distinctive 'feminine face of oppression'."⁴⁷ Up until this point, there have been no Decrees from any contemporary General Congregations that address the concerns of feminism, much less frames them through the lens of deep marginalization. Putting on a feminine face of poverty not only humanizes their work of justice, but it also prompts Jesuits to pay attention to the women of their work. Second, the Decree also redefines the context of the Society's relationship to women. It pointedly asks for Jesuits "...to align themselves in solidarity with women. The practical ways of doing this will vary from place to place and from culture to culture, but many examples come readily to mind..."⁴⁸ The Decree goes on to list five of these "practical ways" that include paying more attention to the violence perpetrated against women, "appropriate the presence of women in Jesuit ministries", as well as including women in decision-making processes for ministry work.⁴⁹ This is a specificity that contrasts the two aforementioned strategies of disruption, as it offers that tangibility of the inclusion work that is at the heart of the Decree's message.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Enactment as a strategy of disruption is the more physical action that dispels the current hegemonic view in order to affirm and reinforce a new, different interpretation of a situation. As this is a written document, there is no physicality present beyond the written calls to action. Yet, Foss mentions that “rhetoricians who employ enactment act and feel differently even when external conditions remain the same. They act as if the changes they desire in the world have already occurred.”⁵⁰ Throughout the Decree the enactment is one of non-domination. This takes form in two ways. First is the reiteration to act in a way that is counter-cultural for the Society, “In making this response we are being faithful, in the changed consciousness of our times, to our mission...”⁵¹ Reading the signs of the times, the Society is adapting their mission in order to best serve the world in the state that it is. Second, is the actual invitation to act. “In the first place, we invite all Jesuits to listen carefully and courageously to the experience of women. Many women feel that men simply do not listen to them...it will bring about change.”⁵² Even though this seems simplistic, it is a means by which women can be included in on the conversation and Jesuits can live out the aforementioned five practical ways. It serves as a call to action that bridges the tangible with the abstract of the Decree’s overall message.

Finally, the last strategy of disruption that is apparent in GC 34 Decree 14 is that of *juxtaposing incongruities*. Merging categories once thought to be mutually exclusive, the authors are seeking to unite the values Catholic church with the interests of the women’s movement. “Pope John Paul II in particular, has called upon all men and women of good will, especially Catholics, to make the essential equality of women a lived reality. This is a genuine ‘sign of the times’.”⁵³ Here, the authors are seeking to re-establish the women’s movement at the forefront, reiterating that it is not just a cultural relic of the 1970’s.

Through cataloging the rhetorical components of these artifacts, we are afforded greater insight into the ideologies that are predominant within them. This was first done by reviewing GC 34 Decree 14 within the broader Jesuit context. Next, Decree 14 was considered in light of Pope John Paul II’s “Letter to Women” as they are situated within the

⁵⁰ Foss 152

⁵¹ General Congregation 34, “Jesuits and The Situation.”

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

1990's third wave of feminism. Lastly, all the features of Decree 14 are analyzed for their ideological correlation to the other artifacts.

Discussion and Contribution to Rhetorical Theory

The contextualizing Jesuit artifacts bolster the notion that the mission of the Society of Jesus is to work for justice. This comes from both their articulation of the specific doctrine of this mission, as well as the imaginative ways in which they can live this out. While delineating solutionary measures for individuals and institutions to implement mission they intentionally prevent narrative closure. This cultivation of ambiguity is intended to generate honest conversations, in that they are not mandating standards across the order but rather allowing for individual Jesuit ministries to envision this action for their own situations. In hoping to transform dominating structures and relations in Jesuit ministries, these artifacts identify that their work is not meant to focus merely on political and economic justice. Rather it must consider the intersecting dimensions, of a social analysis, that constitute the varying cultures and communities in which they live and work. Moreover, it reframes mission in a more tangible form of solidarity.

In Pope John Paul II's "Letter To Women" he asks his audience to reflect with him on the reality of womanhood. Though the word "sorry" only appears once, the letter serves as an apology to women on behalf of the church. Recognizing the oppressive forces that have both held back and continue to restrain women throughout the world, John Paul II also adds his hope for the future of society. He points out that an increase in personal rights and general acceptance are "a matter of justice but also of necessity".⁵⁴ In addition to his apology, John Paul II also offers his gratitude for womanhood. He credits them with the world's sense of compassion, admiring their ability to connect on a level that maximizes the personal during their interactions. He also expresses their quintessence in the human race, calling them "part of the essential heritage of mankind and of the Church herself."

Adding a more specified tenet to the Society's articulated mission, GC 34 Decree 14 seeks to continue dialogue on the role of women in Jesuit ministry. It begins by calling to mind the context in which this is written, enhancing the order's mission while also journeying with those often not included in on these conversations. Next it progresses into

⁵⁴ John Paul, "Letter to Women."

conversation on the discrimination and exclusion of women. Specifically, it addresses transgressions against women, especially in Jesuit institutional life. The order offers eight specific actions which Jesuits and laypeople can implement, in order to be more intentionally conscious of including women. Overall, this serves as a call to action to offer a more intentional invitation to commit the society in growing in mission with the value “men and women for and with others”. Yet, this does not totally grant agency to the rhetor(s) as they remind their audience that they have no expertise in the matter as they are not women.

Though they make mention of their relationships with women, there is still an implication that Jesuits do not particularly have any authority in speaking about women’s issues. Offering a listening ear as Jesuits ministering to and accompanying women underscores the Decree’s invitation to enact gender inclusion. Alongside the mission of journeying with and caring for the marginalized people of the world, the functioning audience of Jesuits within the order felt divided. It was almost as if they were at the crossroads of either taking GC 34 Decree 14 as a charge to go forward, or finding themselves hesitant in taking on another cause. Yet, this document was also addressed to the additional audience of lay women within Jesuit ministries, as well as a more diffused audience of women in general. The Jesuits, alone, cannot fulfill their mission. GC 34 Decree 14 seeks to recognize this, doing everything short of calling women an asset to the Society. The document intends to assuage these alternative audiences with their explicit expressions of gratitude and desires for inclusion, while also instructing its own within the Society.

This study is, of course, limited in all it is able to achieve. Without interviews to extrapolate the voices of the Jesuits who authored this Decree, we cannot truly determine why this document has sat on the shelf for all of these years. There were 10 different drafts before the final document was composed. Future research should look to the progression of these drafts to extract the feminine influence that supported Decree 14’s composition. Moreover, if we were able to gain access to interview data⁵⁵, we would be able to delve even further into the organizational narrative that this criticism seeks to articulate.

⁵⁵ For future direction of research, it would be best to consult Dr. Margo Heydt, a social work professor at Xavier University. During a sabbatical

In regard to the contribution to rhetorical theory, GC 34 Decree 14 exemplifies the invitational rhetoric that Meyer details. This is based on similar principles of Foss's feminist criticism: equality, imminent value, and self-determination. Meyer details this subgenre of rhetoric as being one where "Rhetors who utilize an invitational style recognize the inherent value in the ideas of others and, as a result, refuse to impose their perspectives on their audience(s)".⁵⁶ By not forcing any one hegemonic viewpoint, invitational rhetoric instead encourages acceptance of the rhetor's point of view because there is no conversion process. It aims to validate alternate perspectives and offer the rhetor's idea for consideration. We see this contrasting from the papal document, Pope John Paul II's "Letter to Women", that engages its audiences with apologia. Rather than offering the 'mea culpa' of an organizational apology, this papal letter is more about transcending the conversation of inclusion of women in the Catholic Church. Pope John Paul II attempts to move deliberations from the specificity of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action to a more general principle of gratitude. He also makes use of differentiation as a rhetorical strategy in that he takes the question of a woman's role in the church out of its immediate context and places it in a larger context of appreciation and equity. In underscoring this distinction, the letter acts as a means for the Pope to repair the image of the Catholic Church as an exclusive patriarchy while reinforcing a more generalized and positive recognition of women.

Decree 14 operates as a bridge between religious patriarchy and the feminist movement coupling two seemingly incompatible interests. While also enlisting the strategy of transcendence, Decree 14 explicitly acknowledges the specific contexts in which the Catholic Church's transgressions against women exist. The authors make mention of violence, poverty, and oppression that pervade the communities that Jesuit ministries serve. What really sets Decree 14 apart from the other documents of this criticism is its strategic use of intentional ambiguity. This does not dilute the message, but rather makes space for conversations about gender inclusivity that might not have happened

she was able to travel across the world and track down the authors, and record their perspectives, while also discovering that there were in fact women who edited the document.

⁵⁶ Meyer, 5.

otherwise. In creating that space, the ambiguity of the Decree delivers an invitation to the Jesuits and other audience members to participate in the Society's new discourse. The intentional ambiguity works in tandem with the overall invitational rhetoric to facilitate institutional change throughout the Society, allowing the authors a greater degree of control over their message that is not offered in invitational rhetoric alone.

This criticism affirms the presence of invitational rhetoric, while also extending it to feminist interests within religious patriarchy. When crafted with intentional ambiguity there is a greater possibility to provoke conversation around organizational issues like diversity and inclusion. Furthermore, it stresses the limitations of apologia, like that of "Letter to Women", in its ability to generate a greater institutional impact when compared to invitational rhetoric. Rhetorical criticism has a direct relationship with authority, understood here in the exercise of power and control. Feminist criticism seeks to untangle these and uncover the driving ideas and beliefs behind them. Without consulting organizational leadership of the Society of Jesus, who is to say why Decree 14 has been seemingly untouched for the last 25 years? Further examination of the discourse in the documents in this criticism has revealed that generating organizational conversations around issues of diversity and inclusion are only effective when they are sustained throughout organizational life.

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