





# Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits



MAR 31 1992

Testing the Water  
Jesuits Accompanying the Poor

*Thomas H. Smolich, S.J.*

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# THE SEMINAR ON JESUIT SPIRITUALITY

A group of Jesuits appointed from their provinces in the United States.

The Seminar studies topics pertaining to the spiritual doctrine and practice of Jesuits, especially American Jesuits, and communicates the results to the members of the provinces. This is done in the spirit of Vatican II's recommendation to religious institutes to recapture the original inspiration of their founders and to adapt it to the circumstances of modern times. The Seminar welcomes reactions or comments in regard to the material which it publishes.

The Seminar focuses its direct attention on the life and work of the Jesuits of the United States. The issues treated may be common also to Jesuits of other regions, to other priests, religious, and laity, to both men and women. Hence the Studies, while meant especially for American Jesuits, are not exclusively for them. Others who may find them helpful are cordially welcome to read them.

## CURRENT MEMBERS OF THE SEMINAR

John F. Baldovin, S.J., teaches both historical theology and liturgical theology at the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley, CA (1991).

John B. Breslin, S.J., directs the Georgetown University Press and teaches English at Georgetown University in Washington, DC (1990).

Michael L. Cook, S.J., teaches systematic theology at Gonzaga University in Spokane, WA (1991).

Brian E. Daley, S.J., teaches historical theology at the Weston School of Theology in Cambridge, MA (1991).

James J. DiGiacomo, S.J., teaches theology at Regis High School in New York, NY (1989).

John R. Donahue, S.J., teaches New Testament studies at Notre Dame University at South Bend, IN (1991).

John B. Foley, S.J., is doing advanced studies in liturgical theology at the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley, CA, and continues his work in musical composition (1990).

Mark J. Link, S.J., of Chicago, IL, works in the area of religious education and has published extensively in that field (1991).

John W. Padberg, S.J., is chairman of the Seminar, editor of *Studies*, and director and editor at the Institute of Jesuit Sources (1986).

Gerard L. Stockhausen, S.J., teaches economics at Creighton University and is a member of the formation community at Campion House in Omaha, NE (1990).

Parenthesis designates year of entry as Seminar member.

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(Tel. 314-652-5737; Fax 314-652-0810)

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Thomas H. Smolich, S.J.

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## *For your information . . .*

The Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality is responsible, as our readers know, for this publication, *Studies*. Another such group, somewhat similar to this one and responsible for another publication, *CONVERSATIONS on Jesuit Higher Education*, has also come into existence. It is the National Seminar on Jesuit Higher Education, a joint venture of the twenty-eight Jesuit colleges and universities and the ten Jesuit provinces in the United States. Its purpose is to reflect on, discuss and ask questions about the work of Jesuit higher education in this country and to put out twice a year a publication for all those engaged in that partnership. This new Seminar has ten members: Jesuits, laymen and lay women, and religious from other orders; they are from Jesuit institutions of higher education, from the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities, and, in the person of this writer as chairman, from the Institute of Jesuit Sources. They presently include faculty members from such fields as history, English, mathematics, and philosophy; the executive vice president of a very large university; a trustee; the assistant for planning at a college; and the rector of a Jesuit community. Those of our readers who are engaged in the work of Jesuit higher education will regularly hear more about that seminar, but I thought all of our readers would be interested in knowing of the new venture. The first issue of its journal, *CONVERSATIONS on Jesuit Higher Education* has just appeared.

The brief piece in *Sources*, a talk by Antonio Araoz, S.J., with its rambling informality and its puns on the word "habit," presents a facet of his character not usually shown. Araoz and Pierre Favre were the first Jesuits that Francis Borgia met, and they impressed him most favorably. Later Araoz turned hostile to Borgia and also to Nadal and Polanco, became somewhat the darling of the Spanish court, and a trial to generals after Ignatius, notably in his determination that no Spanish money go to the Roman College, his advocacy of election of superiors by regular provincial chapters, and his irritation that the general lived in Rome rather than in Spain. Here and in several other talks and instructions to young Jesuits, however, there are a simplicity and an almost naive piety which can be charming.

*John W. Padberg, S.J.*

*Editor*

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# Testing the Water

## *Jesuits Accompanying the Poor*

### Preface

*By daybreak, Jesus came to them walking on the lake. When they saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified, thinking that it was a ghost. And they began to cry. But at once, Jesus said to them, "Courage! Do not be afraid, it is I." Peter answered, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you walking on the water." Jesus said to him, "Come."<sup>1</sup>*

**W**e all know what happens in the gospel story—Peter leaves the boat, walks on the waves, then, seized by fear, begins to sink. Most of us can identify with Peter in this instance: we too have seen our plans left incomplete, time for prayer interrupted by a phone call, or spiritual reading left lying on the floor.

For many Jesuits, our experience with "the faith that does justice" has a similar flavor of great hopes left unfulfilled. We, the

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 14:25-29. All Biblical citations are from the *Christian Community Bible*, 2nd ed. (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 1988).

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*Rev. Thomas H. Smolich, S.J., is the executive director of the Proyecto Pastoral at Dolores Mission in Los Angeles, CA. His work involves training, education, and social-service activities with the community there. He has long-range interests in the area of public policy. His address is Proyecto Pastoral, 171 Gless Street, Los Angeles, CA 90033.*

sons of Ignatius, find ourselves grappling with a new understanding of the world and the Society of Jesus. We look to incorporate faith and justice in our work, but we find resistance—both inside and outside ourselves. And “F & J” (to use the common shorthand term) has this distressing tendency to change on us. Now we hear people talking about an option for the poor, and we find ourselves feeling like Peter—willing to take the walk, but sinking because we don’t have faith in where we are going.

The following essay is an attempt to talk about this walk of faith—making a fundamental option for the poor. Our identification with Peter is our starting point; a broader identification, or solidarity, with the poor is the goal of this journey. All of us, whatever our work or role in the Society, have safe boats that Jesus invites us to leave behind. I hope this essay can help us begin to test the waters around us.

## I. Introduction: Leaving the Boat

### A. . . . I Like My Boat . . .

One of the more influential documents of General Congregation 32 was Decree 4, “Our Mission Today: The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice.”<sup>2</sup> Since its publication the meaning of the link between faith and justice has been debated in every possible place and context. In the midst of the Society’s developing understanding of this mission through the 1970s and 1980s, General Congregation 33 concretized and deepened the call to a faith that does justice. In a profound movement of the Spirit, this congregation stated that the credibility for our mission was found in making a fundamental option for the poor.

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<sup>2</sup> *Documents of the 31st and 32nd General Congregations of the Society of Jesus*, ed. John W. Padberg, S.J. (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1977), 411–38. Hereafter references to these congregations will cite the congregation itself (when this is not evident from the context), the number of the decree, and the sequential paragraph numbers printed in the margins of the text.

What is this fundamental option for the poor? In the words of Donal Dorr,

[w]hat it involves is a response to the structural injustice that characterizes our world. The word "option" suggests a personal choice. . . . I would want to insist that the choice in question is not essentially an act of private asceticism or even face-to-face compassion for a poor person. It is specifically a response at the level of the wider society as a whole, a response to the unjust ordering of society. Therefore, it makes sense only in the context of an awareness of how society is in fact structured.<sup>3</sup>

Two key points emerge from Dorr's discussion. The first is that the context of the option for the poor is the wider society, its structures and ongoing mechanisms. The second is that awareness of how that society is structured is key to "making the option." In other words, the decision to leave the boat may be a personal one, but the commitment to the wider world must eventually take priority. The challenge that these two conditions make to North American values is clear.

Most of us spend our lives and our thoughts in the relatively small worlds of daily experience: work, home, television, recreation, reading. By birth, education, or aspiration, most North Americans identify with the middle class. The natural human tendency to follow habit and routine, when combined with limited experience outside our social class, yields a worldview narrow rather than expansive. Our ability to dismiss the suffering of people living on the street as we drive by on the way to work is simple proof of this. For most of us an option for the poor makes no sense, for there are no actually poor people inhabiting our day-to-day worlds.

Our awareness of the structures of our society is limited by the narrow confines of our experience and by our cultural stance toward social analysis.<sup>4</sup> Much in our daily lives militates against

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<sup>3</sup> Donal Dorr, *Option for the Poor* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1983), 3.

<sup>4</sup> Social analysis is a term often used and seldom defined. By social analysis I mean a systematic reflection on human experience from the

the development of a critical consciousness, the product of ongoing social analysis which enables us to judge and act in ways consistent with internal values as opposed to external norms.

Our culture's oft spoken tenets of individualism ("up by one's bootstraps"), patriotism ("my country right or wrong"), materialism ("I really do need a CD player"), and anti-intellectualism ("money won't solve our public schools' problems") are effective cultural barriers against ongoing, systematic analysis of our society. While we feel sorry for the poor and try to help them (Dorr's face-to-face compassion), we spend little time asking how they got to be poor in the first place.

North American Jesuits are not immune to this perspective, our education and religious formation notwithstanding. Jesuit training in philosophy and theology has emphasized systems of thought, often at the expense of analysis of social issues. Most of us work in apostolates where the poor are peripheral. At the risk of oversimplification, our institutional involvement with the marginalized is designed more to benefit our students (community-service projects) or to offer selective encouragement (help the brightest of the poor meet our entrance standards) than to empower the poor. We usually live on campus or in comfortable neighborhoods, away from daily dramas of survival. Our experience limits our ability to appreciate a different worldview and the need for structural change which such a view might demand.

Appreciating our own situation can help us understand two of the most common Jesuit objections to making a personal and institutional option for the poor. The first catalogs the option for the poor as a foreign idea and therefore not relevant; the second identifies it as synonymous with the faith and justice that we are already doing.

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perspective of communal and institutional values. A Christian social analysis, for example, will use gospel values as its basis of reflection.

**B. . . . I Don't Like the Looks of That Water! . . .**

The phrase "fundamental option for the poor" emerged out of Latin America, particularly from the meetings of Church leaders in Medellín in 1968 and in Puebla eleven years later. The bishops of Medellín made specific reference to the structural injustice of Latin American and world society. Seeing that their people are by and large the victims of this injustice, they cast their lot with their own flock. The legitimacy of this understanding of Catholic social teaching was clarified in the documents of Puebla, in the chapter entitled A Preferential Option for the Poor.

We affirm the need for conversion on the part of the whole Church to a preferential option for the poor, an option aimed at their integral liberation. . . . This option, demanded by the scandalous reality of economic imbalances in Latin America, should lead us to establish a dignified, fraternal way of life together as human beings and to construct a just and human society.<sup>5</sup>

This citation uncovers the root of the objection that the option for the poor is a foreign idea: It is "liberation theology." That is enough to cause many of us to put up our intellectual barriers and wonder about things like Marxism and Catholic thought. Regarding the "taint" of liberation theology and Marxist thought, one must be careful to distinguish between methodology and ideology. Liberation theology as practiced by men and women throughout the world is primarily a method which stresses the role of actual experience in the formation of Christian belief and practice. Christian tradition, values, and teaching are brought into play through reflection on lived experience. This stands in contrast to other theological methods which begin with tradition and interpret experience through it.

The "Marxist" dimension of this fundamental option should not be overstated. Liberation theology has its roots in a culture

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<sup>5</sup> Third General Conference of Latin American Bishops, *Puebla: Evangelization at Present and in the Future of Latin America: Conclusions* (Middlegreen and London: St. Paul Publications and CIIR, 1980), Nos. 1134, 1154.

where Marxist analysis is part of intellectual conversation.<sup>6</sup> (One might add, this situation is true virtually everywhere in the world except in the United States.) Pedro Arrupe, S.J., former general of the Society, addressed this concern in a 1980 letter.

First, it seems to me that in our analysis of society, we can accept a certain number of methodological viewpoints which, to a greater or lesser extent, arise from marxist analysis, as long as we do not attribute an exclusive character to them. For instance, an attention to economic factors . . . or again, a sensitivity to the exploitation that victimizes entire classes . . . attention to ideologies which can camouflage for vested interests and even for injustice.<sup>7</sup>

In other words, Arrupe stresses that methodological agreement does not demand ideological unity. In fact, the method of liberation theology consistently begins with the faith experience of the community. In its reading of the signs of the times, the community may find an economic analysis (for example, our wages are low so that profits can remain high) helpful in clarifying the issues it deals with on a daily basis. This use of methodology is a far cry from accepting an ideology of atheism and materialism. From an active faith perspective, in fact, such an ideology has little appeal.

Leonardo and Clodovis Boff emphasize the distinct starting point of liberation theology:

In liberation theology, Marxism is never treated as a subject on its own, but always **from and in relation to the poor**. . . . Here Marxists are subjected to the judgment of the poor and their cause, and not the other way around.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The tremendous changes in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union will not strike Marx's name from the history books. In a recent conversation I was informed that the fall of the Soviet state is the end of Marxist-Leninist thought; people will now go back to the writings of Marx and Engels!

<sup>7</sup> Pedro Arrupe, S.J., "Letter to the Provincials of Latin America on Marxist Analysis," *Acta Romana Societatis Iesu* 18, No. 1 (1980): 340, par. 5. Arrupe goes on to say that Marxist analysis cannot form "a priori" principles. "They certainly do not flow directly from the Gospel" (par. 6).

<sup>8</sup> Clodovis and Leonardo Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology* (Kent,

Lest this discussion seem too contemporary, the difference between belief and method also appears in the New Testament. Jesus often used a rabbinic style of teaching and preaching, yet his message was far different from that of the scribes and Pharisees. St. Paul gives us another example of this complex relationship in Acts 23. While appearing before the Sanhedrin and the Roman commander, he cites his belief in the resurrection of the dead. This alienates the Sadducees and makes supporters of the Pharisees. Yet his belief is motivated by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, whereas the Pharisees would base theirs on the Torah and tradition. As Paul says, his preaching is worthless without Christ crucified and resurrected (1 Cor. 15:14). For a Christian the same is true of any belief or ideology; it is worthless if not grounded by one's faith experience of Christ.

At the same time, we should remember that the option for the poor has been a part of our tradition from the Exodus to the present. That contemporary terminology for this experience borrows from contemporary conversation should not surprise anyone. Suffice it to say that a phrase developed from an unfamiliar model of social analysis which, nevertheless, names a Christian truth should not arouse suspicion because it is put into words which make us uneasy.

### **C. . . . Am I Going to Get Wet? . . .**

The second reservation about the option for the poor revolves around current progress and practice. "Isn't 'option for the poor' another way of saying faith and justice?" is a common recreation-room comment. In the background of this statement are a legitimate pride in the achievements of most Jesuit institutions in this area and, often, a reluctance to explore the issue further because of personal discomfort or the perceived attitudes of an institution. In the foreground are the difficult, depressing, and deadly

conversations all of us have been through at one time or another when "F & J" came up.

While "faith and justice" is clearly related to "the option for the poor," the concepts are not identical. The "faith that does justice" (or any of the innumerable ways we have linked these words) suggests beginning where we are, a personal or communal process which yields specific actions or commitments. It demands no context for these actions, nor does it establish on whose behalf we work for that justice. An option for the poor suggests movement at the outset, making a fundamental choice on behalf of a specific group of people before any process or action occurs.

The line becomes clearer when we grapple with just whom we mean by "the poor." Once again, all of us have been in discussions where a particular group of people (students, alumni, parents, divorced, separated, and so forth) is defined as the poor and given apostolic priority. In these conversations, poverty becomes equated with personal needs, not gospel or socio-economic considerations.

This grappling with the idea of "the poor" lies in the context of a structural issue: Poverty is not part of our national awareness. Even in a time of recession, North Americans don't see on a daily basis the lack of basic human needs so obvious in so much of the world. Culturally, we blame individuals who are poor for their poverty, and we are unwilling to look at the structural reasons behind the statistics. With due respect for the achievements of our society, there is a grinding poverty in this country, and most of us are unfamiliar with it.<sup>9</sup> The poor are here

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<sup>9</sup> The statistics on just one issue, homelessness, will suffice. In the United States there are 2,500,000 homeless (40% families with children; 33% of all homeless are children under 5); 40,000 families in shelters (4 times the number in 1984); 6.7 million families in danger of losing their homes; 1.3 million families overcrowded, doubled up in apartments; 180,000 shelter beds (155% increase over 1984). See Amata Miller, I.H.M., *Network* 17, No. 3: 2.



with us—seen or unseen, ministered to or abandoned, acknowledged or forgotten.

As Peter Henriot, S.J., suggests, if everyone in need is poor, one can not make a fundamental option.

I do not think it is accurate or helpful to call “poor” all those who have particular needs, no matter how great. They are “needy,” deserving of our immediate care and worthy of our special concern. We should indeed respond to them with our attention, our love, our ministry—but not under the rubric of responding to the poor.<sup>10</sup>

This is not to say that people with needs should not be served. What I am suggesting is that such service be done from the context of a commitment to the poor, a commitment cited as “preferential and nonexclusive” by Medellín, Puebla, and John Paul II.<sup>11</sup> We cannot be neutral; our priorities must be with those who are structurally marginalized from meeting their most basic needs, and our service to all of those in need ought to begin from this understanding.

This is, of course, a challenge for all of us, especially those involved in Jesuit educational apostolates, where the preferential but nonexclusive quality of the option for the poor is crucial. In a recent issue of *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, John Coleman, S.J., argues that Jesuit intellectual life needs the grounding of GC 32’s faith-and-justice perspective if it is to be relevant in today’s world and of service to our students.<sup>12</sup> Father General Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., in an address to Jesuit-university educators, explores this dual focus of commitment and nonexclusivity:

. . . it is urgent that this mission [the service of faith through the promotion of justice], which is profoundly linked with our preferential love for the poor, be operative in our lives and in our insti-

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<sup>10</sup> Peter Henriot, S.J., *Option for the Poor: A Challenge for North Americans* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Concern, 1990), 25.

<sup>11</sup> See Dorr, *Option for the Poor*, 207.

<sup>12</sup> John Coleman, S.J., “A Company of Critics: Jesuits and the Intellectual Life,” *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 22/5 (November 1990). See especially Section V, *Spiritual Timbre for the Intellectual’s Voice*, 43–49.

tutions. It must be up front, on the table. . . . But let it be noted, and let there be no misunderstanding: This option for the poor is not an exclusive option, it is not a classist option. . . . The option is far more comprehensive and demanding, for it calls upon us to educate all. . . .<sup>13</sup>

Our work, then, rooted in a fundamental option for the poor, must be open to the service of all and must reveal a faith manifest in action for justice. Yet a "faith-and-justice perspective" is not necessarily an option for the poor. The key, of course, is from whose perspective justice is determined: the powerful or the marginalized. Those in power tend to say that, if we make the system work better, there will be more justice. The marginalized will respond that the system itself is a cause of injustice.

Is it just that one out of four African-American males twenty-five or younger is in the criminal justice system?<sup>14</sup> On a case-by-case basis, one could say these men are being justly punished. From the perspective of the Kingdom of God and a just society, the horizons for our faith and our work, injustice is evident. This returns us to the essential structural issues in which Dorr situates the option for the poor—the personal must become the institutional.

For personal and cultural reasons, the option for the poor is difficult to deal with. Yet the reality for the Society of Jesus is that our most recent general congregation claimed an option for the poor as essential to the Jesuit charism. How do we, as flesh-and-blood human beings, get to that perspective? We do it by getting our feet wet in concrete experience.

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<sup>13</sup> Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., "Address to Assembly 1989: Jesuit Ministry in Higher Education" (Washington: The Jesuit Conference, 1989), Nos. 69, 72.

<sup>14</sup> See Stanley Meisler and Sam Fulwood III, "Inner-City Despair Yields a Legacy of Crime, Crack," *Los Angeles Times*, July 18, 1990, Sec. A, p. 1.

## II. Narrative: What Does the Water Look Like?

▶ 6:30 A.M.: The day begins for the staff of Dolores Mission Church.<sup>15</sup> It is wake-up call for the ninety-plus men sleeping in the parish church. Many are already gone, however, looking for work in the produce market as early as 2 A.M. Those remaining get up, bathe in the makeshift shower constructed in the rectory patio, and set out to look for work. Most will go to street corners scattered throughout the Los Angeles area. Some will find work today. If it is a good day, most of those will be paid the minimum wage.

▶ 7:30 A.M.: Families begin to rise at Casa Rutilio Grande, a home for Central American refugees. It had been a noisy night: police helicopters swooped in twice looking for drug dealers in the neighborhood. Little Carlos woke up screaming; the noise reminded him of being fired on in his home village in El Salvador.

▶ 8:30 A.M.: Amalia gets her children ready to leave Casa Miguel Pro, a home for Mexican and Central American refugees. Recently abandoned by her husband, Amalia will leave the children in a cooperative day-care run by other single mothers and go out to look for work—a task made even more difficult by her lack of resident status.

▶ 9:30 A.M.: Julio, who sleeps at Dolores Mission, has an appointment at the County General Hospital clinic. After a wait of seven hours, he was diagnosed as having a blood-vessel infection common among those suffering from malnutrition.

▶ 10:30 A.M.: “Tiny” shows up at the door, just released from juvenile hall after a probation violation. Midway through his breakfast burrito, he begins to cry. He hasn’t been able to talk to his father, his stepmother doesn’t want him back, and his mom

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<sup>15</sup> This narrative is a collection of actual events which have happened at Dolores Mission Church in East Los Angeles and Casa Rutilio Grande, a Central American refugee shelter in Hollywood.

says she doesn't have room for him. "It's not right that nobody wants me," he says. "I'm not hungry any more."

▶ 11:30 A.M.: With a broad smile on his face, Marcos introduces Juanita and three little ones to Padre Miguel. Marcos has just returned from Mexico and brought his wife and family across through the mountains to escape detection. A bottle of Coca-Cola is shared—"Bienvenidos" is the toast.

▶ 12:30 P.M.: Rosa comes to the door. She needs money to buy food for her three children. A question about the puffiness under her right eye triggers a story of drunken abuse by her husband. "I have to get back," she says. "Where else can I go?"

▶ 1:30 P.M.: Local gang members start waking up and drifting to the church office. They've been out until 3 A.M., cruising, brandishing weapons, staying on the edge of trouble. Most have dropped out of school; some of them can't read; few are employable; all want a job.

▶ 2:30 P.M.: Noe drifts back to Dolores Mission. He worked eight hours and was paid \$35.00. But he is sad; he misses his family in Jalisco, Mexico. Noe is fifteen years old.

▶ 3:30 P.M.: Angel drops by. He's spending a few days with his family in the housing projects. His scholarship to UCLA has been renewed. He's working, he's happy—and he's worried about his sister, who dropped out of school and is hanging around with gang members, and his little brother, who never pays any attention to his mother.

▶ 4:30 P.M.: Refugio returns to Casa Grande—a day without work. There is no hiding the sadness in his eyes. "They destroy my country and they destroy me here. What do they have against me?"

▶ 5:30 P.M.: Maria, her family, and her neighbors arrive with rice and beans for 125 hungry men. They are members of one of the parish groups that cook a meal once a month for the homeless living in the church and on the streets.

▶ 6:30 P.M.: A wedding rehearsal begins. Arnulfo and Sylvia will celebrate their fifth wedding anniversary by convalidating

their civil marriage. Salvador, their youngest son, will be baptized at the same time. Sylvia is nervous. "I want it to be simple but nice," she says.

▶ 7:30 P.M.: The one hundred men living at Dolores Mission begin their weekly meeting. Police harassment in the form of tickets for jaywalking, littering, and loitering is on the rise again. The police are cooperating with the *migra* (Immigration and Naturalization Service). "Is there anything we can do?" The meeting divides into groups to plan their strategy.

▶ 8:30 P.M.: One of the Comunidades Eclesiales de Base (Christian Base Communities) begins to wind down after an hour spent in reflection on next Sunday's Gospel. The group shares prayers of petition, focusing on Maribel, whose house was deliberately shot up by drug-selling gang members the night before. While her heart is brave, she has decided to move. "It is too dangerous for my children."

▶ 9:30 P.M.: A lone police car cruises the semideserted streets. The men are inside the church for the night, and scheduled activities wind down. The night's activities heat up. Residents, homeless and ministers alike, pray for a good night—no helicopters, no fights, no bullets, no deaths.

### III. Question: Why Should We Leave the Boat?

**H**ow do we begin to understand the poverty, violence, and hope described above? How do we begin to see those experiences from the perspective of those who live them? An important step is to explore our own Jesuit tradition in the light of the narratives to see what it has to say regarding the poor and our response to their situation.

#### A. The Vision of Ignatius

The development of Jesuit spirituality and our option for the poor clearly follow the development of this orientation in the

larger Church. At the root of a Jesuit commitment to this fundamental option lies the example of St. Ignatius himself. To be sure, Ignatius did not use the language of solidarity and option for the poor. However, his own life points to an identification with the poor grounded in personal asceticism and validated through apostolic effectiveness.

Ignatius's autobiography gives ample evidence of his personal austerity through the process of his conversion and studies. This desire to live the life of the poor was also strong in the original companions of Ignatius.

It fell to the pilgrim [Ignatius] to go with Favre and Laínez to Vicenza. There they found a certain house outside the city, which had neither doors nor windows. They stayed in it, sleeping on a little bit of straw that they had brought.<sup>16</sup>

This simplicity of life is in keeping with the ideals of the Spiritual Exercises, especially in the Second Week's meditations on the Two Standards.<sup>17</sup> Its spirit carries over into the Constitutions.

When other considerations are equal (and this should be understood in everything that follows), that part of the vineyard ought to be chosen which has greater need, because of the lack of other workers or because of the misery and weakness of one's fellow men in it and the danger of their eternal condemnation.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, this spirit of simplicity was present in the ongoing life of the Society of Jesus. In a letter to the university at Padua,

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<sup>16</sup> Ignatius of Loyola, *The Autobiography of Ignatius*, trans. Joseph F. O'Callaghan (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1974), 88.

<sup>17</sup> For a particularly evocative reading of this simplicity in the Spiritual Exercises, see *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: A Literal Translation and a Contemporary Reading*, trans. David L. Fleming, S.J. (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1978), 87 and 89 ([143–46]). Hereafter quotations from the *Spiritual Exercises* will follow this edition.

<sup>18</sup> Ignatius of Loyola, *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, ed. and trans. George E. Ganss, S.J. (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1972), [622,a] (p. 274).

where the community was complaining about the lack of income from the school's benefactor-founder, Ignatius says:

Only this I will say: that those who love poverty ought to love to live it, as much as they can, in poor food, clothing, sleep and in being looked down on. If on the other hand, someone loves poverty but more importantly doesn't want to feel any privation, nor the thought of it, that would be a very delicate person, and without a doubt, would show more love for the title than the possession of poverty, or love more in words than in the heart.<sup>19</sup>

## B. The Vision in Renewal

The sum of Ignatius's thinking is a clear desire to share the life of the poor for the effectiveness of the mission, all other things being equal. The developments in the Church's social teaching have made it clear that things are not equal, that justice and gospel priority demand a preference for the poor.<sup>20</sup> The development of Jesuit understanding of this concept can be seen clearly in the three most recent general congregations, GC 31 (1965–66), GC 32 (1974–75) and GC 33 (1983). The thinking of the Society of Jesus is based on Ignatius's insights and mirrors the development of Church teaching.

### 1. General Congregation 31

The decrees issued by GC 31 begin by citing *Gaudium et Spes* in reference to the "new age" in which the human communi-

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<sup>19</sup> Ignatius of Loyola, *Obras Completas* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1982), 742 (passage translated by this writer).

<sup>20</sup> The evolution of Church social teaching roughly parallels the Society's growing understanding of social-justice issues. For example, Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio* (1967) and *Octogesima Adveniens*, and the Synod of Bishops' *Justice in the World* (both 1971) for the first time speak of the poor—individuals, associations and unions, countries—as the authorities on their own human rights and liberative process. This understanding, fragile at best in GC 31, is echoed clearly in GC 32.

ty now finds itself.<sup>21</sup> Hindsight now tells us that the ramifications of that newness, declared in the midst of the fervor of Vatican II, could not be explored or developed for many years to come. In that context, it is easy to understand why GC 31 adopted a rather traditional analysis and language. The necessary modernization of the legislation of the Society left little time for a broad analysis of the social milieu.

Such an analysis is primarily restricted to the congregation's Decree 32, "The Social Apostolate," one of seventeen decrees in Part V, The Apostolate. Decree 21, "The Better Choice and Promotion of Ministries," introduces the section, which then continues with a separate decree for each of the Society's principal works.

In 1965 the social apostolate is seen as one apostolate among many, and is encouraged to take its place among those having apostolic priority in a particular province (GC 31, D. 5, ¶575). The social apostolate is described as being broader than maintaining social works "among workmen or other groups of the same sort that are especially needy" (D. 5, ¶569), and having a particular call to dealing with "global inequalities" between economic sectors, regions, nations, or classes of nations (D. 5, ¶570). Social centers, where Jesuits trained at the best universities will work, should carry on research, social education, and social action itself in collaboration with the laity (D. 5, ¶578).

## *2. General Congregation 32*

The expansion and prominence of social awareness and rearticulation of Jesuit mission in GC 32 is even more striking in the historical context of GC 31. The brief mention of "global inequalities" in a relatively insignificant decree grew into a social analysis of global inequalities which is the methodological underpinning

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<sup>21</sup> D. 1, ¶1.



for GC 32's description of Jesuit identity (Decree 2, "Jesuits Today"), and the core of Decree 4, the statement of purpose, "Our Mission Today."

"Jesuits Today" unites the Church's social teaching with a key image of Jesuit spirituality, echoing the Meditation of the Two Standards and Ignatius's vision at La Storta: "What is it to be a companion of Jesus today? It is to engage, under the standard of the Cross, in the crucial struggle of our time: the struggle for faith and that struggle for justice which it implies" (GC 32, D. 2, ¶11).

This struggle for faith and justice is made in the context of a social analysis. Belief in a God who is justice because God is love (D. 2, ¶17) links ignorance of the Gospel and the prevalence of injustice. In a world barely acquainted with the Christian message, unbelief does not allow the Gospel to be seen as the primary basis for social analysis and critique, and injustice is an obstacle to furthering the credibility of the Gospel.

In a crucial development from GC 31, GC 32 regards the call to serve faith and promote justice as fundamental to all of the missions of the Society. Faith and justice are not a ministry by themselves; they are the integrating factors of our ministries and inner lives as well as the "decisive choice" which underlies all the decrees of the congregation (D. 2, ¶19).

How is the Society to respond to this call? Jesuits are called to "the common task of radiating faith and witnessing to justice" (GC 32, D. 2, ¶36) in love, poverty, and humility. The discussion of humility in collaboration particularly foreshadows the further development of these themes in GC 33:

[E]ven in those enterprises we can and should undertake, we realize that we must be willing to work with others: with Christians, people of other religious faiths, and all men of good will; . . . and willing to learn how to serve from those we seek to serve. (D. 2, ¶39)

Decree 4, "Our Mission Today," expands the ideas developed in Decree 2. The guidelines proposed for promoting a faith that does justice provide important challenges for Jesuit life. Ac-

knowledging our own inertia as part of the problem (D. 4, ¶76), Decree 4 underscores the increasing inequality of resources and the oppression thereby generated. Our involvement with the world—"Too often we are insulated from any real contact with unbelief and with the hard, everyday consequences of injustice and oppression" (D. 4, ¶84)—our collaboration with others, and a focus on the Spiritual Exercises will provide the context for the apostolic decision making called for in the last section of the document. This decision making stresses the need for social change: "The struggle to transform these structures in the interest of the spiritual and material liberation of fellow human beings is intimately connected to the work of evangelization" (D. 4, ¶89).

In this section social involvement, solidarity with the poor, the service of faith, and the Spiritual Exercises have priority as the components of decision making. The decree makes specific reference to GC 31 and the development of thought that has occurred in the previous decade: "For us, the promotion of justice is not one apostolic area among others, the 'social apostolate'; rather, it should be the concern of our whole life and a dimension of all our apostolic endeavors" (D. 4, ¶96).

### 3. *General Congregation 33*

GC 33 continues the development of our commitment to faith and justice. Saying that it would discuss "only those questions that seemed more urgent, along with some specific matters entrusted to it,"<sup>22</sup> it presents the issue in its principal document, "Sent into Today's World." GC 33 repeats GC 32's mission, the commitment to the struggle for faith and that justice which it includes.

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<sup>22</sup> *Documents of the 33rd General Congregation of the Society of Jesus* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1984), Decree 1, Introduction, ¶4. Hereafter references to this congregation will cite the congregation itself (when this is not evident from the context) and the sequential paragraph numbers printed in the margins of the text. All citations will be from Decree 1.

The primary focus of "Sent into Today's World" is to review the implementation of this commitment in the seven years that elapsed between the two congregations. It confirms this mission of faith and justice as integrative, universal, produced by communal and corporate discernment (GC 33, D. 1, ¶41). In addition, while encouraging the pluralism of ministries in the Society, GC 33 calls for a review of all ministries, traditional and new, through a process of communal apostolic discernment (¶¶42-45).

Section G of "Sent into Today's World," titled Prerequisites for Credibility, makes it clear that the implementation of a faith that does justice cannot be mere rhetoric. It carries with it specific criteria which enable us to judge our response to this call. True collaboration with non-Jesuits and a life-style reflecting the justice which is key to our mission are criteria which have been previously articulated. GC 33 adds that the validity of our mission depends to a large extent on our solidarity with the poor.

So, together with many other religious congregations, we wish to make our own the Church's preferential option for the poor. This option is a decision to love the poor preferentially because there is a desire to heal the whole human family. . . . Directly or indirectly, this option should find some concrete expression in every Jesuit's life, in the orientation of our existing apostolic works, and in our choice of new ministries. (¶52)

It is important to realize that Ignatius's stress on apostolic effectiveness remains operative in GC 33 and its predecessors. What has changed in the one hundred years of Church social teaching, and most rapidly in the post-Vatican II era, is the source of apostolic credibility. Ignatius acted out of a personal asceticism consistent with a more individualized understanding of sin and salvation. In 1992 an understanding of the structural dimensions of sin and their impact on the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God suggests that personal asceticism, as important as it is, is no longer enough to establish the Society's apostolic integrity. The Society as a whole must exhibit the critical consciousness necessary to articulate gospel values, and its members must publicly live in ways consistent with those values if its witness is to be credible.

GC 33 presented the challenge for all Jesuits. If we are to be faithful to the Church and to our call, a nonexclusive preferential option for the poor needs to be part and parcel of our lives. This option cannot be made in the abstract. It is made in our daily experience, through lives lived in solidarity with the poor.

#### IV. Response: We Walk the Water Together

**H**ow do we, as Jesuits, make this option for the poor? GC 32 begins to answer that question when it speaks of solidarity with the poor as a key apostolic decision. Commenting on the necessity of identifying ourselves with those suffering hardship and oppression, Decree 4 states:

[S]olidarity with men and women who live a life of hardship and who are victims of oppression cannot be the choice of a few Jesuits only. It should be a characteristic of the life of all of us as individuals and a characteristic of our communities and institutions as well. (GC 32, D. 4, ¶97)

The place of solidarity in Catholic thought has grown in the intervening years. John Paul II makes it the moral basis for Christian action in the world.

When interdependence becomes recognized, the correlative response as a moral and social attitude, as a "virtue", is *solidarity*. . . . [I]t is a *firm and persevering determination* to commit oneself to the *common good*; that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual, because we are *all* really responsible *for all*.<sup>23</sup>

The solidarity that GC 32 asks of us is a commitment to the poor which should manifest itself personally, communally, and institutionally. The option for the poor, therefore, will be the fruit of the experience of solidarity. Yet if the qualities of Jesuit life described in Part I are at all accurate, such a commitment will not be easily achieved.

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<sup>23</sup> *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, in *The Pope Speaks* 33, No. 2 (1988): 146, par. 38 (emphasis in the original).

The challenge, then, is to learn to live in solidarity. While there are undoubtedly many ways to go about this learning, perhaps it makes sense to walk a simple path, which, by no coincidence, is the path of so many *comunidades eclesiales de base* ("Christian base communities") throughout the world. These local-church meetings are the root of the solidarity movement in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Western world. Their method, drawn from the practice of liberation theology, invites us to see reality, to analyze our experience, and to act on our beliefs.

## A. See Our Reality

### 1. *The Water Looks Different*

We begin by acknowledging that solidarity with the poor will change our way of seeing reality. The first step is asking for openness to another way of seeing the world that we live in. Gregory J. Boyle, S.J., provides us with such an example:

Recently, I encountered a 13-year old crack dealer and gang member standing alone at midnight in an area of the projects where one of his homeboys had been shot the previous night. I warned him of the dangers. He shrugged and said, "Padre, I have nothing to lose." Before long, he was crying, unable to see his way clear beyond the dark confines of his own dysfunctional family and his gang allegiance.<sup>24</sup>

We would like to say that a thirteen-year-old in the throes of despair is an exception. He is not an exception in the world that looms outside, the reality that tries to break through our consciousness from the streets and jails and barrios and county hospitals. Seeing this reality is the first step in the realignment of our spirit.

Knowledge of this reality does not come through books or prayer. It comes through lived experience with the poor and marginalized. This, of course, is not a new idea. While commenting that the Son of Man has no place to lay his head (Matt. 12:34),

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<sup>24</sup> Gregory Boyle, S.J., *Los Angeles Times*, January 28, 1990, Sec. B, p. 7.

Jesus modeled it in his life and preaching. Ignatius had the same insight when he insisted that Pierre Favre and Diego Laínez live in a hospital (places for the poor and dying far different from our hospitals) while attending the Council of Trent. The power of modern-day saints like Ghandi and Dorothy Day also drew from this rich source of lived experience.

How then, do we have this experience and gain its perspective? In some ways, gaining it is analogous to learning to ride a bicycle. Once we learn the set of movements and reactions, riding a bicycle is forever in our behavioral repertoire. But we need constant practice and exercise for the learned ability to keep its edge.

For North American Jesuits, the awareness of a different reality almost inevitably comes from an "insertion" experience of some kind. Typical insertion experiences, such as learning Spanish in Guatemala or living in India, break down our usual ways of living and allow a different understanding of the world to become possible. This breakthrough is an essential first step.

## *2. Maintaining a New Balance*

For the perspective to become part of our ongoing lives and perceptions, however, continuing lived experience is necessary. Ongoing apostolic contact with the poor is the most obvious way to gain and keep this perspective. The narratives of Section II above are examples of the type of experience which both changes one's viewpoint and keeps it on edge. The misery and challenges facing the Latino refugees and undocumented communities of Los Angeles have focused the ministry of a number of Jesuits on the East Side of Los Angeles, the narratives' source. Similar stories could be told by any number of Jesuits in most parts of the world.

If apostolic contact with the poor on a regular basis is impossible (studies, mission, other reasons), living with the poor is always possible. Carlos Sevilla, S.J., former California provincial for formation and current auxiliary bishop of San Francisco, once asked his Mexican counterpart, José Morales, S.J., what had been

the key event in the Mexican Province's renewal. "Breaking up our large communities into smaller groups which live with the poor," was his response.<sup>25</sup> This way of living constantly informs Mexican Jesuits of the realities of their society, no matter what their work or study might be.

Simply stated, making an option for the poor means living and/or working with the poor and taking the time to reflect on the changes it brings in us. We need regular, ongoing experience with the poor to keep our perspective keen and our prayer open to what God is attempting to say to us. Such is the final thrust of GC 33's description of the credibility necessary for our commitment to faith and justice.

This credibility does not arrive out of a Third World novice experience or a summer well spent in a refugee camp. Nor does it necessarily come from the genuine good work for the poor done by many Jesuits in their hours free from traditional apostolates. In both cases the ongoing quality of lived experience is not present. Once we've returned to the boat, we tend to forget what the water was like.

This credibility is not easy. In the circumstances of the poor, our life and our prayer constantly confront us with our limits, our presuppositions, our sifting out cultural differences from true conflicts in values. We learn by mistakes and in exhaustion; like children, we begin to see the world differently when we come to know the pregnant woman who cannot find prenatal care and the gang member who wants to go to occupational school on weekends. In this context it is easy to understand why twenty years of Jesuit conversation about simple life-style has yielded little institutional fruit. Such a discussion outside of a lived reality is experientially irrelevant and doomed to fail.

To summarize, solidarity with the poor is credible only through concrete actions which manifest this commitment. Jesuits who work with or live with the poor have the capacity for a cred-

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<sup>25</sup> Personal conversation between Bishop Sevilla and this writer.

ible solidarity. For this credibility to exist in the Society as a whole, living and/or working with the poor must become the norm of Jesuit life.<sup>26</sup>

### *3. This Water Will Change Us: Living in Solidarity*

This lived experience and our prayer based on it will yield two complementary results. The first is that we will find ourselves in dialogue with the poor about their lives, the lives that we share to a greater or lesser degree. As was stated earlier, most North American Jesuits lead lives sheltered from the reality of the poor. We naturally talk with and think like (to varying degrees) the people with whom we work and live. The same process is true when we live and/or work with the poor. In talking with those marginalized from the status quo, our experience changes, and the needs and perceptions of the community (as opposed to those in positions of power and influence) become the focus of our reflection and dialogue.

This does not mean forswearing friends and family, good nutrition, or a restful vacation for the rest of our lives. Nor does it demand that we close our institutions and end historical commitments in education, retreat ministry, and the intellectual life. What it does mean is that we are open to the changes in our minds and hearts that such a lived reality can bring us. Out of this we will bring our experience of dialogue with the poor to our work, our personal expectations, our interactions with Jesuits, and others outside of this world. We will not be neutral participants in discussions about social issues. We will look differently at the work we do as Jesuits. We will have a point of view from the outside looking in, one very different from prevailing cultural wisdom.

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<sup>26</sup> There will always be exceptions to this normative way of Jesuit work or life. The discernment process which would mission a Jesuit to such a situation would acknowledge that the needs of the Kingdom of God in this instance outweigh the need for a lived solidarity with the poor.



The second result is a change in our (for lack of a better expression) “problem-solving mentality.” When faced with issues such as homelessness or cultural racism, most of us move into analytic modes; we identify problems, define a solution, map out a procedure, and are saddened or relieved that we are not in a position to implement these ideas. As the stereotype goes, liberal thinkers implement programs against poverty, and conservative thinkers tell the poor what they must do to change their situation.

Neither approach works because neither genuinely hears the cry of the poor. Listening to the community forces us to take seriously the experience of the poor and the resources they already have to deal with issues of structural injustice. According to GC 32,

[i]f we have the patience and the humility and the courage to walk with the poor, we will learn from what they have to teach us what we can do to help them. Without this arduous journey, our efforts for the poor will have an effect just the opposite from what we intend, we will only hinder them from getting a hearing for their real wants and from acquiring the means of taking charge of their own destiny, personal and collective. (D. 4, ¶99)

We are no longer problem solvers; in solidarity we become agents who use our training and resources in the empowerment of the community to envision and form its own solutions to its problems. When faced with an identifiable problem or issue, what the community has is usually enough—with guidance, confidence, prayer, and a little good luck.

This model of ministry is often called accompaniment, walking with the People of God as they explore their own calls as loved children of God, members of the Christian community, and agents for social change. The delegates of GC 32 recognized this ultimate goal of solidarity when they stated, “Through such humble service, we will have the opportunity to help them find, at the heart of their problems and their struggles, Jesus Christ living and acting through the power of the Spirit” (*ibid.*).

Accompaniment through solidarity can be expressed in many facets of the contemporary Church: the RCIA process; RE-

NEW, "Re-membering Church," and other parish-enrichment programs; the revitalization of spiritual direction and retreat ministries; and Christian base communities in the worldwide Church. The fruit of accompaniment is a deeper solidarity revealed in the bondedness of leaders and community working together as God's people. Solidarity is the contemporary articulation of the experience presented as normative in the Acts of the Apostles: "Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things possessed were one's own, but they held everything in common" (Acts 4:32).

## **B. Analyze Our Experience**

### *1. How Do We Look at the Water?*

Now that we have begun to realign our way of seeing and thinking through lived experience with the poor, what is the next step to be taken in the odyssey of a spirituality based on an option for the poor? A different experience of life will change our interpretation of the world.

All of us operate out of a constant series of decisions framed by conscious and unconscious processing of social experience. For example, each of us has a specific image for the word "home." When we walk into someone else's house, our judgments about the home, its owner, and his or her station in life are made through a rapid, barely conscious processing of our own experiences of home.

The social experience from which the poor operate is usually quite different from that of North American Jesuits. Another example is appropriate here, that of Michael, who has just celebrated his eighteenth birthday. He has spent the last thirteen months in juvenile hall, accused and convicted of the drive-by shooting death of a pregnant woman. His sentence: twenty-two years to life. It is common knowledge to all concerned that he did not commit the crime. He knows who did it, but he will not reveal the guilty person's name out of loyalty to his "homies," other

members of his gang. They have judged he is a more expendable member of the gang than the actual murderer and therefore can serve the time on the inside. Not long ago, Michael tattooed "SF," the initials of his gang, at the end of his right sideburn; Segunda Flats will serve as his identity in the penal system.

What does one think about Michael? say about him? say to him in a conversation? Most of us would analyze his situation as one of injustice, betrayal, and self-hatred. Michael and his "homies" would see it as loyalty, commitment and identity. Not at issue is who is correct, but the difference in understanding that an educated outsider and an actual participant have of the situation.

Equally constitutive of the difference in perspective is the horizon of my analysis: In the face of this situation, how do I analyze the justice system? my role in it? my views on gangs, incarceration, prisoners' rights? my willingness to work for change in this system?

All of us have views on these topics; they are part of the social experience that enables us to live day by day. Living with and seeing reality from the vantage point of the marginalized affects this perceptual framework. If it does not, then we have not made the fundamental option for the poor that we desire. Our education and training come into play in this area as contributions that we can make in solidarity. An ongoing social analysis fed by this type of experience will help us develop the critical consciousness necessary for Gospel-based action. Our background and resources can help Michael and his homies put their experience in a broader perspective.

## *2. To Look with Love*

As ministers and preachers of the good news, from what attitude or motivation should our social analysis arise? The danger is that it can arise from class-based reflection, ideological presuppositions, or prejudice drawn from limited experience. The Gospel calls us to make this analysis out of love. It is the love that

Jesus has for the marginalized that allows him to know their innermost thoughts, to respond to their situation of alienation and to shame his opponents when they would put the Law before humanity.<sup>27</sup>

This is the key transition in a spirituality of a fundamental option for the poor or, in the words of GC 32, a decisive choice. Our social analysis is what allows and compels us to respond the way we do. Social analysis, based on a love for the poor and marginalized and growing out of personal experience, yields a unique starting point. Looking at Michael with love is far different from looking at him as a young Latino felon or as a person deserving of pity.

A social analysis based on love impels us to action and commitment. This is consistent with St. Ignatius's reflections on the gifts of the Spiritual Exercises: the insight that love is better expressed in deeds than in words.<sup>28</sup> When we identify with the poor, we are compelled no longer to serve them, but to walk with them. We do not look at the marginalized outside the gates; we join their clamoring for the gates to open.

This social analysis (like any other, for that matter) is not value-neutral. Inspired by God's preferential love for the poor, we can not pray for a better world while doing nothing to change it. Most important, we do not have the luxury of uncritical participation in the values and goals of our society, even when our cultural rhetoric seems to offer hope to the poor and marginalized.

A case in point is the issue of youth gangs in Los Angeles. In the summer of 1990, community groups which included several Catholic parishes and organizations began a well-publicized campaign to "Turn the Tide." The goal was to unite low- and middle-income communities in efforts to force gangs off the streets and into prisons. That local news media feasted on Turn the Tide should surprise no one; gangs are most newsworthy and build

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<sup>27</sup> John 4:16, Mark 1:40-42, Luke 13:10-17.

<sup>28</sup> *Spiritual Exercises*, ¶230, 1.

ratings when presented negatively. Church complicity in such a viewpoint, however, reveals a fundamentally unclear and contradictory social analysis.

Looking with love at the gang crisis would have resulted in a different campaign. Effective policing strategy is one part of any crime issue; alternative solutions are equally necessary for the dignity of those involved and for eventual change in the situation. Turn the Tide was anything but conciliatory, making gang members less than human and denying the reality that they are our sons and our future. In the same vein, mainline churches offer virtually no alternatives (drug treatment, employment training) to gang members looking to make changes in their lives. How different Turn the Tide might have been if church leaders had spoken to gang members and worked with them for solutions to gang violence and involvement!

If we are honest, we can acknowledge that our personal and institutional endeavors will have contradictions to a greater or lesser degree. While such inconsistencies can never be totally eradicated, they can be lessened by a social analysis arising out of dialogue with the poor.

For the Jesuit, the root of this social analysis always lies in the love of God and of humanity, a love with which the Spiritual Exercises and the experience of Jesuit life have graced us. Pedro Arrupe captured this attitude in his comments on "authentic fervour" in his 1978 "Final Allocution to the Procurators":

Nadal sums up this idea in a brief pregnant expression of his own: "fervour is the Society." This fervour, born out of a passionate love of Christ poor and humiliated, maintains the Ignatian *magis* in the Society. . . . This fervour makes it so that "From perfect love, with our whole heart, mind and soul, with all our strength, we are led by the Spirit in a sweet, joyous, and lively way."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Pedro Arrupe, S.J., "Final Allocution to the Procurators (1978)," *Five Recent Documents from Fr. General Pedro Arrupe, S.J., on Spirituality for Today's Jesuits* (New Orleans: Southern Printing Co., 1980), 31f.

As we look at our lives and commitments, can we find this Ignatian fervor in ourselves? This same fervor compelled Peter to leave the boat to meet his Lord. We are called to do the same, but we can better walk on the water if, in solidarity, we walk together.

### **C. Act on Our Beliefs: We Walk Together**

How does this spirituality, this point of view, affect our daily actions, our vision and work for the future? In the experience of realignment—of seeing and analyzing the world from the different perspective of living and/or working with the poor—we realize that, however such rights may be defined, human rights are not always presumed for all people. This different perspective, when analyzed in the best of the Jesuit intellectual tradition and empowered by love and a spirit of solidarity with the community, can only manifest itself in a struggle—desire, activity, and celebration of justice discovered and gained with and for those usually left out of its progress.

The idea of the struggle becomes a controlling metaphor for the perspective we bring and the work we do as believers in the good news of Jesus Christ. This struggle has four transcendent dimensions which ground it in our faith tradition and the experience of Christian solidarity.

#### *1. We Discover and Meet God in the Preferential Struggle*

By aligning ourselves with the poor, we encounter our own deep longing for God and the call of that God.

*It was my first Via Crucis—the way of the cross. An older man, Don José, was carrying the life-size wooden cross with some difficulty. As we walked through the housing projects, we sang and prayed the rosary. Suddenly, we turned west, and I saw a huge orange-red sun setting over downtown Los Angeles less than two miles away. So close and yet so far, I thought, as we continued our procession through the projects.*

This type of experience is the root of solidarity. In solidarity, we unite ourselves with those who hunger and thirst for justice. In hearing about their lives—lives filled with pain, flight, brutality, poverty, even death—we also hear of the tremendous hope that arises as they tell their stories. We begin to see the power of God revealed at first in individuals, then, in the struggle at large; at first in the concrete, then in the transcendent. We are energized and drawn into a new world.

This process stands in contrast to the malaise that so often affects our communities, our studies, and our work. Unconnected to the struggle for justice, our lives too easily become closed in on themselves and isolated from the realities of the world. We compete with ourselves for new ways to justify our current work and avoid the challenges of change and the Gospel. Solidarity offers us something more. Can we begin to imagine ourselves living in communities where we are passionate for the people with whom we struggle, filled with intensity for what we believe in?

In this movement of solidarity from the particular to the transcendent, we understand again “the story” which binds us together and urges us forward—the Christ story, the story of the One who thirsted for justice and who showed us how to quench that thirst. We find ourselves renewed and refreshed, put once again on the edge of our vocations as Christian, as minister, as Jesuit.

## *2. To Be Involved in the Struggle Is to Proclaim the Kingdom of God*

This dimension demands that we challenge the system—the “world” of John’s Gospel—so as to transcend it and work toward the Reign of God.

As believers, we are called to bring the word of God alive in the world. For all of us there is the temptation to equate the Kingdom with some worldly reality or at least see it as possible through that reality. Usually, though, the identification of the

system with salvation is subtle. Whatever system we are part of—liberal capitalism, market socialism—presents itself as most capable of meeting the needs of the world. Its ideology tells its members—its believers—that it has the solutions to society's problems and can address them better than any other system. Never mind that the system itself caused the problem which has its poor and marginalized crying out for justice. Jon Sobrino, S.J., deals with this reality in his reflections on the idols of a culture.

There is a deep conviction in Latin America that idols exist in this world. . . . [I]dols are historical realities, which really exist, which pass for divinities, and reveal themselves with the characteristics of divinities. They claim to be ultimate reality, self-justifying, un-touchable, offering salvation to their worshippers, even though they dehumanize them.<sup>30</sup>

Without an ongoing social analysis, we find ourselves imagining the Reign of God in the terms of the system of which we are a part. We settle for less than the Kingdom by making other values (unity, tradition, and loyalty, for example) more important. When such values take priority, we have lost the critical consciousness to see ourselves and our society from the standpoint of the Reign of God.

Every culture has its idols, and no one would be hard-put to name some of ours. Our ongoing dance with death in all its forms is a dominant idol: is there a day when capital punishment, abortion, suicide machines, and assault rifles do not make the front pages? Add to this the sins of racism and sexism (to name but two), and one sees a system at best inhospitable to the values of the Kingdom.

Why are we so reluctant to condemn these idols? Our own inevitable links to the system protect it from the critique it deserves. Having been nurtured on its values, we give them more importance in our day-to-day life than those of the Kingdom of

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<sup>30</sup> Jon Sobrino, S.J., Ignacio Ellacuria, S.J., et al., *Companions of Jesus* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1990), 25.



God. For all of us, life's inevitable compromises ("Don't offend our donors") at times become our guide for preaching the Gospel.

Only a true solidarity, the moral call arising from the shared experience of the poor, can provide the critical stance necessary to examine our cultural heritage in light of Christian commitment. This "arduous journey" of solidarity can transcend the timidity and reluctance we find in ourselves when looking at our own social structures, the places we work and live. Solidarity enables us to ask the question, What would the Reign of God really look like? In that questioning we begin to see the gracious activity of God alive in our world, calling that world to be a place where the meek and oppressed really do inherit the earth. Aware of this gracious activity, we find ourselves able to form a new vision of our works and our lives which responds to the signs of our times.

### *3. The Struggle Itself Becomes Our Source of Hope and Commitment*

Success and failure are the proof of the struggle's value and righteousness. There is nothing new in this idea. It is another way of saying that the blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church.

We need look no further than El Salvador to see this in action. Mixed in with current plans for disarmament and peace are the memories of the 75,000 people who died in more than a decade of civil war. Among the more recent of the martyrs were six Jesuits and two lay women brutally killed by army officers on November 16, 1989. On the one hand, the murder of these prominent, educated victims was certainly newsworthy. But their deaths also serve to highlight the concrete work of the Church in El Salvador, work which constantly seeks peace while not being afraid to speak of the injustice done by anyone to the people of God. As Ignacio Martin-Baro, S.J., wrote in an article published after his death,

[t]here can be no doubt that the changes in the Catholic church . . . have had profound repercussions in Latin America. In El

Salvador, the main consequences have probably been that the sectors of the rural and urban working classes most closely tied to the church have abandoned the traditional belief that their miserable oppressed situation represents the will of God or is at least tolerated by God, and have begun to think that faith in God should guide them toward the construction of a more just and humane society.<sup>31</sup>

Yet this work is not that of superheroes, but of typical, committed human beings. As Segundo Montes, S.J., one of the martyrs, reminds us,

[b]ack in the early 1980's, when the killing of priests was so terrible, I thought of that [leaving El Salvador]. But we decided—there is a saying—how can we leave if our brothers and sisters are not free? This is my country and these are my people. . . . The rich need to hear from us, just as do the poor. God's grace does not leave, so neither can we.<sup>32</sup>

From one point of view, the lives of the six Jesuits, like that of Jesus, were a failure. Yet their deaths generated genuine interest in El Salvador's misery, motivated volunteers to continue their work, and renewed the effort to stop the war now coming to fruition. Fearless in their condemnation of injustice, these Jesuits developed a rootedness in the poor that was ultimately a sign of hope. As much as their vision was the product of their work with the poor, their message was for the rich as well.

Could this not be a model for North American Jesuits as we grapple with issues of crying needs, changing times, and diminishing numbers? Could a dialogue between the poor and Jesuits in a single area yield a vision of hope which could transform a city, our lives, and our work? What might happen if decisions about social outreach projects were made with the poor whom we wished to serve? What would happen if we asked our neighbors, "How can we Jesuits and this institution best be of service?" Such a process would probably form different models of institutional

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<sup>31</sup> Ignacio Martin-Baro, S.J., "Religion as an Instrument of Psychological Warfare," *Journal of Social Issues* 46, No. 3 (1990): 97.

<sup>32</sup> Sobrino, Ellacuria, et al., *Companions of Jesus*, 136f.

commitment to the poor and marginalized and go far to restore the fervor for service that many complain we have lost.

In this spirit, then, solidarity is best understood as collaboration built in hope. Solidarity means sharing the burden and the joy of building God's kingdom among us now. Solidarity itself generates the hope and commitment found in the good news of Jesus Christ.

#### 4. *The Struggle in Solidarity Gives Our Ministry Credibility as Truly Building the Reign of God*

Our experience of the God of the poor and our solidarity with them reveal heroic courage in ourselves. The struggle for a justice built on faith becomes personally sustaining and life giving. To explore the dynamic of this all-encompassing call, we can turn to two documents, one new and one old.

*The Road to Damascus: Kairos and Conversion* is the fruit of two and one-half years of work by Christians from El Salvador, Guatemala, Korea, Namibia, the Philippines, and South Africa. Hundreds of Christians were involved in the making of a document which invites all Christians to participate in solidarity with the poor. As always, the experience of the community proved the primary teacher.

After many years of protest and pleading we began to take responsibility for our own liberation. The Christians who were part of this development began to read the Bible with new eyes. . . . Now we hear God's voice, especially in the cry of the poor, in the cry of pain and protest, of despair and hope.

God is on the side of the poor, the oppressed, the persecuted. When this faith is proclaimed and lived in a situation of suicidal conflict between the rich and the poor, and when the rich and the powerful reject this faith and condemn it as heresy, we can read the signs and discern something more than a crisis. We are faced with a *kairos*, a moment of truth, a time for decision, a time of grace, a God-given opportunity for conversion and hope.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> *The Road to Damascus: Kairos and Conversion* (Quezon City, Philip-

At the risk of linguistic anachronism, let us turn to the example of St. Ignatius of Loyola, in his Meditation on The Kingdom from the Spiritual Exercises.

In the second part, I consider Jesus Christ our Lord and his call. . . . His call goes out to the whole of mankind, yet he specially calls each person in a particular way. He makes the appeal: "It is my will to win over the whole world, to conquer sin, hatred, and death—all the enemies between mankind and God. Whoever wishes to join me in this mission must be willing to labor with me, so that by following me in suffering, he may follow me in glory." . . .

Persons who are of great heart and are set on fire with zeal to follow Jesus Christ, eternal King and Lord of all, will not only offer themselves entirely for such a mission, but will act against anything that will make their response less total. (1995, 97)

For both St. Ignatius and the writers of *The Road to Damascus*, the experience of Jesus transforms their lives. The struggle becomes the controlling metaphor for the believer, motivating us, challenging us, and calling us to an ever-deeper understanding of both the Lord and one another. This is solidarity at its most profound. We willingly join our lives to the hope and pain and faith of others.

In this context the passion of GC 33's commitment to an option for the poor comes alive. Our personal experience of Jesus Christ at a moment of *kairos* not only drives us forward but credibly unites us with others as we walk and work together. As Ignatius knew so well, the struggle will never be completed through our work. Likewise, those working for justice in our day know that the fullness of solidarity will come only in the fullness of time beyond our lives. Yet our lives can only make sense in that context—that which we long for becomes that which we struggle for in solidarity. If we are going to walk the water, we must do so together, and never mind the cost.

*Peter answered, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you walking on the water." Jesus said to him, "Come."*

## Conclusion

**W**alking on water is not easy. It is even harder when we are called to leave behind the way of walking we know and join others in a journey whose end is not in sight. This journey, like all others, will have its share of best and worst moments.

We have alluded to one of Peter's worst moments throughout this essay: his lack of confidence in the Lord's call gets him wet and puts him back in the boat. One cannot say he didn't learn anything from it. In the end, he allows himself to follow Jesus and to be taken where he "would rather not go" (John 21:18): mission, leadership, martyrdom.

One of Peter's best moments comes on Pentecost. Filled with the Spirit, he addressed an international crowd in a way that all could understand. We can only imagine that it was not purely language; there had to have been something in his voice and manner which conveyed the power of the Risen Jesus, the truth and urgency of Christ's message, and the message's impact on Peter himself.

Near the end of the discourse, Peter sums up what the invitation to become believers in the Risen One will entail:

They asked Peter and the other apostles, "What are we to do, brothers?" Peter answered: "You must reform and be baptized, each one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, that your sins may be forgiven; then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. It was to you and your children that the promise was made, and to all those still far off whom the Lord our God calls." (Acts 2:38f)

We know that to be followers of Jesus is to constantly reform our lives, to respond more deeply to the call that we received in our baptism. Yet in his invitation, Peter emphasized the

promise, the promise made to the Chosen People, their children, and all of us who were still so far off.

As we ask ourselves the question, What are we to do, brothers? this paper suggests three key moments in our response of making an option for the poor in a spirit of solidarity. The first is that living and/or working with the poor should be normative for Jesuit life. The second is a social analysis rooted in Christian love which involves dialogue with the poor and critical assessment of our work. The third moment is action, credible participation in the struggle to make the Reign of God a present reality.

Peter's promise—justice, peace, love, forgiveness—is for all of us. Each generation has its way of articulating the word of Jesus. For us, solidarity with the poor makes clear the gospel message. If the promise is for all of us, we can only work as one to make it a reality.

## SOURCES

*Antonio Araoz, S.J.*

### *The Effects of God's Grace in the Society*

*Antonio Araoz (c. 1516–1573), a nephew of St. Ignatius, entered the Society in 1539, before its formal approval. He was considered one of the secondary patriarchs of the Society; Nadal preserves a collection of his sayings along with those of Ignatius, Favre, and Lafnez. He served as provincial and commissary in Spain. A manuscript copybook containing several very informal talks and instructions to young Jesuits is preserved in the Roman Archives of the Society of Jesus (Inst. 186e, ff. 48–65). Only the second talk, "Father Araoz, June 1563: The Effects of God's Grace in the Society," has hitherto been published (MHSI, FN III, pp. 789–91). The translation is by Martin E. Palmer, S.J.*

My plan had been to give you a set conference; it was going to be on understanding and spirit. But then I decided this was a temptation and gave it up. So I would rather give a simple talk about whatever comes to mind. Today a brother was mentioning to me how the grace of God had shone forth in the Society, etc. This is the topic I will take up now; and since you want me to talk, may it be with the Lord's blessing.

There is nothing for which the Society has been more persecuted, or which brought more trouble on Father Ignatius and the rest, than the Exercises. And see the grace of God in them. They were taught to Father Ignatius (as we reverently believe) by Jesus of Nazareth, by the Holy Spirit, when he still had

no education, doing all that harsh penance there in the Pyrenees.

(If you love the Society, pray God that they will never stop using the Exercises, so it will not become paralytic and sciatic, the way I have been for the last nine years.)

I used to say to Father Ignatius: "Father, how is that we give less attention to the novices in the house than they do in other orders, yet men who had been dissipated come out in three days' time speaking and thinking about God and the things of God so well that, if we measure this progress against what we have given them by way of talks or exercises, we see there is no comparison?" This makes clearly visible the effects of the grace of God in the Society.

Now consider: on one occasion Father Ignatius wanted to expound the substance of the Society, and he summoned the Fathers . . . [and then] went on to expound the marvelous hierarchy in the Society, a thing that would be a challenge for a good mind studying it in detail to comprehend fully. Jesus!—house of probation, college, professed house, coadjutors, etc.—what a great thing! It is a challenge to understand any one of these components, and then their subordination and mutual harmony, etc.

It is a notable fact that in matters of the Society's substance they could never get him to alter a single point he had laid down—in other common things, yes. Where were we in this matter of the habit? I was dying to go barefoot, robed in sackcloth, so I could appear holy right off. It's remarkable that after Father had gone about in sackcloth and barefoot himself, etc., he ended up assuming this habit of secular priests—no garb was more discredited and unreligious in those days than theirs—so that, instead of the habit sanctifying the Society, the members of the Society would sanctify the habit. I mean that this habit, which seems so easy, is in other places perhaps the hardest thing of all. And I think I can prove this. Other religious receive the insults and mortification that go with begging alms onto their habits, and everybody reverences the habit. When

one of them ascends the pulpit, the habit alone is a statement and sign that good doctrine will be retailed there. Fifteen years ago, a secular priest ascending the pulpit would have been jeered at. God's grace shines forth mightily in the fact that he has now bestowed on this habit the name and reputation enjoyed by religious, and that the biretta and cloak can rival some cowls hereabouts, and this by means of the Society.

Now consider: the insults they give you, the mortification in begging alms and so on, you do not receive onto your habit, for this habit never had such habits, but rather the habits of avenging any insult and of bestowing rather than begging alms. So all the shame and mortification falls on yourselves, not on the habit.

And with this I will stop. Father Ignatius once went begging alms, and a woman came up to him and said, "Go on with you, with that fine cloak of yours!" He answered, "Madam, I thank God for giving me this cloak." So the habit doesn't give us the same prestige that the friars' habit gives them—and in my view all the different habits in these holy religious orders are the work of the Holy Spirit, and are their individual distinguishing garb which each of them will wear in heaven.

And so now go with God, or you'll be here all night.



## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Editor:

I recall my philosophical studies back in the early sixties. We had a saying: "Change the philosophy and you change the theology." Well, the philosophy has changed, or more specifically, the cosmology has changed. Thanks to David S. Toolan, S.J., for insightfully and lyrically calling this change to our attention in the November 1991 *Studies*.

For the first time ever in the history of the human species we have a scientific, empirical cosmology which is attempting to answer the basic questions: Where does everything come from? Who and where are we now? Where is everything going? These questions that formerly were attempted by the shamans and gurus, philosophers and theologians, are now being engaged by our scientists, whom Thomas Berry calls "the yogis of the West."

The New Cosmology instructs us that we find ourselves in an evolutionary universe which began some eighteen billion years ago and has continuously unfolded itself in space and time. This de-

velopment has involved a movement into greater and greater diversity, complexity, and inter-relatedness both on the physical and psychic levels. And the process continues today.

Until quite recently our cosmology told us that the universe was a fixed reality and that it was merely a backdrop for all human activity. Within this perceptual grid our Western culture was articulated—our economics, our educational and legal structures, our philosophies and theologies.

What a shattering experience it is to discover that we live in a time-developmental universe and that we humans are an aspect of its emergence, conscious celebrators of its beauty, terror, and mystery. Along with David, I hope that this kind of revelation "will make a good story of our passage here," that it will change our destructive behavior and unfold deeper dimensions within our spirits!

John Surette, S.J.

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