





STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS

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**The Disturbing Subject:  
The Option for the Poor**

Essays:

Adrien Demoustier, S.J.

Jean-Yves Calvez, S.J.

Experiences:

Nine U.S. Jesuits

MARCH 1989

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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, laity, men and/or 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.

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THE DISTURBING SUBJECT:  
THE OPTION FOR THE POOR

Adrien Demoustier, S.J. / *The First Companions  
and the Poor*

Jean-Yves Calvez, S.J. / *The Preferential Option for the Poor:  
Where Does It Come From for Us?*

Translations by Edward F. Sheridan, S.J.

Nine U.S. Jesuits / *Experiences of Solidarity with the Poor*

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### For Your Information . . .

The one-hundredth consecutive issue of *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* will be published in this present year, 1989.

If you think that you have previously read that first sentence above, you are correct. It began *For Your Information . . .* in the last issue as it does in this one. I repeat it to call attention again to how **we would like the help of our readers** as we prepare for the one-hundredth issue of *Studies*.

In that issue we hope to publish a selection of "classic Jesuit prayers" that come out of the four hundred and fifty years of the life and activities of the Society of Jesus. **Do you have an example or examples of such prayers?** The prayer may be written by a Jesuit in English or in any other language. We shall see to a translation if necessary. **Please send it to me at the Institute of Jesuit Sources by June 1, 1989.** Please also include as full a bibliographical reference as possible, for example, the full name of the author, the title, publisher and year and place of publication of the book or other source in which you found the prayer. If you do not have all the details, do not let that deter you. Send the prayer with as much information as you have. In advance, thank you for your help.

A little more than a year ago we began a section of "Letters to the Editor." To those who have written, our thanks; to those who have not yet done so, a word of encouragement; your views, pro or con, on the topics treated in *Studies*, we welcome. Letters should ordinarily not exceed 750 words and should relate directly to an article published in *Studies*. They may be edited for reasons of space and clarity, and publication is at the discretion of *Studies*.

Good news for those who have been inquiring about copies of the book: *The Spiritual Exercises: A Literal Translation and a Contemporary Reading*. It is again available in a new printing from the Institute of Jesuit Sources, clothbound at \$13.95 and sewn paperback at \$10.95. To date more than ten thousand copies have been sold. In prospect for

early summer are two new books, *The Spiritual Exercises in Everyday Life: A Method and a Biblical Interpretation* by Gilles Cusson, S.J., and *An Introductory Commentary on the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus* by Antonio de Aldama, S.J. The book by Father Cusson is a complement to his earlier book, *Biblical Theology and the Spiritual Exercises*. The commentary by Father Aldama comes from the knowledge and experience of a man who has spent more than forty years as a researcher and writer on the life and constitutional structure of the Society. Lastly, the previous issue of *Studies* (January 1989), on "United States Jesuits and Their Memberships," brought renewed interest in another IJS book, Carlos Valles's *Living Together in a Jesuit Community*. It is a set of frank and practical reflections on topics ranging from friendship to power, from work to intimacy, from competition to sensitivity, all in the context of Jesuit community life.

**John W. Padberg, S.J.**  
**Editor**



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## THE DISTURBING SUBJECT: THE OPTION FOR THE POOR

### Foreword

John W. Padberg, S.J.  
Editor of *Studies*

On several counts this is an unusual issue of *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*. First, this is truly an international collaborative effort. Secondly, the number of "authors" is larger than for any previous issue of *Studies*. Next, the authors of the first two principal parts of this issue are members of the Society not from the United States but from France, and their contributions are translated from essays presented in the French province. Then, the third part consists of a series of very short personal reflections, all of them originally published among contributions to a booklet prepared for its members by one of the American provinces. Lastly, the original impetus toward using in *Studies* the two French articles came from a member of the Upper Canadian province who also served as their translator. To all of these generous contributors, who will be identified specifically further along in this foreword, go the thanks of the Seminar members and, I am sure, of the readers of *Studies*.

It is no secret that the "option for the poor" and more generally its insertion into the life of the Society have occasioned much discussion, equal heat, and some light in the last decades since the thirty-second and thirty-third general congregations in 1974-75 and 1983. When the opportunity arose to make available to American Jesuits what seemed to the members of the Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality two excellent essays on the subject, they eagerly accepted it. Both

of the essays were originally presented to an assembly of French Jesuits at Chantilly near Paris at the end of 1986.

The first essay, by Adrien Demoustier, "The First Companions and the Poor," situates the early Jesuits and the early Society historically in their contemporary milieu, describes certain of their "exemplary" experiences, and draws consequences and conclusions that will probably for some of our readers be novel and perhaps unexpected. Father Demoustier is one of the editors of the distinguished French Jesuit journal of spirituality *Christus*, and is also one of the tertianship directors in his province.

The second essay, by Jean-Yves Calvez, "The Preferential Option for the Poor: Where Does It Come From for Us?" both recounts very recent history in describing briefly how the "preferential option" came to be and gives a soundly scriptural and theological basis for that choice. Father Calvez is professor at the Institute of Higher Studies in Paris and recently wrote *Foi et justice: la dimension sociale de l'évangélisation*. From 1971 to 1983 he was one of the four General Assistants of the Society.

The addresses of our two principal authors are: Adrien Demoustier, S.J., Centre Sèvres, 35 rue de Sèvres, Paris 75006, France; and Jean-Yves Calvez, S.J., 14 rue d'Assas, Paris 75006, France.

To turn now to the third part of this issue, the Seminar members thought that just as the original French "dossier" included other documents which gave specific details of how that option was being experienced today in France, so our American treatment of the subject might well do the same for the United States. Fortunately, at hand was a booklet prepared by the Oregon Province, *Laborers in His Harvest: Essays by Jesuits of the Northwest on Experiences of Solidarity with the Poor*, containing forty-seven pieces by members of that province precisely reflecting personally on the subject of such solidarity. With the kind acquiescence of Craig Boly, dean of St. Michael's Institute in Spokane and editor of that booklet, we include nine of those pieces in this issue of *Studies*. Each of the authors will be identified on the page at which his contribution is published.



Most vividly, our original and continuing debt of gratitude is owed to Father Edward F. Sheridan of the Upper Canadian province. He it is who first brought the French articles to the attention of the Seminar; he was their translator; he assured us of the willingness of the original French editor that we use them. Father Sheridan is at present a member of the Jesuit Centre for Social Faith and Justice in Toronto, where he is editing a companion volume to his earlier book, *Do Justice*, on the social statements of the Canadian bishops. He was most immediately in the past the English Assistant of the Society, and before that provincial of Upper Canada, rector of the theologate in Toronto, and professor of moral theology.



## THE FIRST COMPANIONS AND THE POOR

Adrien Demoustier, S.J.

To introduce this subject, "The First Companions and the Poor," let me, in the spirit of St. Ignatius, propose three considerations as first preludes:

1. The poor and the people in the society of his time
2. The poor and the religious vocation of St. Ignatius
3. The poor and religious poverty

After that, this essay will then attempt a reflective description of the "way of proceeding" of the companions with a view to clarifying a question that we pose but that they did not pose, or did not pose in the same way. Attempting to steer a course between a pious discourse and a properly historical lecture, we shall have to risk a certain anachronism to open for ourselves a way to a better understanding of this subject.

### PRELUDES: THE POOR

#### The poor and the people in the society of the time of St. Ignatius

By birth Ignatius was not rich but he was of a noble family, and so he was one of the "powerful," who could exploit the system of solidarity into which he was born in order to take the opportunity to set himself up in his own name—"the esteem for a great name on earth"<sup>1</sup>—and so to become rich, and thus to be able to give liberally

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1 See *The General Examen*, no. 44 ([101]), *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*,

and to extend his influence.

In sharp contrast to the type or class of "person of power" was the "poor person," the man of the people, of the "little people." Such were those with no particular protection, who could in good times live by their labor, but without any margin of security. The poor also included the destitute, the beggars, wandering from town to town, charitably moved on from hospice to hospice. It was enough that widowhood might intervene, or sickness, or even a rise in the cost of living, to break the equilibrium and force "little people" into vagabond marginalization.

Cities and towns maintained, poorly rather than well, one or more "hospitals" or "hospices." They were generally small refuges of only a few beds to harbor vagrants. These people were figures of Christ, other Christs, but society sought to protect itself from them since they frightened others and were dangerous. Accommodated for a night, they received a small coin before being sent on their way. A small number of the privileged poor, the poor of the town who were well-known, were allowed to sleep in the porches of churches and in the streets. These would play the "extras" at the funerals of distinguished citizens, who would remember them in their wills, leaving them a new garment or a piece of money. The municipal authorities carefully limited the number of such people. In time of war or epidemic, they drove them out of the town without pity, while trying at the same time to limit the crowds of starving peasants trying to escape death by famine, who sought refuge in the city stocked with reserves of food.

The "poor," then, are the common folk, or "little people" and the wandering beggars, into whose ranks the former were ever in danger of slipping.

### The poor and the religious vocation of St. Ignatius

Ignatius's vocation led him to adopt the socially recognized status of a penitent. It was when he adopted the habit or garments of such a person and had to lay aside his gentleman's dress that he encountered the poor with whom he would walk daily on his pilgrim journey. He tells the story himself: "He went as secretly as possible to a poor man, and removing his fine clothes gave them to him and put on his desired attire." The sequel was that the unfortunate man was suspected of having stolen those fine clothes.

[He was asked] whether he had given some clothing to a poor man, as the poor man had said. Answering that he had given the clothes, tears of compassion started from his eyes for the poor man to whom he had given his clothing, because he had been suspected of stealing them. But no matter how much he tried to avoid esteem, he could not be long at Manresa before people were saying great things about him. . . .<sup>2</sup>

Taught by this poor fellow, Ignatius began to learn what humiliation was, but also sensed that form of consolation experienced in tears of compassion. The importance of tears in his mystical life is well known. His *Spiritual Exercises* mentions it explicitly:

It is likewise consolation when one sheds tears that move to the love of God, whether it be because of sorrow for sins, or because of the sufferings of Christ our Lord, or for any other reason that is immediately directed to the praise and service of God.<sup>3</sup>

After the experience of Manresa, to which the above adventure was an introduction, Ignatius wanted to depend only on God while pursuing his pilgrimage; so he renounced the security of either companionship or financial resources. He lived close to the poor, knowing different kinds of humiliation, noting each time that they were experi-

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2 *St. Ignatius' Own Story*, trans. William J. Young, S.J. (Chicago: Loyola University Press, n.d.), 16, no. 18.

3 *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, ed. Louis J. Puhl, S.J. (Chicago: Loyola University Press, n.d.), no. 316.



enced with the support of intense consolation. This is the way it was when arriving in Venice he was left alone at nightfall without shelter, unable to keep up with his companions because of his lame leg. So, too, at Jerusalem, when he allowed himself to be manhandled by a common guard and dragged by the arm through the city; again, on his return journey, when he was searched to the skin by soldiers who took him for a spy and hustled him off in his underwear through the streets. They ended up judging him a half-wit.<sup>4</sup> In the school of the poor, Ignatius learned how to renounce every project properly his own. It was thanks to this humility, which enabled him to recognize what his conversion and experience of the Lord had inscribed in the very depths of his being, that he discerned his true future in the desire to acquire some education and to enter fully into the dynamism of contemporary culture.

“... and finally he felt more inclined to study so as to be able to help souls.”<sup>5</sup> The poor person, according to the “sacred teaching” of the *Spiritual Exercises*,<sup>6</sup> is the one who is not protected or does not protect himself from humiliations, and who thus achieves the humility which permits a genuinely free election. This is the first guideline: the rejection of society’s standard as a criterion of decision. Blessed are the poor.

### The poor and religious poverty

On his arrival in Barcelona he told Isabel Roser and Martín Ardévol, who was then teaching grammar, of his inclination to study. Both approved it, Ardévol offering to teach him without charge, and Roser to supply him with what was necessary for his support.<sup>7</sup>

So Ignatius bargained with society to procure the means necessary

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4 *St. Ignatius’ Own Story*, nos. 41, 48, 51-52.

5 *Ibid.*, no. 50

6 *The Spiritual Exercises*, nos. 145-46.

7 *St Ignatius’ Own Story*, no. 54.

to enter into its culture. It would have been an easy matter if he had remained alone. But from the time when he was no longer a complete beginner in his schooling, he undertook at Alcala to begin his apprenticeship in spiritual direction. "He worked at giving the Spiritual Exercises,"<sup>8</sup> he tells us. By then he had been joined by companions who were his disciples.

The rest of the Pilgrim's journey, to the end of his account, can be understood as a groping search for some way for a group to live as such in the society of their times, without renouncing the originality of their project: to be of the poor, but preparing "to be of help to souls" by completing their studies. A number of arrangements were tried. Every attempt led back to a rather wandering status and to begging. The group lodged with the caretaker in a hospice or prison or else boarded in some home or institution. Ignatius even contemplated living as a servant in the employ of an academic member of the university. Eventually they became paying guests in the university colleges.

Finally, about the time of their vows at Montmartre, the companions could foresee the end of their studies, each having resolved his financial problems more or less successfully. They then made their vow of poverty, understanding it to mean a commitment to have neither property nor sources of revenue and to live on alms. Though it was not feasible to live together, they did offer each other support. Without willing or stating it explicitly, they were readopting something of the primitive perspective of the great mendicant orders, to preach in poverty "like the apostles," without property or assured revenues, either individual or collective. In Italy, while waiting for passage to Jerusalem, this was their way of life.

At the conclusion of their quest, when they were establishing the Society of Jesus in Rome, the companions ended by adopting the heritage and the rule of life of the traditional religious orders. They became the voluntary poor of Christ, irrevocably engaging themselves

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8 Ibid., no. 57.



in and through the community not only to own nothing but, by their community poverty, to abdicate ownership even of everything they used. Poverty became a sharing of goods and a public, institutional proclamation of evangelical fraternity.

Religious poverty provided them the opportunity to affirm, in the Christian society of their time, the obligation of Gospel sharing, access to which is discovered in the life-style of poor beggars. Their mutual personal engagement became a public contract to own nothing as of right, not even an alms received. They would carry on their ministry gratis, but they recalled from their experience as students that it was necessary to receive from society the accredited right to enter into its culture in order to evangelize it. They would accept for purposes of formation not so much an exception to mendicant poverty as another form of preparatory poverty, making use of the semi-public social institution of the colleges, whose theoretical purpose was precisely to provide the poor an access to education.

Voluntarily poor and united in a public body, the companions sought the opportunity to remain poor through the adoption of religious poverty.

## THE MISSION OF THE COMPANY OF JESUS AND THE POOR OF SOCIETY

Two experiences—one lived by Ignatius alone at the time of his return to his homeland from Paris, the other shared by the ten companions at the time of the foundation of the order—would provide models.

### Ignatius's life-style on his return to Azpeitia

This is the first experience. Coming back to the land of his birth, he was welcomed by his brother, eager to give him all the honors due his rank. Ignatius, however, declined his hospitality.

He went instead to the hospital, and then at convenient hours sought

alms throughout the town. In this hospital he began to talk on divine things with many who came there to visit him, and by God's grace gathered no little fruit. As soon as he arrived, he made up his mind to teach catechism daily to the children. . . . He also made an effort to get rid of some abuses, and with God's help he removed some of them.<sup>9</sup>

He used the credit which his reputation as a man of God gave him in his own district to influence his fellow citizens to some decisions for social and moral reform, the repression of gambling (at that time a plague which generated poverty), and of priestly concubinage. Finally, "he saw to it that some provision was officially and regularly made for the poor,"<sup>10</sup> a measure of social justice.

We can read in this description something of a paradigm: a dwelling place accessible to all, a way of life which assures freedom and entails frequent contact with others, a ministry of individual direction and public preaching. Addressed first to children but soon to the general public as well, this preaching succeeded in inducing society to reflect on its public morality and to establish a greater social justice.<sup>11</sup>

A few months later, alluding to his journey to Spain, Ignatius wrote of his desire "to preach as a poor man, and certainly not with the embarrassing abundance I now enjoy during this time of studies."<sup>12</sup>

The second model experience was lived by the ten companions in Rome during the winter of 1539-40, at the time of the deliberation to found the Society of Jesus. Their first place of mission, indicated by the pope, was the Eternal City itself. They were living in a vast

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9 Ibid., nos. 87-88.

10 Ibid.

11 See a penetrating analysis in Dominique Bertrand, S.J., *La politique de saint Ignace de Loyola: L'analyse sociale* (Paris: Le Cerf, n.d.), 367-71.

12 Letter to Jaime Cazador, 12 Feb. 1536, in *Letters of St. Ignatius Loyola*, trans. Wm. J. Young, S.J. (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1959), 16.

*palazzo* belonging to a wealthy friend because the hospice did not admit such a large group. Two of them were teaching at the university. They participated in theological debates at the Vatican. They were giving the Spiritual Exercises to retreatants, engaging in spiritual direction, preaching in the churches, and teaching Christian doctrine to the unlettered. It happened that famine had driven a crowd of peasants from the environs into the city in the hope of finding something to eat. The companions went to the help of these poor people, gave them what food they could gather, with their host's permission transformed his house into a refuge, organized the accommodation of these unfortunates in the city hostels, and by religious instruction sustained the morale of the hungry exiles from their homes. They drew in their wake the upper classes of Rome, including cardinals and ladies from the nobility, who in turn used their capacity for organization and familiarity with social conditions to mobilize relief.<sup>13</sup>

Presence to the poor and action on their behalf through the society of the time were integral to the founding activity of the companions, quite as much as learned preaching, pastoral action, and spiritual direction. Indeed, it was this way of life, it seems, which drew the attention of the companions themselves and of the ambient society to the Gospel character of what they were living. Their other ministries were, in a way, more ordinary, less remarkable, given what these men were and the formation they had received.

### Conditions and consequences of the foundation decision

In the meantime, the pope was beginning to send the companions on missions beyond Rome, to support the action of his legates to the great ones of this world. It was partly in consequence of this call to engage in activity with important personages that the first Jesuits were led to the decision to found the Society as a religious order.

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13 G. Wilkens, *Compagnons de Jésus* (Rome: Centrum Ignatianum Spiritualitatis, n.d.), Recherches no. 14, 308-309.



The conclusions of Dominique Bertrand's analysis, made rather from the viewpoint of Ignatius's political ideas, can readily be transposed to the level of the companions' relations to the poor.<sup>14</sup> I follow his lead. If Jesuits were sent to work with and for important persons, it was for a mission which concerned all classes of people. They took advantage of their mission to the powerful to preach in the churches, to teach Christian doctrine to the common people, to hear confessions, but also to minister to the dying, visit the hospitals and prisons, etc. The condition on which their mission depended for the most part, both geographically and socially, was the conversion of the powerful. This included necessarily the conversion of the great to a sense of social responsibility to the people who had a right, quite as much as they, to spiritual help and to temporal relief as well. The common people needed to be protected by the normal social mechanisms of their society from a miserable destitution and to be respected in their human dignity. The great could not experience genuine conversion without turning to the poor. Proximity to the poor, the choice to visit them rather than others and, in the measure possible, to live close to them in the hostel or the hospital, for example, became a high priority of the companions' mission, even when that mission was to the powerful. It was this choice of proximity to the poor which gave orientation to their presence to the great.

The first Jesuits did not theorize about their lived experience in their various missions. Their accounts, however, permit the reader to appreciate the coherence of that experience. In Bertrand's expression, it was really a choice to mesh or interrelate the two extreme levels of society, a "differential choice of the extremes."<sup>15</sup>

Proclamation of the Gospel is addressed to all without exception. But effectively to address all required, at least in that era, that the preacher cultivate the goodwill of the great, convert them to the acceptance of their duty to use their power for the common good

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14 Bertrand, 367-71.

15 Ibid., 304.

—above all, therefore, on behalf of those threatened with marginalization, the poor.

The priority of “ministry to the high” required the adoption and declaration of an *antecedent* priority “to the low” or, more accurately, of being able to go to the high, intending the service of the lowly. The “to the low” is therefore the necessary intentional point of departure.

The poor life-style of the Jesuits—they were themselves always on the edge of indigence—oriented their activity. It aimed at indicating that the base, the connatural base, as it were, of their mission was the poverty of religious life, organized on the model, impossible to attain, of the life of the poor themselves. It was a religious life oriented towards the poor because inspired by what proximity to the poor teaches. On this point it is worth rereading the passages in the *Constitutions* where the word “poor” is found.<sup>16</sup>

This need, which was also a taste, a preference, points to a certain way in which the companions situated themselves quite spontaneously in the exercise of their ministries. What one does when no other task imposes itself are the customary ministries, still called works of piety, good works. I quote Bertrand:

... presence in the prisons and hospitals, and teaching Christian doctrine there, concern to help “repentant women,” all kinds of relief of the poor, arranging reconciliations, spiritual help to the simple and to unlettered children. Such ministry went well with, and was even sustained by, a predilection for a certain style of “pilgrim” life. They preferred, without rigidity however, to journey on foot, at once to avoid the “high” style of travel on horseback and to be able to mix evangelically with all, for instance, in inns. . . . They liked public places, crowded streets, the shops of Rome in particular, to be able to gather a good-sized crowd for proclamation of the word of God.<sup>17</sup>

Since pressure could easily lead to allowing themselves to be

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16 *Constitutions*, [54, 81, 240, 331, 338, 562, 650].

17 Bertrand, 487-88.



occupied in tasks socially more distinguished, the companions had to provide a counterpressure, proximity to the common people. When they were departing for the Council of Trent, Ignatius gave Laínez, Salmerón, and Favre the following instructions:

For the greater glory of God our Lord, our principal objective in this journey to Trent is, after having arranged to live together in some suitable place, to preach, to hear confessions, to give public instructions, to teach little children, to give example, to visit the poor in the public hostels and hospitals, to exhort our neighbor to Christian living.<sup>18</sup>

Ignatius knew very well that his companions were going to Trent for the spiritual assistance of the Fathers of the Council and of their suites, so his insistence on preaching to all becomes all the more significant. "Teach the children at a convenient time, according to the possibilities of time and place."<sup>19</sup> The visiting in hostels and hospitals was not merely symbolic but to be done "at times more convenient for the sick," as though they were the masters of the place!

The customary ministries, works of piety, are somehow presented as the normal activity from which one is distracted by the mission to important persons or the service of institutions and to which one always returns promptly, as it were, as soon as possible.

The members will also occupy themselves in corporal works of mercy to the extent that the more important spiritual activities permit and their own energies allow. For example, they can help the sick, especially those in hospitals . . . or do what they can for the poor and for prisoners in the jails, both by their personal work and by getting others to do it.<sup>20</sup>

Thus writes St. Ignatius in the Constitutions.

In 1552 Ignatius had a secretary write to Sebastiano Romeo, a young Jesuit in his formation years:

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18 *Letters of St. Ignatius*, 95-96.

19 *Ibid.*

20 *Constitutions*, [650].

Visit the sick and the poor who are without resources in that country, and if they are in prison, go visit them, and see if you can get some help for them from the rich or those who are better off, so that you may do a material service to the former and a spiritual favor to the latter.<sup>21</sup>

The newsletters sent to the whole Society never omitted this dimension.<sup>22</sup> Polanco, in his *Chronicon*, an annual collection of edifying items and events to the credit of the Society culled by the author from the archives, emphasized this aspect of the apostolate.

We can take as an example Sicily, where the situation was particularly favorable, thanks to the presence of the viceroy, Juan de Vega, a great noble and a profoundly spiritual man, a sagacious statesman and an authentic disciple and friend of Ignatius. It was thanks to him and in part on his own initiative that the first college explicitly destined for non-Jesuit students was founded at Messina in 1548. Polanco reports on him at some length, but gives prominence also to the ministry of Father Jerome Doménech in the prisons and to his efforts for their reform.

In visiting the prisons Father Jerome remarked that a great number of poor people were held prisoner for quite small debts. He arranged with the viceroy that from fines levied, a certain amount should be allocated to discharge their debts, with the result that twenty of these poor debtors regained their liberty. Some of them had passed one or two years in prison, others even three, and certainly not without grave damage to their wives and children. For fourteen others he obtained permission to leave prison with a guard, to labor on public works, building a bastion. In this way they earned sufficient to gain their liberty.<sup>23</sup>

The matter came up again the following year.

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21 *Epist. Ignatii.*, 4:457, in *Monumenta Historica S.J.*, series 1 (Madrid, 1906).

22 For example, that of 1556, translated by Bertrand, 543-47.

23 Juan Alonso de Polanco, *Historia S.J.*, *Vita S. Ignatii*, *Monumenta Hist. S.J.* (Madrid, 1894), 1:241, n. 197, or *Textes Ignatiens II*, 94-95.

Father Doménech preached regularly in the presence of the viceroy; encouraged by the latter and aided by a companion, he sought to gather alms to free from the public jails those imprisoned for debt. The viceroy gave the example of generosity, the city imitated him, and private citizens followed in turn. So such poor prisoners began to be released . . . having been already freed from the debt and prison of their sins by confession and communion. It was the viceroy, whose zeal and devotion is evidenced in an extraordinary way by his works of piety, who had spontaneously suggested this.<sup>24</sup>

As long as he had strength and time, Ignatius, as we know, devoted great personal effort to the reintegration into society of reformed prostitutes. He used his expertise in the area of the law of associations, recently acquired by his work in composing the Constitutions, to put the finishing touches on statutes which would assure that work an autonomous legal existence. He labored as well on the restoration of a confraternity of gentlemen for the relief of the poor "ashamed to beg."

In all these documents one can sense an attention, discreet but clear, to the institutional dimensions of problems. Ignatius encouraged the foundation of cooperative lending institutions. The "works of piety" of the Jesuits in favor of the poor tended to take on something of the nature of a partial reform of society. They may seem timid to us. That age, however, had not yet conceived the idea of action on social structures as such, nor did it have the mental categories to think in those terms. But their "way of proceeding" moved in that direction, notably in a reorganization of medieval confraternities, orienting them towards social action which was not uniquely "charitable." In the sixteenth century, almsgiving had an economic and socially effective function inasmuch as it helped to extend the circulation of money to those social sectors where an economy of subsistence remained predominant. Contemporary documents, however, present manifold indications of concern for a better organization of

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24 Ibid., 283, n. 244, and *Textes Ignatiens III*, 3:25-26.



society so that the indigent poor could be reintegrated into the general population.

The Jesuits of the first generation wanted to be present to all the people. They were careful to be close to the poor, turning to the rich and striving for their conversion because it was the best service they could render to the people as a whole. To reintegrate the marginalized or the excluded poor into the "little people" presupposed the conversion of the powerful to the acceptance of their responsibilities. The aim or final purpose, however, was to lead all to a sharing which evidenced a Gospel communion, that communion which the poverty of the religious body wished to proclaim institutionally as in the process of being realized.

That boundary beyond which the poor become the destitute, excluded even from the "little people," a boundary which had to be crossed in the opposite direction if they were to be integrated into society, that dividing line was the central axis on which the quest for a Gospel sharing could be organized. That is why proximity to the wretched was essential as the axis of reference for all forms of social action. It was in starting from the destitute that it was possible to go to the rich, to integrate the latter into the movement of charity, reintroducing the marginalized into the fraternal sharing of the "little people."

Such was the central gear which meshed into contact with each other the twin choice of extremes of the rich and the poor.

## TOWARDS A CONCLUSION: THE COLLEGES

Paradoxically, situating the colleges in this perspective opens the way to a conclusion. The colleges occupied a middle place between the service of the great, who had no need of them since their children were educated by private tutors, and the little people, who did not go to school at all. Falling somewhere between private charitable action and a social service, they were, in some way, the pivot of a sociocultural activity, thanks to the service Jesuits rendered through

them to society and to the service society rendered to the Jesuits in return.

At the time of its foundation, the Society of Jesus asked society to provide it with the sources of revenue necessary to assure the cultural formation of young Jesuits. It was a question of founding, or funding, colleges, still in the medieval sense of the term: autonomous institutions of semipublic right whose purpose was to enable poor students to engage in university studies. Early in 1547 or 1548 the Society agreed to take charge of colleges no longer exclusively for Jesuit students, but still staffed by Jesuit instructors able to teach gratuitously; thus it helped secular society to enter massively into the path of the evolution which was carrying it into its future, the civilization of printing, in a dynamic promotion seeking to widen its base. The social effect was to facilitate access for the greatest possible number to the new culture of the book and of the written word, without adding new barriers on the basis of social or class distinctions over and above those that already existed. It was the genius of Ignatius to have refused any such selectivity for entrance into the colleges and to have understood that it was necessary to begin with the lower age groups. He insisted on that and imposed it upon his companions, who did not always understand the policy. This opened our schools to the cultural dynamic which was shaping the future and to the incipient middle classes, from whose ranks would issue the great; it also opened them to the poor. The schools began with the youngest possible students, given the limitations of the Society of that time. It was, of course, ill prepared to take charge of a systematic program to foster literacy. Contemporary society in general showed itself incapable of organizing institutionalized primary schooling until a good century later. But, in fact, a number of the colleges did provide such instruction in reading and writing without making an issue of it; and some, in France, for example, accepted students who had to learn their ABCs.

To assume the responsibility of colleges was to enter a contract of mutual service with society, since these colleges enabled the Soci-



ety of Jesus to form Jesuits while assuring a determined form of poverty. The Society was not, properly speaking, the owner of the colleges. These, however, permitted an authentic form of religious poverty, though it was not mendicant poverty like that of the "professed houses" in which resided the priests who had pronounced (professed) final vows. The distinction between the colleges and these "professed houses" permitted the coexistence of the demands of religious poverty and of the need to take advantage of the cultural facilities of their society. Ignatius hoped in this way to avoid the mitigation of poverty, of which the great mendicant orders had become victims.

The "professed house" lived on alms, which permitted the Jesuits to work gratuitously. The colleges assured a gratuitous formation from earliest years and for everyone, Jesuit or not. In addition, their establishment had as an effect not intended nor even clearly conscious the redistributing, for the benefit of the less rich, of a considerable number of ecclesiastical foundations or benefices whose beneficiaries were not at all poor, but who received the revenues as of right. Despite the repeated protestations of Church councils, the churchmen of the sixteenth century, cardinals in the lead, accumulated benefices for themselves, a practice which was equivalent to a gigantic enterprise of turning ecclesiastical foundations to the profit of the rich. Those endowments were now transferred to the Jesuit colleges and their revenues were applied to the expenses of the colleges, thus making possible both their gratuity of instruction and the support of the Jesuits who were part of the colleges.

In this mediating position between the high and the low, the college wished to be the place of formation of Jesuits and of the whole of society. It aimed at educating men dedicated to justice, servants of a common good willing to take the poor, who were threatened by wretched destitution, as the normative figure for the sharing to be effected for the common good.

Further, it is necessary that the first schoolmaster in this pedagogy be the poor person, who can teach the true starting point for an

approach to the exalted, namely, on the side of the lowly. In this position riches do not protect one from the humiliation that puts him in his true place, even if that place is at the side of the prince, where, like a court jester, he alone can speak the truth with impunity.

In all this, was there a preferential option for the poor? Theirs was a society totally different from our own. But for the companions, the choice to be near the poor was the only possible starting point for a mission of evangelization addressed to all. The rich man is, after all, the person in the greatest need of conversion.

Ignatius had his secretary, Juan Polanco, write to the Jesuits of the college of Padua in 1547:

So great are the poor in the sight of God that it was especially for them that Jesus Christ was sent into the world. . . . "He has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor" (Lk 4:18), words which Our Lord recalls when He tells them to give an answer to St. John the Baptist, "The poor have the gospel preached to them" (Mt 11:5). Our Lord so preferred the poor to the rich, that He chose the entire college of His apostles from among the poor, to live and associate with them, to make them princes of His Church and set them up as judges of the twelve tribes of Israel, that is, of all the faithful, and the poor will be their assistant judges. To such a height has He exalted the state of the poor.<sup>25</sup>

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25 *Letters of St. Ignatius*, 147-48.

## **THE PREFERENTIAL OPTION FOR THE POOR**

### **Where Does It Come From for Us?**

Jean-Yves Calvez, S.J.

A variety of questions can be posed with regard to the "preferential option for the poor." To what extent is it new? What is its relation to the mission of the Society of Jesus? Who are the poor intended in the phrase? Why precisely this option on the part of the Church and of the Society? The present paper will try to reply to these questions and so to situate the preferential option for the poor in both the Church and the Society.

#### **Its source in the Society of Jesus**

A first question: In the Society of Jesus, whence the preferential option for the poor? Strictly speaking, it comes from the Thirty-third General Congregation, which elected Father Peter-Hans Kolvenbach superior general in 1983.

The Thirty-second General Congregation (GC 32, and so with others), which met from 1974 to 1975, had recommended "solidarity" with the poor, with "families who are of modest means, who make up the majority of every country and who are often poor and oppressed" (Decree 4, no. 49). It insisted strongly that "solidarity with the 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" (*ibid.*, no. 48). Further, the congregation recognized that such solidarity is not at all easy: "The personal backgrounds of most of us, the studies we make, and



the circles in which we move often insulate us from poverty, and even from the simple life and its day-to-day concerns" (ibid., no. 49).

For all that, the characteristic option of the Thirty-second Congregation was rather for the promotion of justice and the pursuit of the integration of the service of faith with that promotion. It is from that choice that the obligation of solidarity with the poor derives.

It was GC 33 which spoke explicitly of the preferential option for the poor. It had no intention, however, to make that the totality of the actual apostolic mission of the Society. That mission was determined by the decisions of GC 31 and GC 32 and by the requests of the sovereign pontiffs regarding unbelief and the implementation of the Second Vatican Council. The Thirty-third Congregation, however, wished to indicate a trait which from now on must be characteristic of the *whole* mission of the Society.

The validity of our mission will also depend to a large extent on our solidarity with the poor. For though obedience sends us, it is poverty that makes us believable. So together with many other religious congregations, we wish to make our own the Church's preferential option for the poor (d. 1, no. 48).

### Its source in the Church

For the entire Church, the preferential option for the poor, originating more remotely in the Second Vatican Council, came into prominence through the activity of the Latin American Church. Medellín (1968) and Puebla (1979)<sup>1</sup> are sketches of its affirmation. For some of us, that is an origin which evokes distrust rather than a sense of the breakthrough of grace. There was a good deal of politics in all that, some observe; and they recall that Pope John Paul II had to warn against just such political action and any "exclusive" or excluding or Marxist connotation of such an option.

To whatever is not entirely false in this observation, one should

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1 The second (Medellín, Colombia, 1968) and third (Puebla, Mexico, 1979) conferences of the Latin American episcopate.



add something less known, not sufficiently known, namely, that the pope, in a whole series of addresses in 1984-85, was rather chagrined that he could have given the impression of not believing in the preferential option for the poor, or of not believing in it very strongly. To a group of cardinals in Rome, Dec. 21, 1984, he protested:

This option which is emphasized today with particular force by the episcopacy of Latin America, I have confirmed repeatedly. . . . I gladly seize this occasion to repeat that engagement with the poor constitutes a dominant motif of my pastoral activity, a concern which is daily and ceaselessly part of my service of the people of God. I have made and I do make this option. I identify myself with it. I feel it could not be otherwise, since it is the eternal message of the Gospel. That is the option Christ made, the option made by the apostles, the option of the Church throughout its two thousand years of history.<sup>2</sup>

On October 4 of the same year, he had said to the Peruvian bishops:

Without doubt, you and your priests know, at first hand, the tragedy of the citizen of the countryside and of the towns of Peru: his very life threatened every day, crushed by wretchedness, hunger, sickness, unemployment; that unhappy citizen who, so often, merely survives rather than lives, in conditions which are subhuman. Certainly such situations respect neither justice nor the minimum dignity corresponding to the rights of man. Reassure fully the members of your dioceses who work for the poor in an ecclesial and evangelical spirit, that the Church intends to maintain its preferential option for the poor and encourages the engagement of those who, faithful to the directives of the hierarchy, devote themselves selflessly to those most in need. That is an integral part of their mission.<sup>3</sup>

A few weeks earlier still the Holy Father had affirmed a similar position to the bishops of Paraguay: "It is true that the precept to love all men and women admits no exclusion, but it does admit a

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2 To a group of cardinals in Rome, reported in *Origins*, 14 (1985): 501, nos. 9-11.

3 To Peruvian bishops on their *ad limina* visit to Rome, Oct. 4, 1984, reported in *Osservatore Romano* (Oct. 5, 1984).

privileged engagement in favor of the poorest.”<sup>4</sup> It is evident, moreover, that John Paul II became personally more and more strongly committed in his progressive contact with the poor of Latin America—the poor of the urban slums and the poor of the native regions—in Mexico (1979), Brazil (1980), Haiti (1983), Ecuador and Peru (1985), and Colombia (1986).

The preferential option for the poor or love of preference for the poor has a prominent place in the description of the mission, the “liberating mission,” of the Church in the fourth chapter of the instruction *Christian Freedom and Liberation*.<sup>5</sup> In view of these positions, adopted repeatedly by the highest authorities, the option for the poor has become the option of the universal Church.

### Who are the poor in the option?

Who are these “poor”? it is sometimes asked. What are the “areas of poverty” covered by the preferential option? One Jesuit community remarked: “Our ministry makes us familiar with a poverty not so obvious, but crossing the borders of all milieus and generations, where lack of a supporting community makes itself cruelly felt with regard to phenomena like drug addiction, prostitution, divorce, and unemployment.” Another community, however, noted: “When the Society as a whole is invited to opt for the poor, there seems to us to be question, first of all, of the *economic* poor. It is with regard to them that our individual and collective resistances are strongest.”

Clearly this is a sensitive area. We do in fact often experience strong resistance when our attention is drawn to the economically poor. Is it a feeling that there is something of a claim here, something of the worst class-struggle attitude of some economically poor or of those who speak in their name? Or maybe, and perhaps at the

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4 To the bishops of Paraguay, on their *ad limina* visit to Rome, reported in *Documentation Catholique* 81 (1984): 1159.

5 *Christian Freedom and Liberation*, Instruction of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, April 1986, in *Origins*, 15 (1986): 713.

same time, a certain unconscious class attitude in ourselves? Others, however, become irritated when people insist on the variety of miseries of which our human family is victim. They protest that these are not all on the same plane as economic poverty: there are evils caused by man to which man can bring a remedy, and then there are others.

The Church, in recent declarations of universal scope, adopts a rather wide interpretation of poverty. Poverty is almost synonymous with deprivation, and that has many varieties: "material deprivation, unjust oppression, physical and psychic sickness, even death," to quote the instruction, *Christian Freedom and Liberation*, which treats of humankind in its weakness, and of all its weaknesses.<sup>6</sup>

The lack of liberty, particularly of religious liberty, is also poverty, even extreme poverty, as the pope often insists. "Isn't he poor, the man wounded by his fellow men, in his interior relation to the truth, in his conscience, his deepest personal convictions, his religious faith?"<sup>7</sup> In his Christmas message of 1984 he said: "We affirm our solidarity with *all* the poor of the world," and followed this statement with an enumeration of varied forms of distress, of the victims of drought, of refugees, of those suffering discrimination or loss of liberty, of the victims of psychological violence. In this instance he seemed concerned almost exclusively with wretchedness caused by man or at least aggravated by human indifference.<sup>8</sup>

Obviously it is not that the preference recommended by the Church extends only to victims of such misfortunes. It reaches out to the victims of earthquake, of cancer, of AIDS. The Church holds to the position, however, that in this global preference a prominent place should be reserved for the poor, especially the economically poor, and for the victims of injustice, for whom redress is possible. I would conclude that one cannot empty the word "poor" of its

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6 *Origins* 15 (1986): 723, no. 68.

7 John Paul II, to a group of cardinals in Rome, Dec. 21, 1984, reported in *Origins* 14 (1985): 501, no. 10.

8 Christmas message, 1984, reported in *Origins* 14 (1985): 498.



primary meaning, even though there are many other meanings.

### What is expected of us?

From this set of remarks, what behavior is expected of us? What attitude? Clearly an attitude of love, in accord with the expression “a love of preference for the poor,” one of the variations in expression current today. To be more accurate, love *and* “compassion,” bearing in mind all the deprivations which people can suffer. Poverty, human misery, says the instruction *Christian Freedom and Liberation*, “elicited the compassion of Christ our Savior, who willed to take it on himself and to identify with the very least of his brothers and sisters (Mt 25:40-45).”<sup>9</sup> It is precisely this that is expected of the Church and of all its members.

In every case where it is possible, this must be an active love, an *effective* one: “to relieve, defend, free” are the three verbs by which the instruction indicates what is expected of us with regard to the poor.<sup>10</sup> And clearly it would require nothing different with regard to the victims of injustice than to “defend” and “free” them.

The passage from which we just quoted alludes to the “ministries” by which the Church has always endeavored to relieve, defend, free. The text adds that the Church has done so as well by “striving to apply” its social teaching, “seeking thereby to promote structural changes in society, so as to secure conditions of life worthy of the human person.”<sup>11</sup>

The question has been asked: “Is this a call to share poverty? To relieve and fight against it? Or is it only a matter of developing an awareness of the situation of the poor? But then, how can we avoid deviating into some sort of ‘good conscience,’ something a bit too facile?” At least part of an initial response is in the phrase

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<sup>9</sup> *Origins* 15 (1986): 723, no. 68.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.



quoted earlier: one must act to "relieve, defend, free." The document from which we are quoting bases its position on the example of Jesus: "To the poor, he brought not only the grace and peace of God; he also healed . . . had compassion on the crowd who had nothing to eat and fed them; with the disciples who followed him he practiced almsgiving." The same text adds: "Therefore the beatitude of poverty which Jesus proclaimed means that Christians may never ignore the poor who lack what is necessary for a human life in this world."<sup>12</sup> Then there follows a phrase which is quite crucial. "This poverty . . . is an evil from which mankind must be freed as completely as possible."<sup>13</sup>

This insistence poses a question about the preference some say they feel for the expression "love of predilection (preference) for the poor," used in the instruction *Christian Freedom and Liberation*,<sup>14</sup> rather than the term "preferential option." This latter phrase is not without a certain ideological flavor from which the former is free. Those who may prefer the former phrase, however, may not have paid full attention to all the demands for *effective* remedial action, even to structural changes, which are to be seen in that document. It should be added that the document does not insist on the expression "love of preference" in any exclusive manner. In the same paragraph, in fact, and not at all in any different sense, it is called "special [privileged] option for the poor," an expression used also by John Paul II.<sup>15</sup>

This does not prevent "love of preference" and "predilection" from also being very important phrases here. First of all, just to insist on gratuity, it is Father Kolvenbach who has made allusion to certain forms of the preferential option for the poor, such as "an egoistic

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12 Ibid., no. 67.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid., no. 68.

15 See *Christian Freedom*, section 2, second-last paragraph.

enterprise, the manipulation of the misery of others to one's own profit or glory." Basically, the poor for our satisfaction! "The new commandment means the gift of one's being, of one's person. As long as we give only of our possessions, we have given nothing. It is necessary to give one's life in the model of Christ."<sup>16</sup>

As to the attitude which we need, *Christian Freedom and Liberation* also has this to say:

In loving the poor, the Church also witnesses to humankind's dignity. The Church clearly affirms that a person is of worth more for what he or she is than for what he or she has. The Church bears witness to the fact that this dignity cannot be destroyed, whatever the situation of poverty, scorn, rejection or powerlessness to which a human being has been reduced. The Church shows its solidarity with those who do not count in a society by which they are rejected spiritually and sometimes even physically.<sup>17</sup>

Such are some clarifications which the Church gives on the attitude to be adopted with regard to the poor.

### **The option for the poor: the service of faith and the promotion of justice**

To come to a question of particular pertinence to the Society of Jesus: Does the preferential option for the poor or profession of a love of preference for the poor modify the basic orientation given by GC 32, a service of the faith which includes as an integrating part or as an absolute requirement the promotion of justice (d. 4, nos. 28-31)?

Again Father General Kolvenbach responds. In his address to the Worker Mission at Turin (August 1985), he said, first of all, that in his view there is "something suspect" in a person who says that he can accept "with ease" a preferential love for the poor, but who is

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16 P.-H. Kolvenbach, S.J., "To the Worker Mission," Turin, August 1985.

17 *Origins* 15 (1986): 723, no. 68.

not at ease with the idea of the promotion of justice. He notes further: "The Gospel does not say, 'Blessed are the poor' without saying as well, 'Blessed are they who struggle for justice, a struggle of which the poor are, and must be, the first beneficiaries.'" <sup>18</sup>

Besides, to love the poor and to take serious thought for the promotion of justice—that is to love the poor "with realism." Again, *effective* love! As Father Kolvenbach says:

Justice challenges us in that down-to-earth area where someone lacks something owed precisely to him as to a human person. By its realism, the use of the word "justice" forbids any escape from concrete and real problems. . . . [In consequence], the preferential love for the poor as an expression of the "new commandment" does not weaken in the least the fourth decree of GC 32, which includes the promotion of justice in the mission of the Society, although some of us think, very erroneously, that in the wording of GC 32 our mission becomes less demanding, more "religious," and less threatening as well. The truth is quite the contrary! <sup>19</sup>

To come back to the preferential option itself, some ask: Is this a new mission for the Society, taking account of a renewed understanding of our charism and of the new challenges of our world? Or is it rather a simple reminder of St. Ignatius's experience of poverty and of a fundamental option in every religious vocation? After all, every such vocation is ordered to the imitation and following of Christ, in ever-greater conformity to him, a living experience which is to be understood as a movement of personal conversion, not necessarily calling one to work with or in the milieu of the poor, socially speaking.

It is quite likely impossible to gather all imaginable positions under the branches of these two alternatives. At the same time, however, the question does have meaning. What is to be said? First of all, this is not exactly a "new mission" for the Society, in the sense

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18 Kolvenbach, op. cit.

19 Ibid.



that, as GC 33 noted, the preferential option for the poor is a matter of making explicit a condition of the credibility of our mission itself (GC 33, d. 1, no. 48). This condition of credibility, however, involves certain concrete demands on that mission. This is implied indirectly in Decree 4 of GC 32 when it speaks of solidarity with the poor as indispensable for the Society. This solidarity, the congregation explains, "cannot be the choice of a few Jesuits only . . . [but] should be a characteristic of all of us . . . " (GC 32, d. 4, no. 48). Then, coming precisely to the matter of sharing the life and condition of the poor, it says, "It will therefore be necessary for a larger number of us to share more closely the lot of families who are of modest means." If we do this, the congregation goes on, our unity in the Society, whereby we share our experiences with one another, should enable all of us to have a greater awareness of the human condition as it truly is, and to make the concerns and worries, the hopes and dreams of the poor our own.<sup>20</sup>

The nuanced recommendations of GC 32, recognizing that all cannot share directly the condition of the poor, remain fully valid. It is necessary, however, that we be careful to fulfil the positive demands of the legislation "that a larger number of us share more closely the lot of families who are of modest means." Note, too, the increased sensitization to the lot of the poor to be acquired by all through exchange with those Jesuits more engaged in sharing the condition of the poor.

Regarding the formation of young Jesuits, the same congregation directed: "An experience of living with the poor for at least a certain period of time will be necessary for all . . ." (GC 32, d. 6, no. 10). "For a certain period of time" indicates that it need not be the constant life-style; on the other hand, an "experience" can hardly be a passing contact.

As for the Society in the past, the essay by Adrien Demoustier in this issue of *Studies* specifically addresses that question. Very

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20 GC 32, d. 4, no. 49.



briefly, however, recall that, for St. Ignatius and the first companions, it was not only that they wished to live poorly but it was also that they wished especially to serve the poor, the little people, the "common" people (*rudes*), and particularly poor children. As GC 32 reminded us, the founding Formula of the Institute of the Society has from its beginning obliged Jesuits not only to undertake the ministry of the word and of the sacraments, but also to "show [themselves] no less useful [*nihilominus*] in reconciling the estranged, in holily assisting and serving those who are found in prisons or hospitals, and indeed in performing any other works of charity, according to what will seem expedient for the glory of God and the common good" (Formula of Julius III, [3], [1]; see also GC 32, d. 4, no. 17).

The preferential option for the poor, therefore, is traditional as well as new. We have to give new life to a foundational charism to which we have not always been fully faithful.

Other questions concern the very *why* of the preferential option for the poor. Without pretending to give a complete answer, we can offer some elements of a response. First of all, it is necessary to repeat an argument which does not particularly require recourse to the Gospel for its enunciation but which is, nonetheless, also evangelical. How can one have a *human* society in which there is no particular concern for those in greatest need, for those who are most vulnerable? Wretchedness, poverty in the sense of deprivation, is for everyone, as the instruction *Christian Freedom and Liberation* says, "an evil from which human beings must be freed as completely as possible."<sup>21</sup>

But beyond that, there is something here altogether special for Christians. It is that Christ, to whom we relate as our essential liberator and savior, "for our sakes became poor" (2 Cor 8:9; see also Lk 2:7; 9:58). To cite the same instruction, Christ became poor, radically poor, first of all, in that, being God, he became man. Moreover, "in the human condition Christ chose a *state* of poverty and deprivation, in order to show in what consists the true wealth which ought to be

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21 *Origins* 15 (1986): 723, no. 68.

sought, that of communion of life with God.”<sup>22</sup> Christ revealed God by a paradox: by stripping himself of being he revealed super-being. So poverty itself says something about God.

Consequently, Christ came close not only to those who had the detachment of heart to await his coming, the poor of Yahweh, but to the poor of this world as well, to the poor in the commonest sense of the term, as well as to those in other states of deprivation, people “excluded from the community” even if rich in worldly goods, people such as the “publicans” and “sinners” whom he came to call to conversion. The instruction adds, “The Apostles whom Christ chose also had to leave all things and share his deprivation.”<sup>23</sup> In these words is something which calls the Christian to special fraternity with the poor, something deriving from the special relationship of Christ to the poor, a relationship related to his choice of poverty, poverty to reveal God. Father General Arrupe, speaking at the World Eucharistic Congress in Philadelphia in 1976, expressed it this way:

If there is hunger anywhere in the world, our celebration of the Eucharist is, in some sort, incomplete everywhere. For in the Eucharist we receive the Christ who is hungry in the world of the famished. He does not particularly come to us alone, but with the poor, the oppressed, those who are dying of hunger here on earth. Through him, all these [people] come to us, begging for relief, for justice, for love expressed in action. . . .<sup>24</sup>

To return to the idea that God doubtless could not reveal himself to us other than in poverty, that “God with us” could not be *with* us except in poverty, we should note that it is on this same paradoxical concept that religious poverty is based, poverty chosen to imitate Christ, “who though he was rich, yet for your sake became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich” (2 Cor 8:9).

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 722, no. 66.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> *Catholic Mind* 74 (November 1976): 8.

These two realities are linked one to the other and in function of Christ poor: love of the poor, first of all, of whom he was the first, making them his friends and choosing their condition, and, secondly, poverty chosen in imitation of him.

On this subject Father General Kolvenbach has written, like Father Arrupe, having in mind the Eucharist.

In the Eucharist we profess that only the poverty which Christ lived and the Gospel demands can lead men and women to their unique happiness, to be rich in God. On the other hand, from the time of the first Christian communities, it was not possible to celebrate the Eucharist without combatting poverty and without paying the price personally, by selling one's goods and even by begging in solidarity with the victims of wretchedness.<sup>25</sup>

He continues that paradoxically it is a matter

of being poor with the poverty of God, as an essential value of the Kingdom, in order to combat that poverty which is a non-value and which the struggle for justice must eliminate.

And again,

Only a poor person can destroy poverty or struggle for justice in the service of the poor, seeking constantly that poverty which the Lord canonizes and consecrates in the Eucharist.<sup>26</sup>

This look at a collection of basic reflections is not calculated to provide instant peace of mind. Inevitably, rather, its first effect is to make us feel ill at ease. In fact, reports of community reflections often manifest this unease and betray the resistances which are in us whenever there is question of poverty or of our relation to the poor. Unease, as one Jesuit remarked in a report, because here we are, talking about something which "we are not living."

Without doubt, he is right. But for that very reason, it is neces-

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25 P.-H. Kolvenbach, S.J., *Eucharist, Poverty and Liberation*, message to the Jesuits of Latin America, Oct. 4, 1984, reported in *Documentation Catholique* (1985), p. 76.

26 Ibid.



sary to be able to recognize the unease in oneself, so that it is no longer mere guilt feelings but becomes a consciousness of the immensity of that which cannot *not* be immense, consciousness of the call to a journey we shall never be able to think of as completed as we struggle to attain perfect religious poverty and to be apostolically present to the poor in every way possible for us.

What we must transcend, however, surely only with the grace of God, is the attitude which will not take a step because the road ends only in the infinite distance. Even before there was talk of the preferential option for the poor, we have tried so often to live our poverty more authentically and to come closer to the poor; but we have not got very far, so that we risk being discouraged, rather than encouraged, by a new call.

Everything changes if we understand thoroughly, or at least begin to understand, the deepest nature of this call. It is to see poverty as the choice of Christ, the choice of God, the very way of God being among men. Then it is not at all surprising that we have to begin again many times to advance just a bit along this way. And this is as true of our lived poverty, both personal and communal, as of our efforts to practice the preferential option for the poor in our tasks, our ministry of the word, our encounters. But that is no reason to be discouraged. Christ walks ahead of us. And saying that, I am not at all dissuading us from taking fresh, concrete resolutions. Quite the contrary, I hope I have shown that it is well worthwhile to do so, even though so far we have often failed.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to go back to the Second Vatican Council. It is more than twenty-one years now since it taught in *The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*: "The Church recognizes in the poor and the suffering the likeness of her poor and suffering founder. She does all she can to relieve their need, and in them she strives to serve Christ."<sup>27</sup> Commenting on that phrase, John Paul II said: "Here

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27 *The Documents of Vatican II*, edit. Walter M. Abbott, S.J. (New York: Guild



the Church solemnly proclaimed at the Vatican Council that she was making her own the preferential option for the poor."<sup>28</sup> The question then that we must heed in all simplicity is how we, in the Church, can recognize better in the poor and suffering the image of Christ, Founder of the Church, and serve them in order to serve in them Christ himself. How can we do that in typical Jesuit ministries, which include a wide variety of possibilities? Perhaps even in changing our ministries within that variety, if there be need? And how can we strive the better to recognize and serve Christ in the poor by our lives, our accommodations, our neighborhood, our life-style?

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Press), 24, no. 8.

28 To cardinals in Rome, Dec. 21, 1984, reported in *Origins* 14 (1985): 501, no. 9.

# EXPERIENCES OF SOLIDARITY WITH THE POOR

## GRACED HISTORY

Dan Weber, S.J.

President, Bellarmine Preparatory School  
Tacoma, WA

I've had a lot of good experiences in my life, thrills and otherwise. But the single greatest experience of my life was when I went to Nicaragua and lived with the poor as a poor person. I set aside my education, my Yankee dollars, the power of our system, and experienced the vulnerability of the poor.

The insertion experience came through the Horizons for Justice, and even though I had been in the same regions as a sailor in the U.S. Navy, I was then insulated from experiencing any solidarity with the poor by my mind-set and by our U.S. power. The differences between those two experiences were stark. I have gratefully contemplated them ever since. It was graced history for me.

The Nicaraguan experience led me to rethink my Jesuit training and my work in education. Many questions occurred to me about my training and my vocation. I questioned the relevance of our schools, but after much discernment, I came down on the side of my commitment to education.

One of the choices I have made as an administrator since my time down there to increase my solidarity with the poor (and this is my eighteenth year at the desk where the Buck Stops) is to be personally involved with all parents who seek financial aid. It allows me to experience the brokenness of people, of homes, of impoverished families, of hospital debts beyond imagining, of child abuse, of

alienation, of heartbreaks in sacrifices, and a list of poverties that the average American never sees or experiences. God's suffering people are in our schools, and I believe that day-to-day ministry to them has enriched and will continue to enrich my experience of the Church.

I was tempted to stay in Central America. I have to be honest about that. The life of the poor there was so uncomplicated, and the love manifested in their extreme poverty still touches me. It warmed me in ways my present work does not, but I considered the desire to stay would be "running away" for me. Perhaps someone else would see it as a call, but I felt the Society's training had prepared me to prepare apostles for the poor. This is the multiplier effect of our works. So I came back, content and grateful for my experience, still assimilating its meaning, and committed to training youth to go forth and live the Gospel in our hungry world.

I am very happy with our province commitment to solidarity with the poor. Our community-service involvements and campus-ministry activities keep the preferential option for the poor as a real leaven. It makes my life as a Jesuit much richer than I ever thought it could be when I first looked to the Society forty years ago. The emphasis on solidarity with the poor is a gift of the Spirit for me and for all with whom I work.

### TONY

James K. Voiss, S.J.

Fourth-year student, Weston School of Theology  
Cambridge, MA

On one of those rare warm days last spring another Jesuit and I decided to take a study break. We went into Boston for the afternoon. On the way back from the Aquarium we bought a couple of burgers and sat on the grass at the Boston Common to eat.

The Common was full of people. Mothers and fathers were out pushing strollers. The Hare Krishna chanted in a group by the foun-



tain. Skateboarders surfed up and down the sidewalks. Street people rummaged for empties in the trash. It was a fairly ordinary scene.

As my friend and I sat and talked, a very ragged-looking man eyed us from a distance. He was unshaven, dirty, a visual mess. The picture of a man who lives on the streets.

After a while, he staggered to his feet. While he made his unsteady approach, I had this sinking feeling. "Here it comes. We're gonna get hit up for a handout." My guts tightened for the inevitable. It never came.

He stood a few steps off . . . apparently fearful of intruding. He swayed a bit. A boozy stench preceded him. Everything was as I expected . . . until he spoke.

"Excuse me," he said; "I don't want to bother you, but I really need to talk to someone. I have a lot on my mind, and I just need to talk."

We invited him to join us on the grass. His name was Tony.

Tony's story was long and painful. More so than I can relate in print. The death by cancer of his parents and his brother's suicide after returning crippled from Vietnam were part of it, but the real heart of his story was his own experience in Vietnam. He couldn't bring himself to say much about what he had done there, but "things." But his constant refrain, "I never wanted to hurt anybody. I just did what I had to, what they told me to . . .," spoke volumes about the guilt he bore and which made him into a drunken drifter.

A lot of feelings passed through me as I listened to Tony: sadness at his great pain, joy for the privilege to hear his story, shame at judging him so superficially, peacefulness in a sacred moment of ministry, anger at the hidden cost of war.

I have thought of Tony many times since our meeting. The memory is bittersweet. It recalls my helplessness that, although I am called to serve, I do not have the power to change or redeem his tragedy. The power rests with God alone. In that encounter with Tony, I learned of my own poverty—my prejudice and my powerlessness. Yet, in that meeting I also found a renewed awareness of the

concrete need for healing in our world, and a confirmation of my own call to serve Christ in his redeeming, saving work.

### AN UNMITIGATED EVIL . . .

Michael L. Cook, S.J.

Professor of Theology, Pontifical University  
Santiago, Chile

In all honesty, I must say that I have had very little "contact" with the truly poor. Jesus said, "Blessed are you poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God" (Lk 6:20, addressed to the disciples, and Mt 5:3, addressed to all who recognize they are poor before the Spirit of God). But poverty, in any realistic sense of the term, is not a good thing; it is an unmitigated evil. No one wants to be poor, least of all the poor themselves. We can romanticize poverty, and the poor, and forget what an evil it is.

According to the interpretation of Juan Luis Segundo (*El Hombre de hoy ante Jesús de Nazaret II/1: El Jesús Histórico de los sinópticos*), the poor are called blessed by Jesus in his historical ministry, not because of any subjective dispositions (moral, spiritual, or religious values) on their part, but because God wishes to overturn and put an end to the oppression they are experiencing. This is the arrival of the Kingdom. And yet, it didn't happen. Jesus himself became the poor outcast, abandoned by God as he was crushed by the system.

To recount my own experiences of solidarity with the poor, I must first tell what I have tried to do in solidarity with the crucified Jesus and how that in turn has affected me.

At various times, I have worked with Hispanics (mostly Mexican *campesinos*) in the Bay area, with Quechua Indians in the *altiplano* of Peru, with street people in the House of Charity in Spokane, with the *pobladores* in poor parishes here in Santiago (an involvement I hope to increase in the coming year). But, as the main work of my

adult Jesuit life has been teaching theology and sharing the life of formation with scholastics, these other experiences have been at best passing.

Usually, I have had something to offer: an expertise in Bible study, a sacramental ministry, a material resource. And, most of the time, I have felt more like a visitor from another planet than one who had truly identified with the poor (as does Father Stephen Kovalski in Dominique Lapierre's *The City of Joy*, a book I heartily recommend). Nonetheless, I have sought such experiences with a desire to learn, for I am convinced that one cannot do theology in the contemporary world (my primary orientation) without such involvement.

My experience has been that poverty as such is debilitating and destructive. Its true "face" is evil. The point of the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31) is not that Lazarus is virtuous and the Rich Man evil, but that both are enmeshed in a system that is unwilling to distribute resources in an equitable manner, and this in the sight of God is an unmitigated evil. As Segundo puts it, Jesus reveals God, not the spiritual life of his listeners.

Individually, of course, one can find good people and evil people among rich and poor. And thus one can speak of "gospel people who are poor in spirit" among both. Those whom I have met have taught me the value of the Gospel in their own intense hunger and thirst for the Word of God (especially in Scripture), the value of solidarity in their openness and generosity, and the value of simplicity in their lifestyle.

But, the *really* poor, the materially poor who have been deprived of the fundamental necessities of life (food, clothing, shelter, health care, education) have taught me something else: we live in a world where the evil greed and avarice continues to choke the seeds of the Kingdom planted by Jesus and to crush its victims over and over on the same cross. This we must change . . .



## JUST A CHICKEN MAN

Jack Morris, S.J.

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Seattle, WA

When we unroll the scroll of our yesterdays, we're often intrigued by what sticks, what we remember, what is printed on the exposed lines. So often it is a surprise moment or event, out of keeping with the ordinary onflow of daily life. Surprise, as we know, is one important index for the blazing entrance of the Holy Spirit.

I'd like to recall one such memory, a day during the spring of my first year in the novitiate, 1950. I had a dental appointment in Portland. For my return trip to Sheridan I chose to hitchhike, which I had done quite often before joining the Society. The day was sunny and warm. I felt life everywhere. My raised thumb, however, had no power over all those sleek, modern cars whizzing by, but it did bring to a halt what some might call "an old tin lizzy." As it drew to a stop I noticed rickety, feathery mesh coops helter-skelter in the back end, almost ready to tumble out.

"Howdy! Just push those things aside." He kept both bulky hands on the wheel and pulled out. After a few pleasantries I knew that Jed Walton and his wife were, as he said, "fundamentalist Pentecostal, and hold body and soul together on a small place raisin' chickens." And Jed knew that I lived in that huge, tar-black building above Sheridan and had chosen to follow Jesus in a Catholic religious order. I told him about our vows and way of life, realizing how strange it must sound to this uneducated, rural chicken man. A wrinkled silence fell between us.

Jed finally looked over and asked, "Do they let you pray alone up there, or is there always someone watchin'?" I responded. He went on, "That business about not gettin' married; I don't mean to be offensive but it's got the sound of a rusty nail to me. If you don't mind I'd like to offer you some words."

I looked his way, caught his blue eyes, bright in contrast to his

weathered, wrinkled face. I didn't respond verbally. Jed went on, "I've been alive a lot longer than you, and know somethin' of the Lord's ways. I also know that God made a man and a woman. At times life gets hard, real hard, and a woman is a mighty fine comfort to a man. It ain't just the comfort either; it's about having a home, and knowin' where you're goin'. To put it straight in front of you, I don't think I could get along without my Sarah."

"The Bible" Jed continued, "tells us about vows. You're puttin' yourself right there in front of God in all His holiness, and once you speak a vow your word clings to Him—you can never take it back. It's mighty serious business. Before you take that vow you'd best throw yourself on your knees and beg your heavenly Father for light, askin' if that's really what he wants you to do. It just ain't right that you don't ask that question before God." Silence again, but now it was bright and fitted right into the goodness of the day itself.

We talked on till we got to Sheridan, where I got out. He said, "God bless you," and so did I. I watched his old relic pull away and disappear. That was thirty-eight years ago. Jed, just a poor chicken man, gifted me with uniquely powerful words on celibacy and the vows. I always recall with gladness and joy that surprise encounter. Over the years his simple, straightforward wisdom has been there as the single most memorable "exhortation" of my novitiate years on both celibacy and the vows. I wonder if God doesn't bless all the poor and marginal of the world with unique gifts. We need the sun and the rain from on high, but we also need the soil and the earth and those who are close to it. We also need to go hitchhiking once in a while.

**RICH ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT**

James E. Royce, S.J.

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I work with alcoholics. Many of them are poor, not because the typical alcoholic is a no-goodnik skid-rower, but because the disease of alcoholism has caused them to lose jobs and financial resources which once made them doctors, lawyers, bankers, plumbers . . . or priests, or whatever. Research has shown that the average alcoholic is above average in intelligence and talent.

But they are rich spiritually. I am not talking about Matt Talbott, the devout Irish alcoholic who some think should be canonized. I mean the many men and women of all ages who have arisen from the hell of alcoholism through the beautiful spiritual program of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Nearly forty years ago I had a guest speaker from Alcoholics Anonymous in my alcoholism course at Seattle University who said, "I'm glad I'm an alcoholic." I thought, What? After all the hell she's been through? And then she went on to explain very simply that, if she had not been an alcoholic, she would never have joined Alcoholics Anonymous and so she would never have discovered how much God loved her and how much she loved God.

Alcoholics help each other. It is common for a group of AA members to pitch in and move a poor person to another apartment, or fix up his car. They know that there is always someone they can call on, even if it's the middle of the night. They genuinely love each other, and I don't mean going to bed with them (that's called the Thirteenth Step, and it's a no-no in AA). Go to a regional meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous and watch the hugging and happy greetings of welcome and reacquaintance that go on. Someone has said that in Alcoholics Anonymous we see the one modern instance of primitive Christianity: "See how they love one another."



They know poverty from experience. They may have sold their wedding ring for a drink and have hit bottom financially, physically, and spiritually. One former bank vice-president ended up on skid row, sleeping under bridges, drinking cheap wine out of a brown paper bag. He was sentenced by the court to Cedar Hills Alcohol Treatment Center; as he was preparing to leave at the end of his stay, he was discussing with his counselor, one of our certificate graduates, his plans for the future. He said he wanted to go back into the banking business. His counselor said, "Yes, you start as a janitor in a bank." Now he is a vice-president again, but he started as a janitor.

I learn from alcoholics, too. Though not a member myself, I attend open meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous just because it is good for me to see laypeople working harder at their spiritual life than I, who am supposed to be a professional at it.

One black woman came to my class one night to give the AA lecture, scared to death to be up in front of a largely white audience in a strange university. Her story was one of abject poverty, beatings, squalor. By the time she finished, it was clear that her beauty came from deep in her soul, which exuded a serenity that was unmistakably spiritual. The explanation came out when she revealed, quite simply and humbly, that she spends one solid hour every morning in prayer and meditation—the Eleventh Step of AA.

## VULNERABILITY AND NOT COMPETENCY . . .

Phil Boroughs, S.J.

Student of theology, Graduate Theological Union  
Berkeley, CA

St. Bernard's, a small black parish on Chicago's south side, sits amid burned-out apartment blocks and litter-strewn lots in a neighborhood where poverty and crime touch everyone's life. As a second-year theologian at JSTC, I joined this parish in 1976, thinking that eventually I would get involved in housing issues to facilitate a program to promote lay participation in liturgical roles. The people explained that they already were adept at dealing with governmental agencies, but what they really wanted was greater black presence in the sanctuary of the church.

Consequently, after working with the staff and leadership of the parish for several weeks to assess their needs, another scholastic and I announced at a Sunday liturgy the program which the group had designed. In the course of the homily, while attempting to emphasize the importance of lay ministerial roles and lay responsibility for parish life, I said, "It is up to you people to make the liturgical life of this parish what you want it to be."

After the liturgy, one of the men of the parish took me aside and gently but clearly told me that the phrase "you people" was considered condescending and paternalistic when spoken by a white person in the black community. Embarrassed and apologetic, I resolved to drop that phrase from my vocabulary. However, the following week, while meeting with the key leadership of the parish, I used it again. Mortified that I could be so careless, I stopped my presentation and apologized to the assembled group. In response, a few people replied that they weren't offended, and a few others said that they understood my intentions and overlooked my choice of words; but the discussion ended when one woman commented, "Look, if he wants to become sensitive to our reality, let's not stop him."

Following that meeting and my apology, my relationship with

the people of St. Bernard's Parish deepened rapidly and we learned from each other. As they became lectors, adult acolytes, and eucharistic ministers, this young white man from the Pacific Northwest began to understand the healing power of the Word of God and the radical aspects of the virtue of hope in the midst of overwhelming poverty and oppression.

These memories came back to me a few years later when I was working at St. Leo's Parish in Tacoma. After I had been away from the parish for several months following back surgery, an elderly woman I had never met before came to see me at the rectory. Leaning heavily on her cane and breathing with some difficulty, she slowly entered my office and lowered herself into a chair. When she looked up at me, she asked, "You've been quite sick, haven't you." When I acknowledged that I had, she said, "Good. Now you'll be able to understand what I need to share with you."

With time and experience I'm learning that it is vulnerability and not competency which frequently opens the way for relationships and ministry.

### A RICH YOUNG MAN

J. D. Whitney, S.J.

Professor of philosophy, Seattle University  
Seattle, WA

If, in polite society at large, one is cautioned against raising the subjects of politics and religion, one is similarly cautioned in polite Jesuit society to avoid the subject of solidarity with the poor.

Few topics seem as effective in bringing out the worst instincts in many of us. When it is raised, our hypocrisy, our sophistry, our self-righteousness all rally to our defense as we attempt to show either that (a) we are in the *true* ministry to the poor or that (b) someone else is not. This, at least, is the reaction I find in myself;



and it leads me to wonder why I feel this way. What is it about the call to solidarity with the poor that causes me and many other Jesuits to squirm and rationalize our own ministries, or to stand in judgment over the "Jesuit" nature of another's work? I think it has to do with the awareness of our own sinfulness which this call to solidarity requires.

To be in solidarity with the poor is, at its most personal level, the same as being in solidarity with my vows as a Jesuit and my desire as a Christian. The vow of poverty does not begin with the Thirty-second General Congregation; and, when I am aware how far I am from the true living of this vow, I am aware how far I am from the loving Christ who calls me to this life. Of course, I can, and do, justify myself through saying that all I own belongs to the Society. But does "common ownership" get any of us off the hook for living as well as we do? Perhaps if I had vowed "common life" instead of "poverty," this would bother me less. Unfortunately, however, I did vow poverty, and my distance from it makes me uncomfortable with the topic of solidarity with the poor; for in my heart I know that my distance from the poor is the same as my distance from Christ.

So, I feel uncomfortable. So what? Should I give up my office and my job in this upper-middle-class university and go to work on the reservation or the streets of Seattle? Maybe. The time I spent on the streets of Tacoma or in the JVC in Alaska certainly brought me a humble awareness of Christ's presence among the poor and the need and right they have for the promise of the Gospel. So, perhaps, this is the way to get rid of my discomfort.

On the other hand, since God has given me a great gift in my education, do I not have an obligation to teach young men and women that society can have a human face or to counsel them at times when Christ is as absent from them as he ever is from the poor? I cannot help but think I do. There is real value here, real purpose in this ministry. But what of solidarity with the poor?

Perhaps I could get rid of my discomfort by seeing what I do as, in some way, an act of solidarity with the poor. After all, these

people who do not know God are “spiritually” poor, aren’t they? And if they become the leaders of society, what they learn from me will affect the poor, will it not? There is a truth in these arguments; but there is also something which smacks of rationalization, just as there is also something which smacks of oversimplification in the idea of quitting to work with the “real” poor. Neither alternative offers a clear solution to the discomfort which the call to solidarity with the poor raises.

Maybe the truth is that a call to solidarity with the poor is meant to make me uncomfortable—not to make me hypocritical, not to make me self-righteous—but to make me uncomfortable. Like the rich young man to whom Christ spoke in the Scriptures, perhaps I am meant to be troubled because I am very wealthy; but unlike him, I need not go away sad. On the contrary, I need to stay with Jesus and embrace my discomfort as a sign of his gentle pulling me toward himself.

There have been and will be times when I turn my discomfort into anger or into cynicism, but without it I would be incapable of realizing my own incompleteness, my own sinfulness. I need to get closer to the poor in my work and in my heart; I need constantly to return on vacations or in my spare time to work among the powerless, not because it relieves my discomfort, but because it heightens it. For me this pain, this discomfort, is the “happy fault,” the *felix culpa*, which draws me from what I am to what, with the Lord’s help, I have yet to be.

## POVERTY OF THE IMAGINATION

Kevin Connell, S.J.

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Cambridge, MA

Surrounded as I am every day at Jesuit High by Guess jeans, Bugle Boy jackets, and Ralph Lauren sweaters, I find it difficult to believe at times that I am working among "the poor." And since, for some reason, my cynically icy heart fails to grasp the significance of many of our students' being left quite poor by the absence of one of their parents from their homes, I have, I think, found myself called to address another sort of poverty among the typically upper-middle-class young men with whom I work: a poverty of the imagination.

Recently, while attempting to explain Romanticism to a group of juniors who would have very much preferred to listen to me describe techniques of tin mining in central Romania, I mentioned that the Romantic Era closed with the death of Sir Walter Scott. "Walt," I wittily explained, "is, of course, the creator of *Ivanhoe*."

The few lights that were left in their eyes went out.

Further questioning revealed that only two, in a class of twenty-nine "Crusaders," had ever encountered Scott's novel in any form. Since then, I have discovered a wonderful new hobby in name-dropping the literary companions of my youth among my students.

On the one hand, I suppose that this crisis hardly ranks with the plight of the people of Ethiopia, Central America, or Afghanistan. At the same time, however, it helps explain a small part of the rampant "cultural illiteracy" about which we've heard so much lately, since a mind that has never been entranced by the vivid simplicity of Verne, Baum, or Kipling will most likely find it rather difficult to untangle the slippery subtleties of Dante, Shakespeare, and Faulkner. Further, to one who has never wrapped his imagination around such pressing and perplexing issues as "What happens to Dracula's clothes when he turns into a bat?" or "Why was the Queen stupid enough to give the Duke of Buckingham those diamond studs in the first



place?" *real* riddles about "God becoming man" and "losing one's life to save it" may well seem understandably insolvable.

I am in many ways an imperfect high-school teacher: I am forever postponing homework deadlines and have won fame as the purveyor of Jesuit High's easiest vocabulary quizzes. I have, however—I hope with some success—tried to instill in my students some measure of my love for the life of the imagination, life of which they have been deprived by their material advantages and without which the life of the spirit is, as far as I am concerned, unlivable.

### A STORY OF SANCTUARY

Chuck Schmitz, S.J.

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Spokane, WA

Late in the afternoon of August 3, 1983, a Volkswagen van pulled into the driveway of St. Leo's Parish in Tacoma. A handful of reporters and a camera crew stood in the shadows near the entrance to the church. They cautiously moved forward as I walked to the side-panel door of the van and opened it.

"*Bienvenidos, nuestra casa es su casa,*" I greeted the seven passengers huddled inside. Slowly, with their eyes fixed on my Roman collar and avoiding the stares of the reporters, the family from El Salvador stepped out of the van into Sanctuary.

Several weeks later, after the family in Sanctuary had become somewhat accustomed to its new surroundings, a formal welcoming liturgy was celebrated at the 10:30 Sunday morning Mass. I will never forget that celebration. For weeks the parish community had practiced a Spanish version of the song "Be Not Afraid." As the family entered the church, the whole congregation stood and faced them singing "*No Temas Tú.*" I waited at the altar as the family approached. Their faces were covered with bandannas and tears filled their eyes. The father of the family carried a crude wooden cross he

had made the day the family left El Salvador. One of the children carried a small banner of Archbishop Romero, while her mother carried an infant son in her arms, her hope, the family's hope for a new and peaceful homeland.

Every member of the parish knew the risks we were taking in offering Sanctuary to this family. Six months earlier, all of the pastors in the Seattle Archdiocese had received a letter from Archbishop Hunthausen encouraging local parishes to respond to the needs of refugees from Central America. During the next five months the parish staff presented a series of workshops and forums dealing with the complex issues involved in the offering of Sanctuary. When a vote was taken at the end of this process, over ninety percent of the parishioners chose to become a Sanctuary parish.

The Domingo family (not their real name for obvious reasons) likewise knew the risks they were taking in accepting the offer of Sanctuary. They were in this country illegally, according to U.S. immigration law, and faced the threat of arrest and deportation at any moment. Nevertheless, following the welcoming liturgy, the Domingo family began publicly to tell their story. The story was not told easily on that occasion, nor has it become any easier to narrate to countless other congregations and audiences since.

It is not my story to tell, so I will not include it here. What I can and need to say is that the story and the courageous family that continues to tell it have profoundly changed my life, my faith, and my ministry. And as much as I will always remember their public testimonies, there are other memories I cherish more deeply. These are the times I would celebrate the Eucharist with the Domingos in the quiet of their Sanctuary home. On these occasions our Liturgy of the Word would often last for hours. The Word of God was not merely proclaimed, but paused over, savored and shared—as was the brokenness of Jesus which we thankfully received in the sacred meal that followed. Cherished memories of a family rendered powerless by an oppressive society, outcasts and strangers in a foreign land, yet alive with the Good News of Jesus and telling a story that only a few could hear.

Carlos G. Valles, S.J.

LIVING TOGETHER  
IN A JESUIT COMMUNITY

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Editor,

In Appendix II to his article "Where Do We Belong" (January 1989), George Wilson suggests a dearth of readings about the concept of "memberships" experienced by American Jesuits. His interesting paper immediately brings to mind the endless sociological writings about social role theory. Cooley and Mead are often quoted for their early speculations about the "social self" that reacts with such "membership" relations. Sorokin goes so far as to postulate a pluralism of selves in the individual corresponding to the pluralism of groups with which the person associates. The social role theory implied in Wilson's "memberships" is closer to the symbolic interactionist concept of personal adaptation than it is to the functionalist interpretation of the cultural expectations in behavior. In other words, it tends to be self-defined more than culturally enforced. I think he wants to say that the Jesuit has (or should have) more control over his several membership roles than the social scientist allows.

For the behavioral scientist the "set of ongoing, relatively regular expectations" of membership relations is the creation of the culture into which the person is socialized. The individual learns, and adapts to, institutionalized roles already existing in the culture, and these obviously vary according to the key function of the group with which he interacts. Usually, an introductory textbook in Sociology (like my own) will contain a chapter about role and status as a kind of elementary foundation for the understanding of Wilson's Jesuit memberships.

Joseph H. Fichter, S. J.  
Loyola University  
New Orleans, LA

Editor,

Having been raised by two of our lay collaborators in the university apostolate (a physics professor and an administrator) I read Father McGo-

vern's *Studies* article "Jesuit Education and Jesuit Spirituality" (September 1988) with particular interest. It led me to reflect a bit on the question of lay collaboration, since this seems to form an undercurrent to much of the essay.

It seems to me that any attempt to "share" our vision and spirituality with our non-Jesuit colleagues must begin with an effort to listen to them. My experience, both in and outside "our" institutions, is that our colleagues tend to have more vision than we think. Admittedly, their expression of the vision may be less nuanced, less theocentric, less ecclesial or less oriented to questions of social justice than ours would be. (After all, the American Church has tended to give nonclerics a rather superficial formation in the past.) On the other hand, since our spirituality is basically the spirituality of the Church, of Christianity, it is in a sense especially available to the lay Christian. (Occasionally, even a non-Christian will so respect our vision and our values that she devotes herself to teaching in one of our school—no small compliment!)

I submit that by listening to our colleagues we will find that often it is *we* who share in *their* apostolate—especially in areas of endeavor outside the liberal arts. My experience is that this realization is exhilarating and encouraging, for the Jesuits as well as for the colleagues. They seem to appreciate our effort to listen. We might examine ourselves on how often we eat lunch with faculty and staff, show up at colloquia, commencement, and department affairs, or stop to talk. From this point of view the "opening" of the University of Detroit Jesuit Community as described in Father McGovern's article is particularly encouraging, and consistent with my experience in other university communities. (Ironically, this effort to strike a productive balance among many "command performances" and school functions is a hallmark of the theologate as well.)

It seems to me that our spirituality of finding God in all things is particularly suited to finding him in the work and the vision of our colleagues, of praising what we find that is good, and of strengthening and encouraging the work of the Kingdom in which we take part.

James M. Deshotels, S.J.  
Weston School of Theology  
Cambridge, MA

Editor,

Full marks for your September 1988 issue featuring the article of Father Arthur McGovern "Jesuit Education and Jesuit Spirituality."

As an admirer of Father McGovern and his pioneering and very brave work on Marxism, I deeply appreciate his efforts to place in writing his experiences.

But I would like to place before your readers a dilemma which has faced me constantly in my twenty-seven years here in Jamaica.

The Mission has been staffed by New England Jesuits for half a century and we brought to the island our Jesuit traditions—specifically, our Jesuit Community life. We imported to Jamaica the tradition of black-robed (in Jamaica white-suited!) Jesuits who flowed out of their walled commune in the morning to go to their classrooms and who disappeared back into their cloisters in the night for food and prayer.

While they did this, however, in following their traditions, they were cutting diagonally across the culture of the very mission station they were trying to inculturate.

Jamaica is an African nation—97 percent black or brown of African or mixed color. Only a small percentage is white or fair-skinned. Africans live out of doors in a tropical country; houses are for eating and sleeping. There is no tradition of cloister or monasticism. Religious traditions (if any!) are Anglican, including married clergy. There are no monasteries or cloisters.

In the midst of this open physical environment, New England Jesuits imported an institution where white foreign men in large groups came out in the day and disappointed in the night—any social mixing with the rest of the population kept at a minimum. This resulted in a separation, a division, a failure to inculturate, an unnecessary and unnatural division of the religious from the secular that has crippled the mission of Jamaica.

Yet, I realize the dilemma facing our Superiors. Could they tell each missionary coming to Jamaica that he must give up Jesuit community life???

The dilemma remains. Only recently, the younger Jesuits have established small communities, refusing to perpetuate the walled cloister approach.

My question is: why was the dilemma allowed to perpetuate itself over half a century without some attempt at a solution?

Gerard McLaughlin, S.J.  
St Benedict the Moor Rectory  
Kingston, Jamaica



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