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FOREWORD

Readers of Tabloid I preparing for G.C. 34, who have reflected on the *Composition of Place* and the *Promotion of Justice*, will probably agree that some of the most difficult issues treated there cluster around **the preferential option for the poor**, while Tabloid II went on to speak of the radically gratuitous manner of life which this fundamental option requires:

The spirit of gratuity finds expression, first of all, in the area of poverty. Decree 12 of General Congregation 32 was an important milestone in this matter. However, while the practical structures which it introduced have been quite widely assimilated, there does not seem to be an equivalent assimilation of some of the basic options which it spelled out with equal clarity.

"Identify[ing ourselves] with the poor Christ, who identified himself with the deprived,"¹ we are called to an option for a more modest style of life and are led to gratuitous activities which are all the more expressive of the gospel of Jesus as they take place in a world deeply corrupted both by poverty and by affluence.

With a view to clarifying this important discussion a bit further, several young Jesuits in different parts of the world were invited to meditate on Tabloid I; to reflect on their apostolic, communal and spiritual experience, as well as their hopes and vision for the future; and to write a brief essay — in as personal or public a style as each one wished — answering these questions:

Who are the poor, for whom we preferentially opt?

What does working with the non-poor mean?

The essays, when read together, form a real "symposium" even though the participants neither met each other nor saw any other's work. Those invited were all "young Jesuits" — prior to final vows — whose views suggest how the Society might respond to this challenge, since they "belong to the generations which will carry the future Society into the third millennium."²

Here are three comments made by the writers themselves:

¹ G.C. 32, Decree 4, N° 48.

² Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., "The 34th General Congregation," letter to the whole Society, 27 September 1992.

I tended to focus upon those elements of the first *tabloid* which I thought were new dimensions added to the general discussion of justice and the preferential option for the poor. I would have liked to speak more directly to the issue of our "non-poor apostolates," or offer more practical suggestions for implementation....

The breadth and width of the theme are immeasurable. I became emotional about a topic which has to be made rational. But praying about the poor, they are people, persons whom I know, makes me talk about them in an evangelical manner....

Thank you for the opportunity to share our experience and our reflection concerning this most central subject which, for us Jesuits, is also most controversial....

The nine writers were born between 1951 and 1965, and entered between 1971 and 1989, eight of them were ordained between 1985 and 1993. One was in regency, one was completing tertianship, and the rest have done theology and are still studying or already active in the apostolate. The discussion is presented from East to West — Philippines, India, Zaire, Poland, Germany, France, Jamaica, Peru, California. The contribution from Germany, an unsolicited letter which happened to arrive at the same time as the essays, fits very well into the discussion.

The introduction from Brazil and the conclusion from El Salvador were written for other contexts by authors who, compared with the symposium's nine young participants, are real veterans. Marcello Azevedo and Juan Hernández Pico are Jesuits whose long commitment, experience in ministry, and prolific writings locate them among the much-loved, much-admired elder brothers and whose contributions perfectly frame this *PJ* symposium.

If you are struck by the ideas presented on the preferential option for the poor, or have questions or comments on the preparatory tabloids **Challenges of Mission today to our *Minima Societas*** and **The Society Facing Challenges of Mission today**, your own brief responses are very welcome. Please do not hesitate to send your letter to *PJ* for inclusion in a future issue (see address and fax number on the cover).

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Thank you for your interest and participation — let us pray for the guidance of the Spirit in all our preparing for the next General Congregation.

EDITOR: Michael Czerny, S.J.

SEMANTICS of the OPTION for the POOR³

Marcello Azevedo, S.J.

One of the sticking points, both in accepting and in actually living the option for the poor, is the question of its meaning and significance, which can be undermined by easy generalization or distorted by outright polarization. Either extreme practically eliminates the meaning and scope of the option, and both are ideological.

The first position feels challenged and troubled, and therefore attempts to rationalise and displace the reading of poverty to a purely situational, sociological, spiritual level. It insists on poverty of spirit and, by an incomplete reading of the gospel text, guarantees that the poor we shall always have with us: they are a social and sociological problem which should be taken into account. In this position there is no room for a transforming commitment and, even less, any openness to an invitation to dismantle poverty. "Preferential love" tends to be the reformulation of what used to be expressed as "preferential option". The discourse itself may be similar, but the praxis and, therefore, the life are profoundly different.

The second position submits the option for the poor to a reductionist reading. It demands the same sort of specific and exclusive commitment of everyone: to live amongst the poor, with them and like them, directly linked to their daily lives and participating in their struggles, especially political and trade union ones. This would be the only convincing way of expressing a clear evangelical and ecclesial option. This manner of fulfilling the option for the poor — living in a *favela*, for example — tends to become an ideological demand that the whole Church express the option for the poor at a personal and community level.

As is the case with all extremes, both positions are caricatures: they are not found in practice in their pure state, or at least they are not lived as such. It may help us, then, to deepen a little the meaning and scope of the option for the poor.

What the option for the poor is not

⊗ It does not *absolutize* poverty or glorify the poor, as if poverty were desirable and should endure, or as if the poor, by the mere fact of being poor, represented the perfect realization of the Christian message and were exempt from human forms of limitation and sin.

³ *Vidas Consagradas: Rumos e Encruzilhadas: Temas fundamentais sobre a vida Religiosa e Apostólica* (Consecrated Lives: Roads and Crossroads: Fundamental Themes concerning Religious and Apostolic Life), São Paulo: Edições Loyola, 1993, pp. 90-97.

⊗ It is not an ingenuous *pretence* that the poor do not aspire to upward mobility and to overcoming their situation, especially those forms of subhuman misery which devastate the Third World and some areas of the First World.

⊗ It is not a demagogic *custody* of the poor, manipulating their potential to benefit the interests of some or for the partisan or electoral advantage of others.

⊗ It is not *organizing* and structuring the poor with a view to their gaining power, in terms of party-political or union-organizing, in order to have a greater impact on society.

What the option for the poor is and what it implies

⊗ It is an *existential* option. It emerges from the deep level of our being, as poverty of being and person, alert to the other, helpful and respectful, capable of welcoming and not imposing. It is, therefore, the opposite of self-sufficient pride which has an answer for everything and which tries to subject everyone. The preferential option occurs in us when we are disposed towards it, before or after concretizing it. Through the option we can be brought to the poor, or by the poor we can be led to the option. There is a continuous back-and-forth. We will evangelise the poor and they evangelise us, to repeat this expression of great wisdom.

⊗ It is a radically *evangelical* form of poverty and it characterizes our Christian identity. It is an opening to the action of the Spirit which leads us to make our own the values and criteria, the attitudes and preferences of the Lord Jesus. It should be an option for every Christian, although at this level it can be expressed in many ways. In all of them, however, one must ask, "Are there in me, in relation to the poor of my time, the same feelings which Jesus had towards the poor of his time? Do these feelings exist in me and impel me to build a just society in the light of the understanding which we have today of how poverty is produced structurally on such a wide and massive scale throughout the whole world?"

⊗ It is a *priority* option but not an exclusive one (*Puebla* N° 1134) for those whom Jesus himself favoured: not the wise, rich or powerful, but the small and simple, the poor and marginalised. Jesus, in his option for the poor, did not want to pass via any of the power factions of his society, neither the Herodians nor the Romans, nor the Zealots or Essenes, nor the pharisees or sadducees, nor the scribes, levites or priests. And yet he had immense impact, political and transformative, upon his own society and many others down the centuries.

⊗ It is an *epistemological* option, that is, a new way of seeing things, a new social perspective. One comes to see and perceive, analyse and interpret the reality in which one lives from the viewpoint of the poor. There is a parallel here with history which, until recently, was written from the standpoint of the great: kings and priests, warriors and merchants. The new historiography starts from ordinary people, the lives they led, the changes which occur in them or beginning with them. The *social place* of the poor is not then a social category, a position in the scale of goods or power in a society (rich or educated, professionals or manual workers). It is an *epistemological* category, a way of seeing and knowing. Everyone can possess it and those who do so best are those who discover in

the poor the gospel root of their poverty and, for this very reason, poverty's meaning and scope as well as its necessary transformation.

A businessman can see an unemployed person as an idler. From the social perspective of the poor, the same industrialist can first take into account the fact that the unemployed person did not enjoy the same conditions as he did in his family and education. Secondly he can learn as well to understand the pressures of the situation and the structural economic mechanisms which are producing unemployment, of which the poor person is a victim and which she will not escape merely because she wishes to do so. It is a different way of reading the same fact: unemployment.

⊗ It is a *theological* option, that is, a new perspective for reading the sources of our formation in the faith: Scripture and Tradition. This different approach occurs in the light of the evidence and relevance of the poor in salvation history, expressed with the perception and in function of their overwhelming presence in today's world. It is, therefore, a new theological perspective, a new *theological topic or place*.

⊗ It is an *ecclesial* option, that is, a reorientation of the Church in relation to her institutional and historical past, which was not infrequently rich and powerful, discriminatory and oppressive. For this we have asked pardon of the men and women of yesterday and today. From this should arise a new formulation of evangelising action which is ecclesial, apostolic and pastoral.

⊗ It is an option in *solidarity*, that is, one which leads us to assume as ours, as meaningful and important for us, the same struggles, challenges and commitments as the poor, with a view to building up a just world. It is, then, an option which leads us to experience the *reality of the poor* and eventually even to share it, either temporarily or permanently. Many Christians of different callings have paid for this option with the ultimate price of death and martyrdom. Some are priests and religious and are generally known and honoured. But anonymous martyrs make up the majority, lay people and activists who gave their lives in the silence of daily life or in the violence of this or that event buried away and choked out of the news with impunity.

⊗ It is a *prophetic* option because it reminds the world and the Church of the fundamental inspiration of the project and kingdom of God, as the prophets reminded the kings and the people of Israel of the terms of the Covenant and the Lord's liberating action in the Exodus. It is prophetic not least of all because it questions, denounces and confronts the many faces of injustice, seeking a new society, egalitarian and fraternal, just and authentic, subsidiary and communitarian.

⊗ It is a *human-evangelical* option which aims at a new synthesis of communion and participation, unity and solidarity, love and truth, and which creates space for freedom, for the construction of justice and the building-up of peace. The Gospel thus becomes real in the complete liberation of human beings, as persons and communities, as individuals and societies.

⊗ It is an option which expresses this *liberation*, which is fundamental to it, as an *inculturation*. This it does to the extent that, through a change of theological perspective (place) and social perspective (place), it makes possible a process of integral evangelisation, at once liberating and inculturated. Such a process starts out from within the culture of the poor and is based on their

presuppositions (inculturation) and leads to an active transformation (liberation) of interpersonal and social relations among us and of our relationships with God.

≈ It is an option which leads us to discover *the poor as active agents* in their own evangelisation. The Church is becoming sensitive to how much of the Gospel may be found in those whom Christ himself declares most open to welcoming the Kingdom. In relation to this the Church, which we are, has something to learn and not just to teach, in opening and adapting herself to the rhythm of the simplest and littlest. These, in turn, show themselves to be subjects of their own liberation and of the world's transformation. This is found neither in extreme or magic formulae nor in palliative, philanthropic or paternalistic solutions. It is found, rather, in a deep-rooted change of the current presuppositions of the stratified, exclusive, concentrated and oppressive organisation of the world today. As those most interested in building that freedom and justice which they lack, the poor can and should be *subjects* and protagonists of their own growth and not only passive recipients of initiatives on their behalf, whether official and public or charitable and private.

≈ It is an option, then, which gives new dimension and new direction to the life of each Christian and the life of the faith community which is the Church. It speaks to us of *conversion*, of consistency and witness, of going out of ourselves in order to open ourselves to those most in need. We announce to them the gift of the Gospel which was given to us in and by Jesus. But at the same time it allows us to be surprised and challenged by the very people we seek to evangelise.

≈ Thus, the option for the poor is *revolutionary*. Effectively implemented, at individual, social, community and ecclesial levels, it hits home at all the presuppositions which support the present-day model of society. It subverts them in a profound, inclusive and total way. It also completely transforms on the way of reflecting about faith (theology) and of translating faith into evangelical and apostolic praxis, evangelising and pastoral praxis, which in turn avails this same faith of an ethical dimension.

Carrying out the option

The fact of grasping and understanding the option for the poor in this way and of describing it with all its ample characteristics does not guarantee its translation into practice in our lives nor the manifestation of the option as apostolic service to our brothers and sisters. To reach that point we must allow ourselves to be led by the power of the Holy Spirit within us. We must bear in mind that we ourselves are the first poor for whom we will have to opt. We are the ones who like pupils will be transformed by the example and the inspiration of others, our more generous companions, freer in their giving, closer to the poor for whom they have opted with consistency. This is a gift of the Lord to us. It is the path of faithfulness and gratuity in us. It is the project of holiness. The option for the poor acts as a catalyst for the evangelical fulfilment of our lives.

The main consequence of what we are saying will be a multiplication of the ways of living out the option. Not all are called to do the same thing. Different are the gifts and vocations, distinct the charisms and services, various the ministries and functions. What matters is that all are called, in their own way, to translate this evangelical priority into action. For some it will be work alongside the poor, like them and with them. For others it will be the effort to influence basic legislative

change, on which in fact depends the transformation of society. For others it will be the ability to make the centrality of the option understood by virtue of their lives or through their writing, work, witness. For others it will be the grace to understand illness, ageing, never having work, lacking influence, not being affirmed, as forms of poverty which echo in another key the experience of the poor in their lives. In one form or another such intuitions into the evangelical perspective of poverty are indispensable to the Christian way of life.

The poor themselves — be they materially, spiritually or psychologically so — have to discover through the action of the Spirit the gospel meaning of their poverty. If they do not do so, they will also become rich and powerful, exclusive and oppressive in their attitudes. In this respect poverty pure and simple should not be absolutised in itself. Only a poverty lived evangelically is really a sacrament. One of the tasks therefore of whoever opts for the poor and lives the option, is to help the poor themselves live their poverty evangelically. Only in this way does poverty become an opening towards others, solidarity with others, an ability to share. None of this is ours automatically. It is rather the fruit of gift and grace. It is the pedagogical project through which we are educated towards the full meaning of our faith.

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I have been asked to reflect on my life as a Jesuit within the context of my relationship with the poor for whom we preferentially opt. I have found the task difficult. I struggled between writing something scientific or popular. Between something systematic or experiential. What compounds the situation is that the topic, the poor, is so rich and wealthy that it cannot be captured in a short essay. Nevertheless, this is a prayerful reflection and it is capsulized in poetic form. Only in form.

A PROSE POEM

Salvador Orara, S.J.

Poor are you whose language is rough, vulgar and unrefined.
Poor are you who speak only about the local gossip.
Poor are you who are tied to tilling the trash of the cities.
Poor are you who scrounge for food and clothing day to day.
Poor are you who have the streets as your bedrooms.
Poor are you who entertain yourselves by gambling your life.
Poor are you whose only consolation are sex and children.
Poor are you who are killed because you have rights and dignity.
Poor are you who are murdered because you dream of being human in an inhuman world.
Poor are you whose language is popular and cannot be understood by the elite.
Poor are you who speak of God as your only hope.

Poor are you who are manual labourers.
Poor are you who are grassroots because you receive only the dregs.
Poor are you whose work is but a cog in the machine.
Poor are you who have become invisible because you are but a mass of labourers.
Poor are you who have no choice but to be domesticated.
Poor are you who travel to find a job only to become illegal migrants.
Poor are you who cannot be a mother and father to your children because of forced overtime.
Poor are you who are killed because you organize dirty, demeaned and dangerous labourers.
Poor are you who sell your lives because they have murdered your families for the sake of ideologies.
Poor are you who settle for the sub-human conditions just to fight for life.
Poor are you cheap labor.

Poor are you who cannot exercise your power as human beings.
Poor are you who have no recourse but to undertake mass-action.
Poor are you who have to resort to violence in order to make the news.
Poor are you who make powerful impressions on the movie and TV screens but not in real life.
Poor are you who are easily absorbed by the consumerist society.
Poor are you who are objects of projects, programs and services which never progress.
Poor are you who always need mediators when dealing with all these mega-systems.
Poor are you whose leaders distance themselves from the communities they serve because they have more now.
Poor are you who are killed because you cannot remain with your community or tribe.
Poor are you who cannot challenge values of cultures because you are a threat to civilization and progress.
Poor are you who are the subjects of ideological and political change because society needs social problems to be studied.
Poor are you the One Billion People below the poverty line because you are the cause of socio-economic retrogression.
Poor are you who cannot live on the land you cultivate because it will be industrialized.
Poor are you grassroots organizations because you are consulted but have no choice or access to the basic services of society.

Happy are you poor for yours is the Kingdom of God.

Poor you who refuse to be in solidarity with the poor because they are everywhere.
Poor you who are blinded by the consumerist world because matters and manners are more meaningful than simply being human.
Poor you who strive for wealth and possessions because the more poor you become.
Poor you who harp only on individual rights when it comes to profit and decision-making.
Poor you who get caught up with the structures and mega-systems of society.
Poor you who accept poverty as a virtue but do not practice it.
Poor you who cannot see the poverty around you for you will not see God himself.
Poor you who want to sustain life at the expense of the poor for you will lose it.

Woe unto you for I was with you and you rejected me.

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WHO ARE the POOR?

Thomas Venad, S.J.

As the Society of Jesus sets out to prepare for G.C. 34 it is a wise thing to adapt the Ignatian "composition of place" as a prelude to a better and integral understanding of our mission in today's world. This sort of "looking" familiarises us with "the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men and women of our time" and also trains us to look with God's eyes and heart. The option for the poor explicitated in the recent Congregations is rooted in such a profound perception.

The South Asian Assistancy, seeking ways to implement the thrust of the General Congregations, recently brought out two documents. The *Kathmandu Statement* (October 1989) reformulates the mission and formation, while *Formation in mission* (December 1992) elaborates the type of formation envisaged and its rationale. Taking stock of the specific South Asian context, the Assistancy sees itself called to collaborate in the task of building up human communities that are imbued with the values of the Kingdom. Today this task demands a preferential option for the poor whom we seek to empower by participating in their struggles. The documents further specify the category of the poor as "all socio-economically marginalised groups, particularly the dehumanized *dalits*, dispossessed tribals, the discriminated-against women, unorganized labour, illiterates." The document continues, "our work with other groups is justified to the extent that it contributes to this empowerment of the poor."

The areas of poverty may vary from place to place yet there is a consensus about the category of the poor. In India, first of all, they are a whole lot, they are the majority, the poor majority. Among these the tribals, the *dalits*, unorganized labourers and women deserve special mention.

The tribals, the indigenous people of this rich area, are called *Adivasis* because they are the earliest settlers. They have a distinct culture and identity of their own born out of an instinctive closeness to nature. Theirs was a self-sufficient, egalitarian agricultural society. The tribals are today a poor lot because they are systematically and methodically being dispossessed of the ownership of their land and of the product of their labour in the name of "progress", "national interest" and "integration". The gigantic anti-nature industrialization policy and urbanization schemes have played havoc with the tribal way of life. The result is the breakdown of their family and community life, and that has made them easy prey to alcoholism, crime, unemployment, suicide, prostitution, infighting, communalism, etc. The tribals are poor due to exploitation and oppression perpetuated by the *dikus*, the outside exploiters.

The state of the *dalits* (a broken people, they prefer to call themselves) is more miserable because most of them are landless, illiterate and unorganized labourers. Their misery results from ruthless economic exploitation and inhuman social degradation. They belong to the last rung of the oppressive caste system of Hindu society. Centuries of cruel segregation in every aspect of life (habitation, jobs, social gathering, marriage, burial, worship) have made them the untouchables and outcasts of the society. They are forced to consider themselves as inferior, worthless, unintelligent

and incapable of any decision or action by themselves. Geographically most of them live on the periphery of the villages or in the slums. The great majority of the unorganized and/or bonded labourers of Indian cities and villages belong to this group. The tragedy is that over the years they have begun to internalize the ideology and values of their oppressors.

In the category of the poor, women deserve special mention. In most of the Asian countries they are victims of multiple oppression. They live in a male-dominated society with all kinds of discrimination based on sex difference. Ironically a woman is considered burdensome even before her birth and yet it is she who sustains the family. Abortion, infanticide, malnutrition, illiteracy, dowry, bride-burning, harassment, rape ... there seems to be no end to her woes. Women are aptly described as "the doubly oppressed and marginalized".

All are in some way "poor" before God but to call everyone poor is to trivialize the suffering of the truly poor. We should not drain the word "poor" of its primary meaning and content. The poor are primarily those economically impoverished. They lack the basic necessities of life: food, clothing, housing, health, education and employment. Their poverty is the result of a cruel and unjust system. In the Indian context they are also the socially disgraced and politically manipulated. The poor are those denied access to social, cultural, religious and political benefits by the ruling class. In today's vocabulary the poor are the powerless, the oppressed. They are victims of the greed and oppression of the rich and powerful. Poverty means death both physically and spiritually.

But this desperate and dark reality is not the whole truth. "The irruption of the poor" is a characteristic hopeful sign of our times. In all categories of the poor there is a new awakening. Their societies are in ferment. People's power and movements for justice and peace are beginning to make their voice heard. "They have not yet spoken", but they have "a quiver full of arrows"! They are convinced that poverty is not something inevitable. It is the creation of selfish human decisions and actions. In God's affluent world there is no such thing as poverty out of necessity. It is an unmitigated evil. It has to be overcome. Oppression and injustice have to cease.

Our option for the poor means that we identify ourselves with all these new stirrings of life in the midst of the poor. We do not have all the answers. We are called to collaborate humbly in the task of building human communities based on kingdom values. And there is much to share with others in our Christ-experience. Fundamental in this sharing is the hope that the darkness can be faced. His abiding presence gives us hope and courage and a direction. As Walter Brueggemann says, "Because this One has promised to be in the darkness with us, we find the darkness strangely transformed, not by the power of easy light, but by the power of relentless solidarity. Out of the 'fear not' of that One spoken in the darkness, we are marvellously given new life, we know not how."⁴

What about working with the non-poor? Service of faith and promotion of justice is not just one ministry among other ministries but the guiding force of all others. The work of our Jesuit martyrs

⁴ Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984, p. 12.

in San Salvador has clearly shown that such involvement could be effective in awakening the consciousness of the ruling class to the existence of sin and injustice in their lives. But finally it is the poor who shall bring the world to its senses. Here we experience greater resistance and hence the need for courageous apostolic discernment. "Our work with other groups is justified to the extent that it contributes to the empowerment of the poor". Among the poor we shall discover the crucified One calling us to follow.

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FRIENDSHIP with the POOR

Metena M'nteba, S.J.

If all Jesuits agree that the preferential option for the poor is constitutive of their mission today, each one's concrete commitment varies in solidarity and style. These options range from a bold commitment in favour of the poor to tepid indifference to their lot. Such varied and sometimes conflicting choices arise from the individuals's experiences or from his own concrete immersion in the world of poverty. For the taste of many Jesuits, the documents and general apostolic guidelines given to the whole Society in this matter always say both too much and too little.

Who is this **poor person** who unconditionally demands our solidarity? Is he the urchin⁵ whom I met the other day and whose vagabond childhood challenged me? Is she the beggar at the corner holding out her insistent hand, whom I brushed off with an abrupt, "I gave you something yesterday"? Is he the battered and humiliated South African, or the unfortunate shown on last night's TV news, who was forced to sell her kidney to pay off her debts? All these faces of the poor challenge me. Their conditions of poverty and injustice impel me to work for the coming of a less unjust world. But what impotence, what anguish today when I recall the cold-blooded murder of our six companions in El Salvador and the unflagging courage of a Jesuit working among the poor but continually cheated by the poor.

This evening, it seems to me that for all these categories of people, I shall opt preferentially. For the poor individual is first of all every face of man, woman or child in whom the dignity of God's image is mocked and denied. She is the neighbour burdened here and now with a cross which I would

⁵ "Le Moineau" is the street kid of Kinshasa.

never wish to carry. He is the unfortunate here and now drinking a cup of bitterness from which I immediately beg to be spared.

In many African languages the concept of poverty refers to a concrete state of indigence, of miserable deprivation, which wears down and undermines the essential ingredients of life. The poor person is not primarily someone perpetually in need, deprived of the essentials. She is the last rejected survivor of a despised or dying-out lineage, he is the landless one who day and night curses the **Heaven** or the **wizard** that are ranged against him by handicapping him physically or socially. Anyone who owns a field and barn, has family and children, in no way considers himself poor. The AIDS-sufferer who is nonetheless visited, the shrivelled junkie who is still surrounded by family affection, does not feel at all poor. True, with the play of competition and commercial exploitation which have impoverished the "rich" in our traditional societies, the indicator of poverty has become socio-economic. At the same time, apart from exploitation, the true poverty that threatens and revolts an African is not lack of food but her imprisonment in the toils of a servitude which is all the more dehumanising in that every effort to escape from it reinforces the spectre that all escape is impossible.

When we speak of the preferential option or of poverty, it is always important to stress, on the one hand, that it is not an exclusive or discriminatory political commitment. Rather, that it is rooted theologically in the compassionate and practical charity of the Good Samaritan, a very parable of christian *agape*. On the other hand, one must clearly stress that the poor and poverty are not the antitheses of the rich and riches. We are not committed preferentially to the poor in order to make them rich, but so that all might have life and have it to the full.

Hence to work with the "non-poor" can only have one meaning for us: to lead them to co-operate, according to the law of charity and according to the grace which the Holy Spirit gives to each, in the work of the Father who "labours and toils" for his creature.⁶ It would be a serious error for the Society to forget the rich for the sake of the poor. As she would deny herself if she forgot the latter. Because for Ignatius "friendship with the poor makes us friends of the Eternal King,"⁷ that is to say a Companion of Jesus. For a Companion of Jesus to opt preferentially for the poor is to choose as did the Master and Lord who was the first in wanting to assume the characteristics of a servant so that his brothers and sisters might be given life to the full. A grace to ask for.

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GOD WHO IS POOR

⁶ *Spiritual Exercises* N° 236.

⁷ St. Ignatius of Loyola, *Letter to the Fathers and Brothers of Padua*, 1547.

Wojciech _mudzi_ski, S.J.

In these few lines I would like to share some reflections on the ministry which has been part of my formation in the Society prior to ordination to the priesthood. Who are the poor with whom I am called to identify? What should be our attitude in encountering the neediest? What is our connection with the lay people who work with us?

While working with addicts at a centre of the Italian Emmanuel Community founded by Fr. Mario Marafioti, S.J., I asked the nearly two hundred addicts in treatment to answer briefly the question: DO YOU NEED A SAVIOUR? There was not one, believer or non-believer, who answered "NO".

I proposed the same theme to a group of students in the senior class of our Istituto Massimo high school in Rome. Not a few of them from upper-class families answered that they really had no need of a saviour. Their parents gave them all they needed. They solved their problems on their own or with the help of a therapist. They got high marks at school. The others envied them for their success, their talents, and their intelligence. They did not see what more a saviour could offer them.

This is just where the difference lies between the wealth of the poor who cry for help and the poverty of the rich which does not allow them to feel their need for the Saviour. Both need to meet a companion of Jesus who can help them to meet Christ.

The poor of whom Decree 4 speaks, the poor with whom every Jesuit should identify, are those who are doing badly, who long for a saviour, who hunger for liberation and hunger for justice. The Lord did not come for those who are well, who hunger neither for justice nor for freedom, who feel no need for a saviour at the material, human, or spiritual level. These are not the poor in the evangelical sense; this does not mean that in reality they are not themselves "the poorest". Jesus, though, does not identify with the latter, but with the poor who suffer their poverty, and our place as Christians is at their side. At the side of the handicapped, the terminally ill, the oppressed, the persecuted, the refugees, the addicts, the alcoholics...

What have we, the Society of Jesus, done for them? What are we doing, and what should we do?

No Jesuit should flee from direct contact with the poor who have no food, with the homeless, the sick, drug addicts, alcoholics, etc. Someone who comes to us with a concrete problem of poverty or injustice cannot be sent away only with words of consolation. If we do not take care of him or at least find the person who can help him, what kind of Society of Jesus are we? No matter what work we do, it does not dispense us from showing a direct interest in those who suffer and turn to us. Spiritual help is not enough, or rather, it is meaningless if the poor do not experience the love of the good God incarnate in a bowl of soup or a warm bed.

Since 1968 we have been noticing a continual increase in young people dependent on drugs, and in sects and ideologies which humiliate individuals and enslave them. This phenomenon claims the Society's special attention and a more systematic and more specialized commitment. Such young people need to feel loved, appreciated, taken into consideration. Once they experience God's love

they may become his most faithful witnesses. Some of the addicts who passed through the centres where I worked and returned to society, now dedicate their leisure to evangelization and catechesis, using their own stories to testify to the liberating power of Jesus Christ. Two of them have actually become full-time catechists.

I think we need to realize that the Society's mission cannot be restricted to Jesuits alone. There are so many lay people who work with us and yet lack any serious religious formation. They are treated like second-class helpers — drivers, cooks, porters — we take no interest in their spiritual life. I cannot recall any Jesuit who ever offered them, beyond their monthly salary, any chance for spiritual growth.

Lay catechists as well, editorial staffs of our journals, teachers in our schools and universities, could all be far better integrated into the Society's spirituality and become Ignatian in their work no less than Jesuits. We are really unjust rather than Ignatian if we treat them only as qualified personnel hired today and fired tomorrow. Sometimes we go to great lengths to evangelize people, while for those who work beside us we have no time.

In the post-Communist countries it seems to me that, the formation of lay people who work with us, whether in humbler tasks or in evangelization and teaching, represents one of the most urgent priorities. They must be given a well-defined place in the Society's mission which, as I understand it, is not limited to the spiritual side alone.

Again in regard to the countries of Eastern Europe, I do not think that we should follow Western models without reviewing and adapting them. Some of the Society's works which have met with success in the West are so attractive that they may interfere with the discernment of the real needs of the Church in the East. In Poland, for instance, we have launched several new projects, some of them truly courageous. The increasing number of poor, unemployed and immigrants has, however, evoked no concrete response from the sons of St. Ignatius.

Reflecting on the Society's apostolate, I often wonder about the value of martyrdom. Is the desire for martyrdom still alive among us young Jesuits? How much do we still long to distinguish ourselves in God's service in difficult situations like the war in ex-Yugoslavia where life is at risk? How many are ready to lose their health in serving the sick? I have the impression that in Europe we have compromised too much in choosing the life-style of the intellectual elite.

A year after the fall of the totalitarian regime in Albania, I was able, along with volunteers from Italy, to help out at one of our missions in a small village. I shall never forget the faces of the Albanian peasants, deprived of the bare essentials and exhausted by their efforts to find food for their children. During our stay in the village their attention was more and more drawn to the extraordinary things we had brought for our use. There in the midst of extreme poverty we built baths, two showers, we used plastic plates and other disposable things. We acted like rich people who help the poor to become more conscious of their poverty. But it was they who taught us the meaning of true fidelity to Christ and to the Church, a fidelity which remained firm even in the face of torture and death which never become news.

Our help to the poor should be based on a deep identification with their lot and with their style of life. We should not be seen as the rich who come to the assistance of the poor, but as faithful companions of the poor who assume the same life-style, who work side by side with them and become their friends by involving them in evangelization and in social outreach. "God is not only the God of the poor. He is, in a real sense, *God who is poor*."⁸

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FROM the EDGE

Stefan Taeubner, S.J.

At the end of our meeting of "Jesuits on the periphery" in Kreuzberg⁹ we decided to send you a couple of reflections about how to proceed with Decree 4 of GC 32 with a view to the upcoming General Congregation. Thus far the following points seem vital to us — especially in our German-speaking context:

1. The need for as many Jesuits as possible to have personal contact with the poor (insertion and exposure). In our experience it is not theoretical concepts that change us, but always the encounter with people on the periphery of society. Even Jesuit scholars, teachers, writers, pastors and spiritual counsellors should set aside part of their time (for instance once a week) for this necessary experience.
2. The necessity of allowing ourselves to be questioned in our involvements (reflection — communal discernment). We cannot rest satisfied with experiencing the poor or with simple charitable assistance. Communal discernment of our priorities and options remains a continuing

⁸ Pedro Arrupe, S.J., *Witnessing to Justice*, Vatican City: Pontifical Commission Justice and Peace, 1972, p. 38.

⁹ Those attending were Franz Keller from the Swiss Province (HEL), Michael Hainz, Siegfried Ecker, Walter Heck, and Hans Heim from the Southern German Province (GSU) and Christian Herwartz, Edelbert Rüber, Werner Herbeck, Ansgar Wucherpfennig (visitor) and Stefan Taeubner from the Northern German Province (GSE).

necessity. The *Mission Ouvrière* has had such meetings with fellow Jesuits "who are willing to let themselves be questioned".

3. For the further planning of our future work, along with dialogue and obedience towards superiors, another important criterion is obedience with regard to the poor. The more we involve ourselves with the poor, the more they engage us and the more we commit ourselves to them. This should influence our understanding of obedience in the Society and with it our availability. Here there are continual conflicts with superiors due to a mis-understood model of indifference in the Society (cf. N° 5, below).

4. We suggest that the methods and priorities of Jesuit apostolates be examined critically in the Society's history. The needs of the poor have not always come to the fore. Even today we find models from the past still holding sway, and these must be examined. One example would be how many of our works still seek to acquire and retain influence with the rich and powerful of this world. In a democratic society, however, the "sovereign" is the people, not politicians or businessmen.

5. Finally, we ask why the understanding and application of Decree 4 has made so little headway in our Assistancy thus far, and we suggest the following theses:

⊗ The background and social identification of our members is mostly middle- and upper-class. They lack experience of poverty.

⊗ The great majority of Jesuits works with middle-class academics and sees loss of faith as the chief problem of our time. The social problems of poverty, exploitation, and exclusion do not come across as vital in this context.

⊗ An objective concept of scientific knowledge renders philosophy and theology apparently independent of reflective contact with social movements and groups on the periphery.

⊗ Third World theologians (e.g., Gustavo Gutiérrez, Jon Sobrino) see clearly that the conversation partners of European theologians are at the same time the exploiters of Third World people. Who form the "circles of friends" of our scholars? What experiences characterize the (international) context of their thinking and questioning?

⊗ In the Exercises and in Ignatian spirituality, "indifference" seems understood as a desirable goal for ongoing availability rather than as a means and freedom for a more decisive commitment.

⊗ In our area theology and Church apparently regard themselves as objectively standing over and above social conflicts. Any taking of sides (God's option and the Church's option for the poor) is almost always rejected as biased and ideologically suspect.

⊗ Those few Jesuits who are assigned to work with socially peripheral groups serve the majority quite well as a token fig-leaf: "It's good that you're doing that." In this situation, though, we feel that again we are on the "periphery of society" (Society of Jesus). Decree 4 as a common undertaking of all Jesuits, even if in various ways, hardly gets mentioned.

These then are our reflections so far which we want to share with our Provincials in a letter and in this way with you and other Jesuits.

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A GULF has been FIXED

Paul Legavre, S.J.

I am 36 years old and entered the Society nine years ago. I have reached the stage between ordination and tertianship and work as chaplain to students in colleges. In French higher education, the colleges for students of business and engineering constitute a track of training parallel to universities. The colleges are very selective and competitive in their recruitment and represent a system of training considered highly effective for a small minority of intellectually-gifted students, often from well-to-do backgrounds. These students will in future carry important responsibilities in industry.

So, to take up the current terminology, I am very clearly engaged in work among the non-poor.

The first preparatory tabloid for G.C. 34 speaks on three occasions in the language of oppressor and victim, and of the exclusion of the oppressor. In France it is certainly not a question of excluding the oppressor. No, in France the question of exclusion is more and more those excluded from economic progress, from work, and also from education. For fifteen years analysts have been stressing the emergence of a society travelling at two speeds, divided between those with a stable salary and housing, access to cultural activity and political debate; and the rest, ever less the minority, without work or living badly on small precarious short-term jobs, men and women with a very limited social horizon, more or less illiterate, and unable to found a family.

These inequalities are accentuated by restrictive laws about acquiring citizenship and controlling the entrance, residence and behaviour of foreigners in France. This translates into a serious challenge of living with foreigners dwelling in our midst, while the economy sinks into recession with the prospect of long-term unemployment for many. The building of Europe risks including a tendency to pull back and close up while pressures from the South and the Third World increase upon our white societies with their high incomes and low birth-rates.

Without a doubt the international character of the Society is going to play an important part in preventing us from yielding to protectionist tendencies. In this sense relations with foreign Jesuits are essential.

The new forms of urban exclusion, with the downward drift of the outlying districts, pose in a new and pressing manner the question: where do Jesuits live, notably in the region of Paris? Whose neighbours do we become through our choice of dwelling-place? The setting up of small communities in the depressed suburbs is a sign of hope, it suggests a shift which the Society is willing to make. Some of us are involved in businesses of social insertion, a dynamic movement that has developed over the last ten years in French society, using economic means to help combat social exclusion. Others work to train those less qualified. But there are practically no more Jesuit "workers".

In a French Society that is ageing and decreasing in numbers, I ask myself: what risks are we young Jesuits ready to take to live this struggle against every kind of marginalisation and exclusion, for the sake of the Gospel? What sort of men and apostolic religious ought we to be, at the two poles of this dual society, to struggle with others against the increase of exclusion?

This raises a question about the formation we receive. Whatever I know of social and economic analysis, I essentially learned in my earlier studies before joining the Society. I do not readily understand why familiarity with social and economic mechanisms is taught so little in the Society. In effect it is a fringe subject among the optional courses and seminars.

Given the fact that the majority of young Jesuits in France is of bourgeois social origins, a great danger occurs of conceiving the reality of exclusion in terms of generosity versus a bad conscience with regard to the poor, or of spirituality of the poor, rather than in terms of rigorous social analysis. The failure of marxism and the absence of any appealing social and political alternative make such analysis more difficult. I am delighted with the work of reflection carried on by several Jesuits at CERAS.¹⁰

We live at a time of great social change, in the midst of a society in which employment is increasingly rare. In the ensuing upheaval of attitudes, it would be good if Jesuits and especially our publications contributed to the considerable intellectual efforts required to rethink the economy, the distribution of work and social solidarity, to help in the transformation of attitudes and public opinion, to alert Jesuits and the whole Church as to which social developments ought to be promoted. Such an undertaking belongs to the prophetic role which Jesuits could play more fully in our economically developed societies.

Experience of the world of the poor is no less indispensable. I believe profoundly that working among the non-poor with the hope of contributing to the promotion of justice, involves first of all a change of attitude, a displacement, in terms of values and priorities. This requires that what Jesuits who are engaged in work among the excluded, particularly in the *Mission Ouvrière*, are living must

¹⁰ Centre de Recherche et d'Action Sociales, Paris.

be communicated to the heart of our apostolic body. Many stress how important it is for each of us to have some contact, albeit occasional, with the world of the under-privileged.

Along with other Jesuits of my community, I am lucky to be able to offer some tutorial help to underprivileged children for a few hours every month. Also of visiting young North Africans in prison. It is my way of remaining faithful to what the Society helped me to begin discovering during noviceship experiments. I often feel it is very little, and this invites me to make an act of faith that, little by little, this changes something in my way of being among students. How could I ever invite them to get committed in some social or charitable involvement, if I dispense myself of the same?

I don't want to fob myself off with words. All the same, I believe my ministry among students is a real priestly service of faith and justice. The radical call of the Gospel and the summons to conversion in the footsteps of Christ will have repercussions, I believe, in the lives of many. Promoting a certain style of church, introducing them to an open and liberating form of Christianity, in deep harmony with Vatican II, forming students who are responsible, offering spiritual direction to those who wish, all this helps a kind of man or woman for others to emerge. Together with the other chaplains we offer the students a Christianity that comes to grips with their present lives and awakens them to the responsibilities they will have in future. Thus we invest a lot of energy along with the student leaders in preparing the national congresses of Christians in College: "Christians and Money" or "What counts as success?" "What future to build with others?" "What is fidelity to the Gospel in the various compromises we make?" etc. Or again, demanding sessions from them in the making of choices, or help them reinterpret the experiences which touched them especially in the work placements they had during their studies.

A passage in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), stands out for me in a special way: "And besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us." There is a gulf between rich nations and poor nations, between the excluded and the rest. Because someone "from among the dead has risen" (cf. 16:31), something has begun to change, and we have the hope that no barrier is immutable.

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A VISION of POVERTY

Peter McIsaac, S.J.

Not long ago there was a city-wide competition here in Kingston, Jamaica, for children eleven years old: An annual event at which representatives from all schools — both private and government-funded — come together to compete academically in a forum that hopes to dismantle, if only momentarily, those social and economic structures which separate and discriminate against even the most innocent, according to class and privilege.

An anger arose within me as the competition unfolded, with the realization that perhaps the contest exposes, rather than suspends, the inequality that divides these children socially and economically. Worse still, perhaps it is an exercise that promotes the myth that such divisions are justified on the grounds that the consistent merit of the private schools proves them to be so. That anger, however, eventually faded, and left only residual concerns about the depth and complexity of the self-perpetuating social structures that bind certain peoples to a specific stratum of society.

A profound and familiar sadness, though, also emerged in the context of that competition, and the reflections it fostered spoke more directly both to the peculiar nature of poverty, and to how we might begin to situate our preferential option for the poor. This sadness descended upon me long before the competition began, as each child was invited to introduce him or herself, and speak of their goals for the future. Those from schools consisting mainly of economically privileged children spoke confidently of their hope for careers that were of a high calibre: well-paying, leadership professions of high status. The children I accompanied from our school in the heart of the ghettos of Kingston spoke humbly and unself-consciously of their desire for work in the service industry.

This was not a conscious and selfless option on the part of these poorer children for labour which finds its motivation and value in the service of others. Conditioned and marginalized by the ideologies imposed upon them because of their economic status and social background, these children were somehow unable to envision themselves beyond the limits of a narrow and impoverished horizon. A "poverty of imagination" did not allow them the freedom even to dream according to a justly possessed dignity.

The spontaneous and persistent sadness I experienced was one of watching those whom you have come to love succumb to the lie that they lack the worth even to imagine themselves greater than the social structures which propagate the lie.

That sadness and its cause, as I now interpret it, has never been far from the centre of my vocation. Whether with the children in the ghetto, or prostitutes, or gang-members, or the homeless, or the mentally ill, the poverty I have encountered has remained constant in its manifest deprivation of the imagination and consequent loss of dignity: the inability to imagine their lives outside the horizon of hunger, illiteracy, homelessness, violence, addiction, abuse, or illness.

One of the fundamental tasks of the Jesuit, then, regardless of the kind of ministry he feels called to engage in, is the reconstruction of the Kingdom, in the first instance, in the imagination of the poor.

In this we follow Christ most closely, whose simple, image-centred Kingdom parables give life to his people by opening their minds and hearts to new possibilities for life — lives of dignity beyond the imprisonment and darkness of sinful social structures.

The great gift that the Jesuit brings to this task — a task of synthesis which fuses evangelism and the struggle for justice — is the Ignatian tradition of imaginative contemplation, and the specific fruits of the Exercises. For the first moment of universal reconciliation of victim and victimizer becomes enfleshed in the imaginative reconstruction of the Kingdom: embracing both the wounded dignity and imagination of the victim, as well as the blind ideology of the oppressors.¹¹ Through the response to the "Call of the King" and the deepening contemplation of the contours of the Kingdom¹² the Jesuit has already begun the process of reconciliation by imagining the many possibilities for new life offered by God.

However, it is as much an act of faith to believe that this first moment of reconciliation is incarnated in the darkness and suffering of the poor as it is to acknowledge that Christian life begins with our crucifixion with Christ. It is the same act of faith which asserts the wisdom of God as appropriated by Ignatius: the *magis* passes via the *minus*.¹³ It is a wisdom which runs contrary to the assumptions of our age, and particularly the common conflation of the notions of "efficiency" and "effectiveness." The preferential option for the poor is primarily a "commitment of love" and is "first and finally of the heart."¹⁴

¹¹ Christian solidarity with the poor has a very precise sense — not sociological or political or even ethical — but first of all evangelical: to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom in which the Father's forgiveness embraces both victim and victimizer. In Jesus, God takes the side of sinners and the poor in order to save all. Essay 3 N° 3.3.5.

¹² *Spiritual Exercises*, N° 91-97, 137-146.

¹³ The school of the Exercises teaches that, according to the logic of the Kingdom, the *magis* passes via the *minus*, the Kingdom comes via Bethlehem and Calvary. By God's grace we declare ourselves ready to put on the uniform or livery of Christ poor and humble (Const. 101) and to enlist under the standard of the Cross, preferring poverty to riches and humiliations to the honours of this world (SpEx 146). N° 3.3.6.

¹⁴ The preferential option with all its analytic and political aspects is first and finally of the heart: "the need to be committed to **people**, to welcome people, to listen to people, to see in them a healing presence of Jesus. And this commitment is to people who are weak, poor, ageing, handicapped, who are depressed and angry, who are mentally sick, who are dying, etc. This commitment of love is not something very visible; it is not productive; it is not honoured. It is true relationships. It is the shepherd, nurturing the flock and walking with the flock" (Jean Vanier, founder of the l'Arche communities for mentally-handicapped people). N° 3.3.8.

The preferential option for the poor, then, is not fundamentally the fruit of a highly intellectualized agenda, but rather the spontaneous response of love, and such love is not possible without entering into the experience of such poverty. Solidarity with the poor requires an insertion into the life and imagination of the poor: it not only shares their concerns, not only lives in their neighbourhood, and not only becomes self-conscious of lifestyle.¹⁵ It is first a love which provides room in the heart of the Jesuit for the poor to rest, to speak, to love, to imagine. It is the imitation of Christ in his service of the lowly, and its primary concern must be the effectiveness of such love in the possible absence of efficiency.

To enter into the life and imagination of the poor, to enter into their darkness, violence and pain can in no way be a casual commitment. It is a radical plunge into an unfamiliar world of desolate landscapes. We often stand vulnerable and alienated before both those who possess the power to oppress as well as those whom we desire to serve. We face the self-doubt of the effectiveness of our witness, and stumble through the chaos that is the consequence of hatred and destruction.¹⁶ In short, the preferential option for the poor is the active contemplation, the embrace, of the Christ of the "Third Week."

Still, at the very centre of this darkness comes the light and liberation of resurrection and hope. It has been the radically poor, those most abandoned and marginalized, who have most clearly manifested the grace and love of God in my own life. I am irresistibly drawn to their suffering. The "preferential option for the poor" is, for me, a weak label for what is the deepest and most intimate relationship with Christ in love; and, like love, it cannot be legislated or set as an agenda for those who have not entered into the life and imagination of the poor. It is an invitation. An act of faith in the God of the oppressed. A spontaneous act of love.

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¹⁵ The first thing to examine is how the poor and their problems become present in our life and works. As Jesuits we both belong to the poor and are distant from them: an ambiguity which runs through all our discernment.... Jesuits inserted among the neediest, living and ministering there, contribute something most precious to the whole Province, for our poverty consists primarily, not in spending less, but in showing effective solidarity with the poor and victims of injustice. N° 3.4.2.

¹⁶ This option locates us in the terrain of sin, at the root of all personal and structural conflict, where the victim-victimizer syndrome works to destroy life. Addressing the divisions, hatreds and resentment which fester deeply in the hearts of both victims and victimizers, the Jesuit "should show himself ready to reconcile the estranged" (*Formula of the Institute*, N° 1). N° 3.3.11.

The OPTION without EXCLUSION

Juan Morante, S.J.

Is the preferential option for the poor possible without excluding those who are not poor? I would like to answer this question on the basis of my own personal and community experience in Peru. In our country, a huge majority of those we call "the poor" are poor without any further qualification: they are people who do not have the economic means to ensure their basic subsistence, much less the means needed for their human development such as education, technological progress, participation in culture or healthy recreation. Nevertheless it is important to bear in mind that, when we take a closer look at the world of the poor, we discover a great variety of social and ethnic groups as well as a great variety of situations which make poverty as such a much more complex problem irreducible to merely economic categories.

The situation of dire economic poverty endured by a great majority of Peruvians also signifies a situation of institutionalized violence which, in turn, has generated just as violent reactions, both by subversive groups and in the form of repression by the security forces, greatly aggravating the anguish and despair of the poor majorities of our people. The situation of the poor thus displays truly subhuman living conditions in violation of all human dignity.¹⁷

Within so crude and violent a reality, I was nevertheless able to find many witnesses, both individual and collective, both personal and institutional, for whom despair and death do not seem to be the last words pronounced by the poor of our country. These witnesses give evidence of the existence of two converging movements.

In the first place, there is the movement which has sprung up from the poor themselves and which takes the form of many varied organizations: poor farmers' and neighbourhood associations, trade unions, groups for women and youth, cultural and human rights associations, as well as organizations for the sick and also political organizations. Through participation in such organizations, the poor have progressively established themselves as true subjects of their own

¹⁷ The Christian ... recognizes that in many instances Latin America finds itself faced with a situation of injustice that can be called institutionalized violence, when, because of a structural deficiency of industry and agriculture, of national and international economy, of cultural and political life, "whole towns lack necessities, live in such dependence as hinders all initiative and responsibility as well as every possibility for cultural promotion and participation in social and political life" (*Populorum progressio* N° 30), thus violating fundamental rights.... We should not be surprised therefore, that the "temptation to violence" is surfacing in Latin America. One should not abuse the patience of a people that for years has borne a situation that would not be acceptable to any one with any degree of awareness of human rights (*Medellín*, "Peace," N° 16). We are deeply pained to see that the situation of violence — which can be called institutionalized violence (either as subversion or as repression) — has worsened. Human dignity is being abused, even in its most basic rights (*Puebla* N° 1259; cf. 27-71).

history and as active agents in the task of shaping a society that is different, richer in fraternal spirit and solidarity.¹⁸

Alongside this emerging popular movement and committed to it in solidarity, another has been taking shape during the last twenty-five years: it is of various Christian communities or non-Christian groups which are inserted within the popular sectors. Concretely I mean religious communities, student groups doing social outreach in new urban settlements and in rural communities, non-governmental organizations working to support and advise popular organizations and in general groups of "volunteers", both nationals and foreigners. Through this experience of insertion, many believers and non-believers of different social backgrounds, most of us being "non-poor", have come to realize that the world of the poor is a world that has its own language, its own voice, its own culture, its own way of life and of being men and women in society and in history. This phenomenon has led many to show solidarity and commit themselves actively in a long and arduous process of struggle and social transformation undertaken at the side of the poor. In this way they have made the "programme of the poor" their own or, as a popular leader from El Agostino (a poor district of Lima) declared, "they have linked their own personal destinies to the collective destiny of the poor."

Complementing this active commitment there is at the same time a solidarity in compassion: a solidarity that consists in staying by the side of the one who suffers, often only in respectful and humble silence, contemplating in the pain of the other the mystery of our fragile existence and of our radical dependence; contemplating and sharing with astonishment as well, the faith, the joy and the hope of the poor as lived in the midst of suffering and death.

In the convergence of these two movements, the poor, contributing their own word and becoming subjects of their own history, have gradually been transformed into proclaimers of the Good News for all other men and women in our society. And here there occurs something of which many of us believers are privileged witnesses in Peru and Latin America today: *the poor are evangelizing us*. In this fact, moreover, which is the most important thing in the life of the Church, we have gradually been discovering a new way of being persons and believers, of living our faith and reflecting on it, of being Church. And this way of living the faith obviously requires of us *a new way of encountering God and our brothers and sisters*, a new spiritual experience, a new experience of God forged in solidarity with those who are absent from history. This obviously demands a real conversion experience because it means leaving our own path to enter upon the path of the other, of the neighbour, especially the poor, in whom we finally meet the Lord (Matthew 25:31-45).

I therefore think that this convergence of the poor and their organizations on the one hand, with the "non-poor" who express their solidarity with popular organizations on the other, offers a very concrete example of how our preferential option for the poor can coherently be lived without

¹⁸ Latin America have increasingly taken cognizance of their dignity as human beings and of the desire for political and social participation, despite the fact that in many areas these rights are crushed underfoot. There has been a proliferation of community organizations, such as cooperative movements, especially among the common people (*Puebla* N° 18).

excluding the "non-poor". If the preferential option for the poor and the promotion of justice are in a very concrete way the focus of our life and of our apostolate in the Society, then we shall also be able to encourage those who are not poor to make this option their own and to discover, in their different social positions, creative and audacious ways of making it operational and effective. The experience of solidarity with the poor has also been for many people the best school for learning how to integrate their faith a bit more with the historical task of promoting justice. Finally, I believe that this experience shows us Jesuits the need for genuine conversion, along the lines described in the previous paragraph, if we really want to be able to promote this kind of integration in those who are not poor.

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GAP between RHETORIC and REALITY

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Almost twenty years after GC 32, there remains a nagging irony about a North American Jesuit — a well-educated, rather healthy, and comfortable university professor — sitting down at his up-to-date lap-top computer to write a short essay on the preferential option for the poor. There remains a yawning gap between all the rhetoric of the past twenty years about serving the poor, even becoming more poor, and the reality we have in fact achieved as individuals and as a corporate body. Of course, there have been magnificent examples of bridging that gap. But one more earnest essay on the subject might well invite a cynical reaction on the part of not a few Jesuits in North America who are doing their best to advance the Kingdom of God under conditions that can hardly be described as poor. Beyond all the phraseology, there remains an unconvincing, hollow ring to much that we have said — hollow enough to raise the question: "Do we really mean it?" "Are we perhaps engaged in a colossal act of corporate dishonesty?" This rhetorical hollowness is only deepened when the preferential option becomes reduced by some to a slogan, a kind of pious and even dogmatic shibboleth. Even a Gospel-inspired ideal can easily become a cudgel of judgmentalism.

The fact is that many Jesuits who work in educational institutions, retreat and spirituality centres, research centres and various special works are on the cutting edges of bringing Jesuit reality into line with Jesuit rhetoric. Yet, often these same Jesuits are caught in the common bind of trying to

figure out what the preferential option for the poor means in real Jesuit life and in the life of Jesuit institutions.

Not all rings hollow. Virtually all Jesuits have been edified and inspired by the example of many of their brothers who have directly placed themselves among the poor in ministries of great hardship. Hundreds of North American Jesuits have been transformed by the kind of direct contact with "third world" cultures which Pedro Arrupe urged some years ago. And the martyrdoms of so many Jesuits in witness to the Society's commitment to the poor is an awe-inspiring fact.

But it also seems a fact that not all Jesuits are authentically called to direct work with the poor as a regular mode of apostolic life. Many work within institutions which may seem intractably buffered from the world of the poor, or deal with scientific or theoretical matters that would seem to have little if any relation to the poor at all. Although these Jesuits are not without love and concern for the poor, and for their own evangelical commitment to poverty, many do not feel called to abandon a primary apostolate, such as university or high school teaching, in favour of a life of direct work with the poor which might (or might not) yield more immediately measurable results. This is not to say that they do not in fact work among the poor as well as within institutions; many Jesuits carry on dual ministries, such as teaching and visiting prisons or working in poor parishes. And very many are often innovators in the cultural interests and working methods of their apostolic institutions because they are mindful of the unique potential of institutions to challenge and change societies. This is certainly true of high schools and universities.

Contributing to the problem is that much of the talk about the preferential option for the poor has at times been undertaken at removal from reality, to such an extent that the role of the evangelical option for the poor ironically becomes idealized and abstract — a disincarnate principle. On occasion, poverty can even become romanticized. While following Jesus entails for Jesuits the voluntary acceptance of evangelical poverty, the Kingdom represents God's victory over the darkness of sin which has given rise to the injustice of involuntary poverty. Involuntary poverty is not good in itself; rather, it is a mark of sin.

Having said all of this, let me be unequivocally clear: The Society of Jesus, in communion with the whole Church, is committed definitively and irreversibly to a preferential option for the poor. This is a commitment which, far from obscuring the Society's earlier commitment to the promotion of faith and justice, gives that earlier commitment a sharpness and focus, indeed a criterion by which to judge the quality and steadfastness of that commitment in both Jesuits and Jesuit works and institutions. Merely stating this, however, does not automatically dissolve the problematic gap between rhetoric and reality which I mentioned earlier. The gap remains.

Bridging the Gap: The Work of Reconciliation

In order to avoid overly-idealistic or unrealistic appraisals, the preferential option for the poor must be understood in relation to a range of other factors which inform contemporary Jesuit vision. I would only mention two here which are treated in the first tabloid preparing for G.C. 34: integral evangelization and *kenosis*. Both of these insights help answer the questions: Who are the poor? And: What does it mean to serve the non-poor?

The tabloid calls for an "integral evangelization — addressing people's hearts in their real poverty and deepest suffering, respecting their way of seeing and doing, and proceeding by way of dialogue and listening." If the preferential option for the poor is to be taken seriously, it must serve as an integrating criterion for articulating the mission of the Society and for evaluating our works. But it is a **principle** of interpretation, a criterion for apostolic life, not an end in itself. The reality to be interpreted is the work of the Gospel as undertaken by the Society. The Gospel addresses the human condition in all its sin-riddled complexity. The key here is sin, in its manifold presentations, from the most hidden personal affronts against God's order, to the most boldly structural forms of injustice. Significantly, the tabloid links the preferential option for the poor to the Gospel's message of reconciliation, "the Good News of a Kingdom in which the Father's forgiveness embraces both victim of injustice and victimizer." This, in turn, is linked to the *Formula of the Institute's* stress on reconciling the estranged as a defining Jesuit work. "The *magis* moves us to seek the more effective path: to touch the root of sin, to reconcile the persons most divided."

Given this broad foundation, the text then suggests that the poor are, first, "the materially poor, the growing majority of humankind," and that the scandal of this fact "touches every Jesuit." In the materially impoverished we have the prime analogue of all the poor. The materially impoverished are those who experience estrangement from each other, from the rich, and even from the agents of God. They are of first concern in the Gospel. Expressions of estrangement abound in complex developed societies: "asylum seekers, migrants or refugees, prisoners and AIDS-patients, the mentally-retarded or the old, oppressed castes, the unemployed and unemployable youth. Here 'the poor' names all of these." The preferential option for the poor, therefore, becomes the **criterion** for the work of the Gospel: to what degree are the estranged being reconciled to one another so that justice is thereby fostered? As a criterion for interpreting the work of the Gospel, the preferential option requires me to ask myself how the estranged are entering into my life in both concrete and implicit ways, and how this contact with the poor might be shaping my everyday Christian consciousness as well as my teaching and research, including the questions I raise as a theologian. I am compelled to ask further the degree to which my work is furthering the mission of reconciliation of the estranged; to the degree that I am doing this, the preferential option for the poor is not a position that excludes the non-poor, but one which includes them within the ambit of the Gospel's liberating power. The oppressor, too, is offered salvation.

A Commitment Founded in Ignatian Mysticism

The tabloid also mentions that Jesuits must undertake a process of self-emptying by "taking-on" the "agenda of the poor" in the spirit of the third degree of humility. The point here is that our evangelical commitment to poverty, and the more recently articulated preferential option for the poor, begin as spiritual values profoundly rooted in the *kenosis* of Jesus. The connection drawn between Philippians and the third degree of humility finds its natural locus in Jesus' own poverty, even to the acceptance of an ignominious death. Becoming poor, not only through a religious vow, but as a preferential option, is a particular way of participation in the life of Jesus, particularly the Cross. This is why Ignatius devoted so much time and energy to the subject of poverty, and possibly why it was the occasion of such great mystical graces in his own life. For Ignatius, the election of poverty as the way of the Society was intimately tied to his devotion to the poverty of

Jesus, the true head of the Society. "...[T]hat very fact is a greater argument for proceeding in total poverty than all the other human reasons..."¹⁹

In order for poverty to become an authentic Gospel value in a Jesuit's life, in order to "opt for the poor," the Jesuit must be given the grace to be poor before and with Jesus, to participate in Jesus' own *humildad amorosa*.²⁰ Perhaps this is why the professed Jesuit, only after years of trial, was asked to assume a more exacting and consistent standard poverty than that required of scholastics. In any event, without spiritualizing poverty, the North American Jesuit probably needs to reaffirm, in the face of individualism, materialism, and various forms of secularism encroaching on our lives, that the root of the option for the poor is, like Ignatius', an essentially mystical identification with Jesus' poverty. Ignatius' mysticism, his keen affective sense of Jesus poor, was not an end in itself; its finality was found in the incarnation of the experience in ardent apostolic life, precisely in a desire to serve the poor, to become poor, and ultimately to be evangelized by the poor. Jesus was to be found incarnate among the estranged. In no way do I wish to resort to a "Jesuit fundamentalism"²¹ here or suggest that ignatian mysticism represents an alternate route, an end-run, around direct contact with the poor. Far from it. But if the preferential option is to be properly located in Jesuit life, it must be rooted in the soil of our common and specifically ignatian experience of the poor Jesus of the Gospel who found his own fulfilment among the poor. Otherwise we run the risk of settling for a reductionist, purely political, or even polarizing view of the preferential option for the poor.

The gap between Jesuit rhetoric and Jesuit reality on the matter of the preferential option for the poor can finally be bridged not by further pious or theoretical essays, even by this one, but only by the bold and prudent charting of new modes of proceeding. I am sure that I am not alone in hoping that General Congregation 34 will help in very practical ways to see us to this end.

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CONCLUSION

¹⁹ See Ignatius' "Spiritual Diary," N° 66, as in *Ignatius of Loyola: Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works*, Diary edited by Edward Malatesta, S.J. (New York: Paulist, 1991), p. 248.

²⁰ A term used by Ignatius several times in the "Spiritual Diary." See especially N° 178 and 182.

²¹ See Philip Endean, S.J., "Who Do You Say Ignatius Is? Jesuit Fundamentalism and Beyond," *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 19 (November 1987).

The MORE and MORE POOR²²

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Instead of speaking of apostolic challenges, I want to emphasize my conviction that **the** apostolic challenge which we should entertain is unique, something like "the one thing necessary".

Today, more so than twenty-five years ago, the main apostolic challenge facing the Society of Jesus is the one which flows from the major **fact** of our times, the growing impoverishment of our brothers and sisters the poor, which is already tending to become their historical, structural exclusion. I mean the plunder of their lives, the obvious failure of their historic projects, and consequently the fatal assaults upon their hope, their solidarity and, at the same time, their faith. This is the greatest "desolation" which confronts us.

This major fact is already a global reality. Of course it affects the two-thirds of the human family who live in the South. There is no need to cite statistics, most of us have been staggered by the dreadful prospects detailed in the reports of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).²³ The same fact also affects the one-third who are excluded from "the societies of the two-thirds" living in the North, that is, the young people who are structurally-unemployed, many of whom drug addicts, women who are doubly excluded as women and as unemployed, immigrants who are ethnically or racially discriminated against, the incurably sick, the permanently handicapped, the aged shunted aside in isolation, a new population reduced to beggary, etc. The impoverished majorities are not only a quantitative human reality but above all a qualitative one. These are they who lack all "human figure" and yet are "light of the nations" (Isaiah 53:2 and 42:6) because their brilliant light reveals what real inhumanity is, the inhumanity of those who have thrown them away on the garbage dumps of the earth.

According to our faith, these impoverished majorities are, as Ignacio Ellacuría, S.J., would say, "the people crucified" and, according to the Catholic bishops of Latin America, "the suffering faces of Jesus crucified".²⁴ To take all this seriously is to affirm without any doubt that the call to service, which the Society of Jesus hears, the call to work for the Kingdom (which is central to the Exercises) flows from those majorities in whom the Word of God is "newly made flesh", in whom Christ "suffers in his humanity" as Ignatius of Loyola would say in the Exercises. To take all this seriously on the eve of the 34th General Congregation, means that recreating or renewing the Jesuit

²² Excerpts of a talk, "Apostolic Challenges for the Society of Jesus," addressed to the Formation Commission of the North Latin American Assistancy (ALS).

²³ UNDP, *Human Development Report*, New York: Oxford University Press. 1990: Concept and Measurement of Human Development. 1991: Financing Human Development. 1992: Global Dimensions of Human Development. 1993: People's Participation.

²⁴ *Puebla*, N° 31; *Santo Domingo*, N° 178.

charism in today's historical circumstances has lost none of its relevance as the mission to serve faith and struggle for justice. Rather than "promotion of" I have written "struggle for" because, in a world infected with such tendencies to exclude the impoverished majorities, that is in the "anti-Kingdom", promoting justice means struggling for justice, as Jesus did, against its individual and institutional enemies. Moreover, Father General Kolvenbach has often used this stronger expression.

Hearing the apostolic call which this reality poses and challenged fundamentally by it, the response of "those who wish to be outstanding in service" is "not to waiver" but "to move against the desolation".²⁵ This translates into creative and persevering endurance in the preferential commitment to the poor and steadfastness even though disaster seems to have overtaken all the intermediate ideologies and most of their concrete implementations. In the old days, Jesuit novices were told that perseverance in the Society would guarantee us eternal salvation. Today one should say that the salvation of a Jesuit's life cannot be assured unless he embraces the greater grace of creative perseverance in his preferential commitment to the poor.

To the concept of "ideology" I attribute the meaning given by Juan Luis Segundo, S.J., that is, not a global vision, but rather a pattern of historical and practical ends and means which mediate the options of our faith. Certainly it is impossible to persevere creatively in a specific commitment, in a believing praxis, unless these are mediated by ideologies and historic projects. But to underline heavily what I am trying to say, I state the paradox that one must persevere creatively in this commitment to the impoverished, even though there were no mediating ideologies or historical projects on which to lean, but simply because this commitment is the heart of the Gospel of Jesus. Furthermore, and pushing the paradox to the extreme, I maintain that reversing this historical structural trend towards the increasing impoverishment of the majorities of humanity, that is, our vigorous contribution to the process of humanizing the impoverished, has absolute value for us and is the cause that we as a body should serve even if there were no God.

The various dimensions and activities of our vocation come together in our humble response to this one basic apostolic challenge, and from this flows a requirement which we should recognize as a grace granted to us, forgiven sinners. We should shape our response with the deepest humility because "this treasure we bear in earthen vessels" (2 Corinthians 4:7), without forgetting that St. Paul expresses this conviction dialectically in a context where he speaks of the glory of God shining in us. The reasons — "of the heart" — for this humility are many. Let us state some of them.

Many of us have been tested by deep suffering woven of friends, Jesuit and lay, who have died "prematurely" in this commitment, martyrs and confessors, and woven also of historic projects in which we have backed the poor and which have collapsed. Suffering can destroy enthusiasm. That enthusiasm might endure in and through suffering is one of the most precious graces of God: "We are in difficulties on all sides, but never cornered; we see no answer to our problems, but never despair; ... always, wherever we may be, we carry with us in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus, too, may always be seen in our body" (2 Corinthians 4:8-10).

We know full well that the poor are neither angels nor always paragons of humanity, but rather often dehumanized victims, merely human and therefore vulnerable to the same sin of selfishness

²⁵ *Spiritual Exercises* N° 97, 319.

which has made victims of them. The present age has made them even more vulnerable to the abundant attractions of selfish consumerism, though their only access be through display windows of shops lining the streets they wander, and through the mass media, degrading many into "wolves ready to prey upon other poor people."

Many of us "formed" Jesuits are aware of not having coherently appropriated G.C. 33's reminder that our austerity of life is the sign of credibility for our service of faith and our struggle for justice and, of course, for our following of Jesus poor and humble. Many of us do not live this sign of credibility. There are also young men in formation, including some who come from among the poor, who already aspire to consumerism and find austerity repellant.

But if we accept the challenge realistically and its response, I believe that, even more than twenty-five years ago, today we must state that "only one thing" is apostolically necessary: creatively to persevere in our commitment to the poor, with those become poor unjustly and with those deprived of all hope — be it unjustly or "only" because of their fragile human condition. This I think is the translation of our mission of "faith and justice" whereby we structurally and individually serve the humanization of the human majorities, our humble contribution lest "the hope of the poor should perish" (Psalm 9:19). That the hope of the poor should not perish is the apostolic desire which shaped many of our generation when we were in formation, and on this same basis I believe we can continue to renew our apostolic response.

In the same spirit we may reread a paragraph not often quoted from Decree 4 (Nº 50):

If we have the patience and the humility and the courage to walk with the poor, we will learn from what they have to teach us what we can do to help them. Without this arduous journey, our efforts for the poor will have an effect just the opposite from what we intend, we will only hinder them from getting a hearing for their real wants and from acquiring the means of taking charge of their own destiny, personal and collective. Through such humble service, we will have the opportunity to help them find, at the heart of their problems and their struggles, Jesus Christ living and acting through the power of the Spirit. Thus can we speak to them of God our Father who brings to Himself the human race in a communion of true brotherhood.

I believe that today, when the horizon of hope of the poor seems further distant from us, this quotation has more relevance than it had twenty years ago. The reason is that it stresses the "patience with which we need to wait", since we do not see "the hope" for the humanization of the poor and thereby of all humanity (Romans 8:24-25).

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