

# PROMOTIO JUSTITIAE

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John Paul II, *VITA CONSECRATA*, §82  
"Preference for the poor and  
the promotion of justice"

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**Michael Czerny, S.J.**  
Editor

## John Paul II, *VITA CONSECRATA*, § 82

### "Preference for the poor and the promotion of justice"

At the beginning of his ministry, in the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus announces that the Spirit has consecrated him to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to captives, to give sight back to the blind, to set the oppressed free, to declare a year of favour from the Lord (cf. Luke 4:16-19). Taking up the Lord's mission as her own, the Church proclaims the Gospel to every man and woman, committing herself to their integral salvation. But with special attention, in a true "preferential option," she turns to those who are **in situations of greater weakness**, and therefore in greater need. "The poor," in varied states of affliction, are the oppressed, those on the margin of society, the elderly, the sick, the young, any and all who are considered and treated as "the least."

The option for the poor is inherent in the very structure of love lived in Christ. All of Christ's disciples are therefore held to this option; but those who wish to follow the Lord more closely, imitating his attitudes, cannot but feel involved in a very special way. The sincerity of their response to Christ's love will lead them to live a life of poverty and to embrace the cause of the poor. For each Institute, according to its charism, this involves **adopting a simple and austere way of life**, both as individuals and as a community. Strengthened by this living witness and in ways consistent with their choice of life, and maintaining their independence vis-à-vis political ideologies, consecrated persons will be able to denounce the injustices committed against so many sons and daughters of God, and commit themselves to the promotion of justice in the society where they work.<sup>1</sup> In this way, even in present circumstances, through the witness of countless consecrated persons, there will be a renewal of that dedication which was characteristic of the founders and foundresses who spent their lives serving the Lord in the poor.

Christ is poor on earth in the person of his poor.... As God he is rich, as man he is poor. With his humanity he has gone up to heaven and, prosperous, is seated at the right hand of the Father, and yet, here on earth, still poor, he suffers hunger, thirst and nakedness.<sup>2</sup>

The Gospel is made effective through charity, which is the Church's glory and the sign of her faithfulness to the Lord. This is demonstrated by the whole history of the consecrated life, which can be considered a living exegesis of Jesus' words: "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Matthew 25:40). Many Institutes, especially in modern times, were established precisely to address one or other

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Propositio* 18.

<sup>2</sup> Saint Augustine, *Sermon* 123, 3-4; *PL* 38, 685-686.

of the needs of the poor. But even when such a purpose was not the determining factor, concern and care for the needy — expressed in prayer, assistance and hospitality — was always a normal part of every form of the consecrated life, even of the contemplative life. And how could it be otherwise, since the Christ encountered in contemplation is the same who lives and suffers in the poor? In this sense, the history of the consecrated life is rich with marvellous and sometimes ingenious examples. Saint Paulinus of Nola, after distributing his belongings to the poor in order to consecrate himself fully to God, built the cells of his monastery above a hospice for the poor. He rejoiced at the thought of this singular "exchange of gifts": the poor, whom he helped, strengthened with their prayers the very "foundations" of his house, wholly dedicated to the praise of God.<sup>3</sup> Saint Vincent de Paul, for his part, loved to say that, when one is obliged to leave prayer to attend to a poor person in need, that prayer is not really interrupted, because "one leaves God to serve God."<sup>4</sup>

Serving the poor is an act of evangelization and, at the same time, a seal of Gospel authenticity and a catalyst for permanent conversion in the consecrated life, since, as Saint Gregory the Great says,

when charity lovingly stoops to provide even for the smallest needs of our neighbour, then does it suddenly surge upwards to the highest peaks. And when in great kindness it bends to the most extreme needs, then with much vigour does it resume its soaring to the heights.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Poem XXI*, 386-394; *PL* 61, 587.

<sup>4</sup> Conference "On the Rules" (30 May 1647) in Coste, ed., *Correspondance, Entretiens, Documents*, Volume IX (Paris, 1923), 319.

<sup>5</sup> Saint Gregory the Great, *The Pastoral Rule* 2, 5; *PL* 77, 33.

# SOCIAL APOSTOLATE INITIATIVE, 1995-1999

Michael Czerny, S.J.

## Reasons for this Initiative

There seem to be at least three good reasons to undertake an **Initiative** of reflection and renewal in the social apostolate of the Society of Jesus.

Reason # 1: Everywhere **society**, which is exactly the special *locus* of this apostolate, is undergoing great, rapid and truly puzzling change. The fall of the Berlin wall (1989) and the Iraq war (1991) are often mentioned as symbols, the triumph of neo-liberalism or the market serve as examples, of many dramatic changes which are taking place — deeply, persistently and, it seems, globally. If we are committed to bringing the Gospel to society, and if society is changing radically and rapidly everywhere, then our social apostolate needs review and re-thinking.

The Church's commitment to bring the Gospel to modern society dates back to Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* in 1891. In the Society, Father Janssens' "Instruction on the Social Apostolate" in 1949 gave important impetus to a wide range of works in the social field. Then in 1975, GC 32 declared the promotion of justice to be an "absolute requirement" of the service of faith and that the two together define the Society's mission. A complex new chapter opened in the history of the Society and of the social apostolate. Twenty-plus years later, it seems well worth the effort to appropriate the lights and shadows, failures and graces of this history — reason # 2 for undertaking the **Initiative**.

GC 34 re-affirmed "the integrating principle of our mission" as "the inseparable link between faith and the promotion of the justice of the Kingdom,"<sup>1</sup> pointed out new dimensions and urgent situations,<sup>2</sup> and deepened our commitment by adding dialogue with cultures and other beliefs as essential elements of our mission.<sup>3</sup> **Inculturation** and inter-religious **dialogue** cannot simply be tacked onto social ministry as done until now. They transform the very manner in which we approach all social ministry: spiritually, communally, intellectually, practically, and so forth. And so reason # 3 is to bring culture and dialogue into the very essence of the social apostolate.

These three reasons, and perhaps others, are behind the several challenging **topics** which began to take form in some social-sector meetings soon after GC 34. In the latter half of 1995 I visited nearly every area of the Society and invited social apostolate Jesuits to take up one or more of the following topics.

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<sup>1</sup> Decree 2, n.14.

<sup>2</sup> Decree 3, nn.5-10 and nn.11-16.

<sup>3</sup> Decrees 4 and 5.

### Topic 1. Characteristics

The first challenge is to give a simple, basic account of the vision, spirit, thinking and praxis of the social sector. As if someone of good will but without our background were to ask:

"How do you Jesuits in social ministry describe your vision and do your work?"

"What do you think is happening in society? How do you respond? What's evangelical, Jesuit, priestly about your response? How does it fit with other things that Jesuits do?"

"Why do you do such work? What do you hope to achieve? How do you evaluate your efforts and institutions: what counts for success, for failure?"

In answer to such questions, we might begin with our understanding, appreciation and critique of society today, and then our response since Vatican II, namely the response of GC 31-34:

How we pray (spirituality) and live (community).

How we research (analysis) and why we respond (service) and what we hope for (vision).

How we try to incorporate media awareness, inculturation and inter-religious dialogue into social ministries.

How we choose issues, do planning, organize action, and cooperate with others.

How we characterize typical marks of Jesuit projects or institutes; typical approaches and methods we use; features which help us fulfil the Jesuit mission and allow others to recognize our effort as "of the Society."

What kinds of formation (early, academic, professional and ongoing) are required; links with other apostolic sectors; national and international networks. And so forth.

Just as *The Characteristics of Jesuit Education* (1987) has proved most helpful for everyone involved in our schools and universities, so an introduction to the social apostolate, its fundamental principles and practical ways of proceeding, promises to be of great help.

Such a clear account would be interesting and useful to several different groups:

- members, veteran and new, of the social sector, with a view to renewing all forms of social apostolate;
- colleagues, co-workers and employees with whom we wish to share our vision, spirituality and service, and to whom we owe a clear expression of "where we are coming from";
- fellow-Jesuits and colleagues working in all other ministries, to improve cooperation and to implement the one mission more thoroughly;
- young members of the Society considering their future apostolate and planning their studies, as well as candidates thinking over a possible vocation to the Society.

With these future interlocutors in mind, a few Jesuits in each Assistancy have taken up topic 1 and are drafting a preliminary response. These early drafts will be assembled, as explained in the section "Process and Calendar" below, and hopefully one day a *Characteristics of Jesuit Social Apostolate* will be the result.

### Topic 2. Socio-cultural Analysis

*Characteristics* will probably open with some kind of understanding, appreciation and critique of society in order to situate our apostolate in the world and in the Church. But because of the tremendous social changes (reason # 1), and also because of the cultural and religious dimensions

which need to be integrated (reason # 3), the tools and techniques we have been using until now to analyze society clearly need to be revised and up-dated.

The second challenge then is to overhaul the **instruments of our socio-cultural analysis**. What are the ideas, the tools and techniques you use to analyze society in its social, economic, political and cultural dimensions?

We need to learn how to do analysis which is penetrating and multi-faceted; which appropriates the best of social science and of practical experience; which not only uncovers socio-economic and socio-political structures, but also gives cultural, communal, historical and religious dimensions their due importance; which is applicable in different cultures as well as in multi-cultural societies; and which makes our social action more incisive.

The challenge of topic 2 has more to do with method than with content; it does not mean producing an analysis or a reading of society; it means facing new kinds of problems as well as thinking through the shortcomings of earlier approaches (such as an ideological slant or narrowness of viewpoint). It involves learning from experience, designing new methods, and assembling workable elements, tools, and techniques. If work on topic 2 prospers, it may produce a *Socio-cultural Analysis for Jesuit Ministry*.

### Topic 3. *Evaluation*

If headway is made on *Characteristics* and on *Analysis*, then both can be put to good use in developing an **evaluation** of Jesuit social efforts. "Social efforts" include all sorts of social centres, development NGOs, grass-root projects and, eventually, the social dimension of other apostolates.

How do you evaluate Jesuit social projects and institutes? Evaluation is something everyone says is important, but then Jesuits seem reluctant to undertake it because they are too busy or do not know how to do it. Were a reliable approach to be available, existing Jesuit social efforts could be evaluated and, eventually, new initiatives planned. The challenge therefore is to develop a reliable approach to evaluation, one that takes the characteristics of our social apostolate as its basis and makes good use of an effective socio-cultural analysis.

Designing evaluation might include: drawing lessons from evaluations successfully accomplished, showing how goals and criteria may be clarified, proposing instruments or techniques for evaluating personnel and cataloguing resources, laying out effective and feasible methodology. The result may be something like *Points for Evaluating Jesuit Social Projects*.

## Process and Calendar

### Phase 1:

- 1995** The Social Justice Secretary (SJS) developed the present **Initiative** with its three topics of renewal in the social apostolate and the justice dimension of our mission. In each area of the Society, some Jesuits agreed on an approach and took up one or more topics.
- 1996** Meetings or teams work to produce an initial draft which is appropriate and meaningful to those in the Assistancy. The accent is on topic 1, *Characteristics*. By the end of the year, the draft responses are to be collected by SJS.

The process begins with relatively few Jesuits in the social sector, takes place primarily at the Assistancy level, and puts emphasis on **producing** relevant draft material which, after mid-'97, will serve to stimulate discussion and elicit feed-back.

### Phase 2:

- 1997** It is thirty years since *Populorum Progressio*, ten years since *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, and ten years since the meeting of directors of Jesuit Social Centres at Cavalletti.

March: The SJS with an international Jesuit Board named by Father General prepares the upcoming Congress, assembles the drafts submitted by each Assistancy and identifies key issues and themes, convergences and differences.

June 15-22: **International Congress**, Naples, one Jesuit from each Province or Region. To work together on the draft materials, to find common and important themes, to express them clearly, working towards a future *Characteristics of Jesuit Social Apostolate*, and perhaps topics 2 and 3 as well. To propose next steps in the renewal, to mandate SJS and Board to guide the process, gather feedback, edit the materials.

### Phase 3:

- 1998** Having prepared good-quality materials, the process of participation now becomes both feasible and significant. The draft *Characteristics*, maybe also *Analysis* and *Evaluation*, circulate widely in each Province or Region among works and communities for discussion and feed-back.

The process 1997-1999, involving Jesuits and non-Jesuit colleagues in both social and other sectors, is widely **participatory** with emphasis on finding **consensus**.

- 1999** The SJS and Board collect the feed-back to finalize a first edition of *Characteristics of Jesuit Social Apostolate* which Father General hopes to promulgate before the end of 1999, perhaps also *Socio-cultural Analysis for Jesuit Ministries*, and maybe even *Points for Evaluating Jesuit Social Projects*.

The purpose of the **Initiative** is to bring the grace and vision and universal mission of GC 34 into the social apostolate at the middle level where Jesuits are formed and live and work and pray, where they discern about their ministry with others and in the Church. If doubts or difficulties still exist regarding faith and justice, culture and dialogue, the hope is to clarify them.

Our attempt to explain our apostolate in a simple manner will, hopefully, bring about a real renewal, rendering this ministry more evangelical and more effective in action and more collaborative, that is, better able to help other Jesuits and colleagues to promote the justice of the Kingdom in whatever they do.



### Disputed questions ... postponed

Several points seem difficult as the **Initiative** gets underway:

- i) Besides the expression "social apostolate," terms used in different parts of the Society include: social action, social justice, social ministries, social pastoral, social sector, worker mission, excluded or marginated, and perhaps others. Nor are the different terms exactly synonyms. Yet it does not seem desirable to clarify the terminology at the start.
- ii) In a few Provinces ministries are organized in sectors, making it easy to identify which Jesuits and colleagues are "social." In many Provinces though, it is difficult to say who "belongs" to the social sector and who doesn't.<sup>4</sup> Those who do not, may feel that their efforts to promote justice are being overlooked. This is not the intention, and no one should feel excluded because of the confusing vocabulary.
- iii) It is not easy to describe the relationship between the social **sector** and the social **dimension**,<sup>5</sup> between specific (explicit, full-time, or professional) social involvement and the promotion of justice characterizing the entire mission of the Society. True, since Decree 4 our entire mission is inescapably social in its implications, but this does not wipe out the specifically **social** apostolate or make it redundant. The distinction and the links between sector and dimension will hopefully emerge along the way.
- iv) To say something significant about justice ministry anywhere in the world and, at the same time, to take enormous local (social, cultural, religious) conditions into account, seems nearly contradictory. Maybe it is. But important **common** concerns may emerge, pointing to global or structural issues, while other irreducibly **different** concerns may reveal important cultural aspects.
- v) Everyone accepts the fact that the social field is very heterogeneous, very varied, throughout the Society. When the preliminary drafts prepared in each Assistancy are brought together in mid-1997, what might be the result? The most disparate: that Jesuit social apostles in different parts of the world have nothing in common. The more universal: important ideas and approaches are deeply-shared and can be expressed in a single booklet of *Characteristics*. A possible compromise: some universal themes, some local ones.

Such "disputed questions" may be real concerns and act as obstacles at the beginning but, rather than pause to resolve them now, let us trust that they will sort themselves out in the course of the process.

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<sup>4</sup> The social apostolate may be a collection of various efforts such as: social centres of research and/or action; worker priests, social workers or prison chaplains; Jesuits who accompany the excluded or marginalized or exploited, who live and/or work with the poor, the unemployed or labourers, the homeless, street children, aboriginal or indigenous people, Dalits or Tribals, gypsies or travellers, those addicted to alcohol or drugs or living with HIV/AIDS; JRS and others working with migrants or refugees; etc., etc.

<sup>5</sup> GC 34's Decree 15 on Communication uses exactly this language: "Sector or dimension? Communication in the Society has usually been considered a sector of apostolic activity, a field for some specialists who have often felt isolated or on the margin of the apostolic body" (n.3).

What might one hope for, five or ten years from now, as a result of the **Initiative**? That another Ricci or Teilhard or Ellacuría shine in bringing the Gospel to his world and society, and that many well-formed Jesuits and colleagues serve God's people, especially the poor, in transforming society "for the building up of a world at once more human and more divine."<sup>6</sup> In the words of Father General:

My sincere hope is that, reflecting on what it means to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to society in the early 21st century, we will discover, in more concrete ways than a General Congregation can, what the Society generally and the social sector specifically are called to contribute.<sup>7</sup>

Within the "Social Apostolate Initiative," a three-day workshop on the social apostolate and the social dimension of the mission of the Society of Jesus was held in Prague, January 25-28, 1996, involving about fifteen Jesuits from countries which used to be within the Soviet sphere. The following account is in three parts: the "Invitation" by the Social Justice Secretary; the "Final Report" by the workshop participants; and, in response, a "Latin American Reading."

#### INVITATION to the PRAGUE WORKSHOP

The enormous difficulties and tremendous sufferings of nearly the whole 20th century are our common background; may the countless martyrs intercede for us; but our discussion will not dwell on the past.

Our ultimate goal is the evangelization of our peoples and service in the Church; within this *diakonia fidei*, the specific concern of this workshop is the promotion of justice in the societies and cultures of our countries — both as social apostolate and as the social dimension, or justice dimension, of every Jesuit ministry.

Few of us have much academic or professional training in social questions, and we accept this limitation. Each will do his best to describe accurately and interpret in a balanced way. If one or more questions seem to need some research, this can be done afterwards.

Our purpose includes some of the following objectives:

- to focus on the most important features of each society-in-transition and to notice the key features in common: What are the most important problems in your country? How are the relations among "church-society-state" evolving in your country?

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<sup>6</sup> GC 32, D.2, n.31.

<sup>7</sup> Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., "Invitation to 1997 Congress of Jesuit Social Apostolate," 9 March 1996.

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- to describe how the Church and the Society of Jesus are responding to the social challenges in the countries of the former Eastern bloc: Give specific examples of what the Church is doing to meet the needs of the "new society." Similarly, what is your Province doing and how is the attitude of Jesuits in this respect?
- to reflect on what the recent General Congregations propose to us as the work and spirituality of the faith which does justice;
- to agree on a few priorities for the Society of Jesus in confronting the social, cultural, and religious aspects of our societies-in-transition;
- to propose the next steps in
  - raising social awareness among us and among our people;
  - developing the social dimension of our spirituality;
  - expressing the social justice aspect in every ministry;
  - establishing appropriate works of social justice or joining others in their good efforts.
- to consider the **Social Apostolate Initiative: A Proposal for 1995-1999**, adapt it to our countries, and nominate some Jesuits to carry it forward.

The content or subject-matter, as well as the different languages, will make it difficult to listen to one another. Nevertheless, we will take our time and give each one the chance to speak, to be heard, to understand, to respond.

The serious concerns of which we speak are not only urgent social issues but also deeply rooted in our faith in Jesus Christ, in our Jesuit spirituality, in our priestly vocation, in our apostolic desires. Therefore the meeting is planned to unfold in a truly prayerful way, with the hope that our agreements may be the work of the Holy Spirit.

Let us ask our fellow-Jesuits and friends to pray very sincerely that God our Father bless the Prague workshop with His generous grace so that, through the intercession of our Blessed Mother and St. Ignatius, our modest first effort may truly help to incarnate the Gospel among our peoples and societies.

## FINAL REPORT of the PRAGUE WORKSHOP

The workshop not only prepared for the International Congress of the Social Apostolate of the Society which will take place in June 1997, but was also a reflection on the way that we are responding to the changed situation and to the new challenges in the countries of the former eastern bloc.

Our reflections resulted in the following points:

### 1. The Situation in our Countries

#### Worlds of Light

- 1) Since 1989 we have experienced the **freedom** to express ourselves, freedom to act and to worship, freedom from fear and freedom to encounter other ideas and people.

- 2) We have witnessed impressive examples of **solidarity** in the actions of ordinary people. There is a growing number of Non-Governmental Organisations.
- 3) Old and new states in the region are taking active **responsibility** for our own institutions, rather than awaiting decisions from elsewhere. We are now having to take **responsibility** for ourselves, for our resources and the new opportunities.

### A World in Shadow

- 1) The optimism and hopes of 1989 have turned to **disappointment and disillusionment**. Our expectations proved to be unrealistic. This has led to despair and a sense that nothing can be changed.
- 2) There are **no new ideas or visions** for our societies. We have resisted the communists, but now we have no attractive models of what to put in the place which communism occupied (only a savage capitalism or a nostalgic conservatism).
- 3) We have new **economic and social problems**: unemployment, a growing divide between rich and poor, material and moral poverty.
- 4) The **mass media** exercise a powerful influence over our lives and cause enormous damage by manipulating people's images of the world and their identity.
- 5) **New problems** are emerging: nationalism, relativism, an absence of authority, and a legal, political and economic "jungle".

## **2. The Church's Response**

### Positive Aspects

- 1) **Freedom** to practice our faith and the need for our faith to become more mature. Awareness that the Church is called to discover her place in democratic and pluralistic societies.
- 2) The establishment of social apostolate **structures**, for instance, *Caritas*.
- 3) The establishment of **educational** and training centres.
- 4) The presence, in at least some form, of the Church in the **media**.
- 5) International **exchanges**, new contacts and opportunities. A new sense of the Church as universal.

### Negative Aspects

- 1) Balance sometimes seems lacking between the pastoral effort to reach the whole population, and the institutional effort to recover properties or have the Church's interests reflected in new legislation. This so reduces the Church's capacity to speak out on social matters that she risks becoming silent.
- 2) A lack of vision and too clerical a style sometimes seem to hinder the Church's work. Lay people are not trusted and so are not fully involved in the mission. The Church sometimes seems defensive and not inclined to co-operate with others to bring about change.
- 3) In some of our countries the Church does not seem to have found a way of reaching out to the people, beyond the ideological divisions. The language which the Church uses does not always speak to people in our societies. The faithful have difficulty in connecting their faith to their actions in social, cultural and public life.
- 4) The Church usually reacts very slowly to changes in society.
- 5) Intolerance and a lack of dialogue between groups and generations within the Church are now having a negative effect upon the Church's ministry.

The Response of the Society of Jesus

- 1) A social dimension can be seen in what our parishes do and in other works. There is lacking, however, a systematic reflection on it.
- 2) In the different Provinces there are works directly related to the social apostolate, for instance, with street children, the homeless, associations and meetings concerned with social questions.
- 3) In many Provinces there is no co-ordinator or committee for the social apostolate (or only formally). In spite of this, we have been surprised that we do more than at first sight we seem to.
- 4) The social works of the social apostolate must not be seen as the initiative of charismatic individuals but as the commitment of the whole Province.
- 5) We hope that this workshop can give impetus for a better response to the concrete situation in the various countries and a deepening of the social dimension of our apostolate.

**3. What should we do?**

- 1) The new social problems appearing in our countries demand an urgent response, which should be an essential part of our apostolic mission with a greater attention to the social dimension of all our works.
- 2) We must work for a change of attitude, including living our poverty in solidarity with the poor so that we can truly share with those in need. First we must have the courage to take apostolic initiatives, and only then construct buildings and institutions.
- 3) We have seen the necessity of social analysis and of a description or *Characteristics* of the social apostolate.

**4. Conclusion**

Individually, many Jesuits are doing good work in the social milieu, but without coordination or exchange. Our meeting was very satisfying and allowed us to discover that we are not isolated in our problems. Our meeting here, even if preliminary, has been a good and joyful experience. It is time now to take another step. The East and the West in Europe can now work together and organise better the drafting of a *Characteristics of Jesuit Social Apostolate*. We would like to meet with our Western brothers, but not forgetting the specific characteristics of our own situation.

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František Lízna, S.J. (BOH) Czechia  
Robin Schweiger, S.J. (SVN) Slovenia  
Aurel Štefko, S.J. (SVK) Slovakia  
Zvonko Vlah, S.J. (CRO) Croatia  
Peter Zahoránsky, S.J. (SVK) Slovakia

## A LATIN AMERICAN READING of the PRAGUE WORKSHOP

As a Latin American, I'd like to share what seems most interesting to me in the above-described experience of our fellow Jesuits. For these companions, who used to live under a political model avowedly opposed to religious transcendence, the Gospel still has something to say in Eastern Europe. Faith, according to the report, "has matured." Such testimony is basic for today. It would be very fruitful to compare their experience with that of Jesuits in Cuba who are going through something similar with the international re-definition of the Soviet bloc. At the same time, it would be good to explain this "maturation" a bit more for the rest of the world.

I feel confirmed in a point central to how I want to live Gospel: the theme of the option for the poor. When the poor become an "object" of technical considerations, the capacity to harmonize with the Good News of Jesus gets lost. And perhaps the very capacity to initiate a genuine human communication on a world scale is also at stake.

In the social analysis we do, it is very important that we "appear as actors-and-subjects." As Christian actors, the option for the poor appears as a characteristic note. Taking the standpoint of the oppressed groups and asking about the possibility or viability of our peoples in the current world arrangement would be, in this sense, our hypothesis or point of departure. At least here there is something which questions us in a concrete way and has us react as actors. At the Prague meeting, this aspect remains integrated, and in really simple language: "Since 1989 we have experienced, etc..."

As I understand it, one of the most worrisome discussions of the whole wide world was also debated at Prague: the collapse of all-embracing visions. This has ecclesial consequences both externally (dialogue with atomized social actors) and internally (de-clericalization). I think that the proposals of our "Base Christian Communities" could respond in part to a possible pastoral vacuum. True, the language used until now in the base communities is coloured with the same all-embracing visions which have gone into crisis. But there is no reason to confuse a popular pastoral approach with a content marked by the language of a certain epoch.

A question implicit in this last aspect is the problem of the "universality of the Gospel." The Church cannot give up this claim: Christ came to save "all" human beings. But today universality is possible only when sought in the form of dialogue. To me it seems that a biblical basis exists for responding to this challenge (the vocation narratives are in the form of dialogue), as does a dogmatic basis (for example, sacramental mediation presupposes the liberty of whoever receives the sacrament and, liturgically, this is always expressed in the form of dialogue). In those countries at Prague, the universalism of the Gospel will continue to be a bone of contention for nationalisms of the extreme which, due to their highly emotive component, are usually susceptible to manipulation for other purposes.

Let's hope that this "globalized" initiative of the Society's helps us all to gain some clarity in our difficult task of preaching the Gospel on the eve of the 21st century.

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# FAITH-JUSTICE-DIALOGUE

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According to the tradition of the Society of Jesus, a General Congregation — the meeting of its highest legislative body, made up of Jesuits elected by all the Provinces in the world — is a rare occurrence. Ignatius of Loyola wanted such an assembly to meet rarely, normally to elect a Superior General who, serving for life, would not often be replaced. But Ignatius also foresaw the need to discuss matters of vital importance for the Order. In the 450 years the Society has existed, the GC has met only 34 times and, of these, only seven times was it convoked solely to handle business without electing a new Father General.

GC 34 was one of those rare occasions in the life of the Society. Among its tasks it proposed to define the Society's mission on the eve of the third millennium. The present article seeks to explain the results of GC 34 in this sense. In order to do so, we return to what roots the mission as Ignatius and his companions saw it and try to demonstrate how GC 34 formulated a new expression of the mission in a both faithful and novel way, keeping in mind the experience of the Society in a complex, pluralist world such as today's.

## Back to the roots...

In seeking the approval of the Pope for the new religious Order which was in the process of being founded, St. Ignatius and his companions elaborated a text which sketched the identity and mission of the new foundation. It is a basic text, fundamental for the self-understanding of any Jesuit. To it we always return to test our own fidelity to the ideal which the Spirit inspired in Ignatius. It is called "The Formula of the Institute" and consists of two versions: the first, approved by Paul III in 1540 and included in the bull *Regimini Militantis Ecclesiae*; the second, presented ten years later by Ignatius to Pope Julius III and included in the bull *Exposcit Debitum*.

GC 34, working to reformulate the mission of the Society on the eve of the third millennium, could not help but have this text before its eyes. For the Formula expresses, for the first time, the mission of the Society in a binding way and serves as the pattern for all future generations of Jesuits.

The central text treating the mission is the following:

**Whoever desires to serve** as a soldier of God beneath the banner of the cross in our Society, which we desire to be designated by the name of Jesus, and to serve the Lord alone and the Church, His spouse, under the Roman pontiff, the vicar of Christ on earth, should, after a solemn vow of perpetual chastity, poverty, and obedience, **keep what follows in mind**. He is a member of a **Society founded** chiefly for this purpose: to strive especially for the defense and propagation of the faith and for the progress of souls in Christian life and doctrine, **by means of** public preaching, lectures, and any other ministration whatsoever of the word of God, and further by means of the Spiritual Exercises, the education of children and unlettered persons in Christianity, and the spiritual consolation of Christ's faithful through hearing confessions and administering the other sacraments. Moreover, he should **show himself** no less useful in reconciling the estranged, in holily assisting and serving those who are found in prisons or hospitals, and indeed in performing any other

works of charity, according to what will seem expedient for the glory of God and the common good. Furthermore, all these works should be carried out altogether free of charge and without accepting any salary for the labour expended in all the aforementioned activities. Still further, let any such person take care, as long as he lives, first of all to **keep before his eyes** God and then the nature of this Institute which he has embraced and which is, so to speak, a pathway to God; and then let him **strive** with all his effort to achieve this end set before him by God — each one, however, according to the grace which the Holy Spirit has given to him and according to the particular grade of his vocation.

The **first** remarkable thing about this text is that it does not abstractly describe a future Jesuit but rather speaks **out of the experience** which he ought to have. The words printed in bold express existential attitudes. Ignatius is a pedagogue or, rather, a mistagogue, someone who manages to introduce us into the Mystery, the mystery of God or the mystery of each one in relationship with God. The book of the Spiritual Exercises is a guidebook for having an experience. The Constitutions do not follow a logical but rather a genetic order, the process of one's incorporation into the Society. The Formula of the Institute has the same characteristic. It is addressed to concrete persons who, on entering the Society, want to be in harmony with the purpose of the Order. "The Society is made to be lived from within the heart of each Jesuit. It is a charisma which can only be understood when seen living in the heart and in the head of those who possess it."<sup>1</sup>

The importance of experience is also reflected in the fact that Ignatius presented two different versions of the Formula for papal approval in the space of ten years. The second version recapitulates what the Society experienced during the first ten years and, in that light, perfects the first intuition. Ignatius was always ready to learn, recognizing that God is constantly teaching us via the ways and byways of life.

A **second** feature is how the Formula of the Institute expresses the mission of the Society. It, too, expresses it in terms of attitudes, not abstract principles. The Society was "founded... in order to." Here the end or purpose of the Society is expressed, and then "by means of....," the means by which to achieve it. They are concrete ministries in so far as the end is the mission, properly-speaking. Now then, "for the defense and propagation of the faith and for the progress of souls in Christian life and doctrine" (end of the Society): this includes reference to the one in need (the poor) as an inseparable dimension. Care for the poor witnesses to faith as concretely lived in daily life and so it is not secondary to the mission of a Jesuit, who must be ready to turn to the poor and assist them. According to an expression of Ignatius elsewhere, it is a matter not of preaching but of "preaching in poverty,"<sup>2</sup> imitating the apostles as models. Service to the poor and the gratuity of ministries constitute the style in which a Jesuit fulfils his mission and makes his effort credible and effective. If he is busy helping those who suffer misery, he will have his eyes fixed on God as the final end of the Society, who is constantly inspiring the good which it can do.

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<sup>1</sup> Jesús Corella, "Qué es la Fórmula y cómo se hizo," in Arzubialde et al, eds., *Constituciones de la Compañía de Jesús: Introducción y notas para su lectura*, Bilbao: Mensajero and Santander: Sal Terrae, [1994?], p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Ignatius of Loyola, Letter to Jaime Cassador (Venice, 12 February 1536) in *Obras completas*, Madrid: BAC, 1991, letter 4, p. 726.



The mission of the Society is inspired, then, by faith and trust in God on the path to which He calls a Jesuit. The mission is characterized by its own style of taking up any and every ministry ("to preach **in poverty**") through which one may achieve the defense and propagation of the faith and the progress of souls ("to preach in poverty").

### **The mission today: from justice to culture**

The Society's effort to rethink its mission over and over again and to express it respecting the contingencies of persons, times and places,<sup>3</sup> is rooted in an Ignatian characteristic of learning from experience and recognizing that God speaks to us through it.

In 1974-75, GC 32 summed up the mission of the Society in the binomial faith-justice and in this creative way interpreted the Formula for the circumstances of the 1970's. We were then at a time when the Church was first discovering the face of the poor as victims of unjust structures, and when movements for liberation flourished everywhere with the expectation of rapid, effective social change for the benefit of the poorest. The service of the poorest integrated into every Jesuit activity, as the Formula of the Institute advocates, provided a basis for the new formulation of the mission (D.4, n.17).

Twenty years later the Society, gathered at GC 34, reviewed the experience just as Ignatius always did in order to learn therefrom. The Society recognized the paschal experience it had been living. The blood of the martyrs marked it deeply everywhere, martyrdoms characterized by a living faith which sought justice. As gifts of God to the Society, the martyrs confirmed the new expression of the mission. All GC 34 had to do was re-affirm it.

Meanwhile, circumstances had changed. Besides being graced with many martyrs, the Society had grown in countries with non-western cultures and was becoming more numerous than expected in countries emerging from communist regimes and decades of persecution against Christianity. It had aged in Europe and the United States, and become young in Asia and Africa. The experience of pluralism had become noteworthy and was to be lived on a daily basis at the GC itself. To reaffirm our mission of faith and justice was not enough. Cultures in their multiplicity and richness were being offered to the Society as a field to be taken seriously in the exercise of the mission.

And there is more. Our understanding of the problematic of injustice in the world had evolved to the point of recognizing that injustice is not only socio-economic but also has cultural roots. Poverty is a matter not only of structures but also of cultural attitudes which harden in a person like a crust of indifference towards the sufferings of others. Changing these cultural attitudes is as important for bettering the lot of the poor as to change unjust economic and social structures.

By drawing near to the poor, a Jesuit not only encounters suffering, pain and humiliation, but also discovers a cultural richness which the dominant hegemonic culture does not suspect exists. The poor have their own culture, and the option for the poor cannot overlook this fact. It has to be an option for their cultures.

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<sup>3</sup> This is a refrain which St. Ignatius repeats in the Constitutions constantly in order to avoid that specifications, which are valid at a certain historical, geographic and cultural moment, be absolutized. For example, General Examen, Ch 4, nn.9, 11, 15.

So this is how, according to GC 34, the faith-justice mission of the Society of Jesus expands to faith-justice-culture-dialogue: Now there is a new option added on to the option for the poor, namely, for the different and for the other, regarded and respected in their otherness.

### **Mission in a plural world**

Accepting the other as other, recognizing the other as different and irreducible to myself, means accepting **pluralism**. This is a given which we must read as a "sign of the times." The Lord wants to speak to humanity and to the Church via the contemporary widespread tendency to affirm differences between peoples, races, cultures, sexes, human groups. Knowing how to read these as "signs of the times" was a challenge posed to the Jesuits at the GC where the presence of Asia and Africa was remarkable and significant.

The recognition of pluralism as a value to be sustained and cultivated is a tough difficult lesson which the members of the GC ran into in their working groups (Commissions), but not for the first time because each one brought this experience with him to some degree from his own country. The Asian, African and East-European presence, plus the Latin American contribution, underlined often enough the need to relativize western culture.

Until now the West has considered itself the only valid culture (the highest or at least a superior culture). For centuries western thought did not allow much space for otherness. It considered everything on the basis of itself, without trying to stand in the place of the other, without striving to see reality from the perspective of someone who does not occupy the same place in society or does not have the same culture. A self-centred tendency used to predominate. In the centre was a western culture incapable of displacing itself and going out to meet the other.

This attitude is incompatible with following Christ. Christian faith is grounded precisely on a God who emptied Himself in order to come and meet humanity (see Philippians 2:7). The revelation of God in both Testaments proposes a pedagogy of comprehension, dialogue, drawing near, *kenosis* or emptying. So it is incumbent on followers of Christ to monitor their way of behaving towards an other who is different. The other is not a threat but an opportunity, a grace; the other helps me to live my own identity more faithfully or find another more adequate way of living it.

Pluralism is transcended in dialogue, not in confrontation. Diversity represents a richness. This is why persons and groups are mutually complementary and call each other to face their own limitations. In a plural world, communion is generated in dialogue, sharing, collaboration, in the context of a common life. To accept pluralism is to accept one's own limitations and enter into an enriching dynamic of interchange with the other who is different. Communion is achieved via convergence: each group grows, beginning with its own roots, integrating the riches which come from others.

**Dialogue** is the name of this basic attitude towards the other whom I accept as other, different from me. This dialogue is now incorporated into the Society's expression of its mission. Cultural pluralism asks us to show openness to all cultures. But dialogue is not merely a fad or fashion. It has deep theological roots interpenetrating Ignatian spirituality.

## The Priority of God

When providing guidelines for directing the Exercises, Ignatius warns the director to be careful of usurping the place of God. Rather than propose decisions, a director should act like the true of a balance and help a retreatant to weigh all internal movements carefully and discover exactly what God wants to communicate. Ignatius assumes that God acts directly in persons (Sp.Ex. 15). At the end of the Exercises he invites the retreatant to contemplate how "God works" in the world, in persons, in events, giving being to all things and leading them towards the end for which they are created (Sp.Ex. 236).

This provides a theological grounding for an attitude of dialogue towards pluralism. "God is already at work" in the different cultures before the arrival of the herald of Christ's Gospel. "The Spirit blows where He wills" (John 3:8). To express this idea the patristic tradition used a theologoumenon of "seeds of the Word" scattered among the pagan cultures. Or a vision that whatever is good, holy and just in various cultures is like a "preparation for the Gospel."

Beginning with God's prior action at work in cultures before the arrival of any evangelizer, dialogue acquires a much deeper meaning. It is "a way of cooperating with God in His mystery of salvation."

We try to enable people to become aware of God's presence in their culture and to help them evangelize others in their turn. The ministry of dialogue is conducted with a sense that God's action is antecedent to ours. We do not plant the seed of his presence for he has already done that in the culture; he is already bringing it to fruitfulness, embracing all the diversity of creation, and our role is to cooperate with this divine activity (D 4, n.17).

## Inter-religious dialogue

Convinced that God and His universal salvific will are prior, we regard other religions positively as concrete and institutionalized forms in which people orient their lives towards God. Religions have inspired traditional cultures and have grounded the options they legitimate, the values permeating them, the attitudes cultivated by them. Given the intimate relationship existing between culture and religion, dialogue with cultures is impossible without dialogue with the religions which inspire them. Even in the case of critical, secularized, modern culture, the ways in which it affirms or denies transcendence or mistrusts any mental effort to transcend the immediate, are privileged areas of dialogue for a Christian (see D.4, nn.19-24).

Accordingly, the Society cannot not include dialogue with the religions of humanity in the modern interpretation of its mission. The Pope has repeatedly entrusted us with the task of inter-religious dialogue as a priority for the third millennium. This is not something extra from which someone can prescind, for "to be religious today is to be interreligious in the sense that a positive relationship with believers of other faiths is a requirement in a world of religious pluralism" (D.5, n.3).

Since dialogue can be carried on at different levels, no one can be exempt. The **dialogue of life** in the daily experience of being good neighbours, the **dialogue of action** in working together on everything touching upon fraternity and justice, and the **dialogue of religious experience** sharing the different religious traditions, are levels within reach of everyone. They come together and

prepare for the **dialogue of theological exchange** among specialists and make it fruitful (see D.5, n.4).

### **Ecumenical dialogue**

If these are valid principles regarding non-christian religions, then how much more should they apply to relations with those who profess the same faith in Christ but are separated into different denominations or churches. Ecumenical dialogue should also be declared not just a specific work but especially an attitude penetrating all our life. For "ecumenism is also a new way of being Christian." The basic ecumenical attitude of "interpreting what the other says or does in the best possible way" corresponds, moreover, with what Ignatius states in the presupposition of the book of the Exercises: "It should be presupposed that every good Christian ought to be more eager to put a good interpretation on a neighbour's statement than to condemn it" (Sp.Ex. 22).

The synthesis of Decree 12 on Ecumenism is also a nice characterization of the dialogical attitude, valid in all cases:

Ecumenism seeks what unites rather than what divides; seeks understanding rather than confrontation; seeks to know, understand, and love others as they wish to be known and understood, with full respect for their distinctiveness, through the dialogue of truth, justice, and love (n.3; see GC 32, D.4, n.37).

### **Evangelization with many dimensions**

In this way GC 34 redefined the mission of the Society for today in the quadrinomial faith-justice-inculturation-interreligious dialogue. It distinguished them clearly and integrated them. The finality or purpose of the mission is the service of the faith, according to the Formula (see D.2, n.14). For the relationship faith-justice, GC 34 kept the expression of GC 32: taken as an inseparable unity, faith and justice are the "integrating principle" of all our work and of our very spirituality (nn.7 and 14). Inculturation and dialogue with other religious traditions belong to our mission as "integral dimensions" (nn.14-15).

It is important to respect the distinction which the GC wanted to maintain. The different classification of faith-justice and inculturation-interreligious dialogue shows the desire, on the one hand, not to have new claims weaken the affirmation of GC 32. Faith-justice are the "integrating principle" of all our ministries. This means to say that they provide cohesion, consistency, and a framework, they penetrate and unify all our apostolic action. They identify our task. On the other hand, GC 34 wanted to underline the relevance of inculturation and inter-religious dialogue without supplanting the centrality of the first pair of terms. The GC preferred, then, to consider the second as "integral dimensions" of the first, which constitutes the nucleus of the mission. One should probably not force the distinction between the two pairs too much at the risk of falling into a *lis de verbis* or squabble over words. The important thing is to respect GC 34's intention that, via the new aspects, the great achievement of GC 32 not be lost.

What unifies the mission can be summed up in **evangelization**. It translates into contemporary language the objective expressed in the Formula of the Institute: "the defense and propagation of the faith and the progress of souls in Christian life and doctrine." Nevertheless the disadvantage of the word "evangelization" is that it can be understood reductively, as if it referred only to the so-called spiritual ministries such as preaching and administering the

sacraments. Not that the term necessarily connotes this, but its current interpretation does run along those lines.

To avoid misunderstandings one could modify the noun "evangelization" with an adjective. Many have tried to do so by talking about "integral evangelization." But the adjective is quite worn out. It has been used to weaken the concrete historical intention of the noun to which it was applied with the idea of weakening its political, economic and social significance. Such was the case when they insisted on talking about "integral liberation," and took aim at the alleged reductionisms of liberation theology as if the latter had not sought, right from the start, to include all the relevant dimensions in the word "liberation."<sup>4</sup> Because of the ambiguity of the adjective "integral," the GC usually preferred to avoid the expression.<sup>5</sup>

It is preferable to abandon the attempt and assume that "evangelization" involves a complex relationship among the different elements of the quadrinomial which the GC wanted to keep together as the nucleus of the Society's mission today. The relationship, apparently complex, is in reality extremely simple, logical and coherent. The concept of evangelization itself makes this clear.

The most immediate meaning of evangelization is to proclaim, with words and deeds, Jesus crucified and risen as the Christ, the Son of God (**service of faith**). But to do that, words are not enough: actions are needed. Nor do any actions whatever suffice. Words and deeds ought to flow from deep within the mystery being proclaimed. Consequently, Jesus is the incarnate Word who stripped Himself of His divine condition in order to become like us in all things but sin (see Philippians 2:6-7; Hebrews 4:15). The corresponding action for whoever wants to proclaim Jesus, the Christ, and not in an empty way, is to incarnate oneself in the different cultures, thus manifesting the redemptive incarnation of the Word as universal (**inculturation and interreligious dialogue**).

On the other hand, it is not merely a matter of an incarnation accomplished abstractly, but rather of a kenotic incarnation which includes stripping down, solidarity with the very least, locating oneself by the side of the excluded. In this condition the incarnate Word assumes the function of the Anointed One whom God sent to inaugurate justice and right by taking up the cause of the poor (see for example Isaiah 11:1-9). Such are the works which identify Jesus as the Anointed One (see Luke 7:22). Whoever presents oneself in His name to proclaim Him as the Christ (Anointed) of God can only show Him with the same messianic works of **justice**, nearness to the poor and solidarity with them, which identified Him.

Thus evangelization in the correct sense, namely, proclamation of the crucified and risen Lord, takes place only when it is inculturated and near to the poor. **Evangelization is the announcement of salvation in Jesus Christ from within cultures and from the place of the poor.** The elements are united "without division or confusion." Otherwise evangelization would be in contradiction with what it claims to be.

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<sup>4</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Teologia da Libertação*, Petrópolis: Vozes, 1975, pp. 44-45.

<sup>5</sup> With the exception of D.6, n.10, and D.16, n.3.

The GC managed to express clearly this multiple relationship:

There cannot, in short, be an effective **proclamation** of the Kingdom unless the Gospel, having been brought to the very centre of a society, touches its structural, cultural and religious aspects with its light. There is effective **dialogue** with members of other traditions when there is a shared commitment to a transformation of the cultural and social life within which people live. The transformation of human **cultures** requires a dialogue with the religions that inspire them and a corresponding engagement with the social conditions that structure them. If our faith is directed towards God and his **justice** in the world, this justice cannot be achieved without, at the same time, attending to the cultural dimensions of social life and the way in which a particular culture defines itself with regard to religious transcendence (D.2, n.18).

### **The point of departure is experience**

Decree 2, "Servants of Christ's Mission," establishes the complex relationship among the different aspects of the mission. The themes then unfold in three decrees which treat each of the facets: justice, culture, interreligious dialogue. There would be much to say about each one. A common feature runs throughout: the desire to learn from experience. This characterizes all three decrees and reflects the methodology used at GC 34.

In order to get reflection going, two elements from the tradition of the Exercises were used: the examen of conscience and the contemplation of the world.

The **contemplation of the world** was based on the image which Ignatius depicts of the Trinity deciding upon the salvation of the human race and contemplating

the whole surface or circuit of the world, full of people ... so diverse in dress and behaviour: some white and others black, some in peace and others at war, some weeping and others laughing, some healthy and others sick, some being born and others dying, and so forth (Sp.Ex. 102, 106).

The resulting "contemplations of the world" done from different points of view by the different Commissions were not included in the GC documents for reasons of brevity. But the contemplated world reality shines through in the results of the work, that is, in the decrees. Reading them it is easy to recognize the social analysis underlying each one.

It is a world in which poverty and hunger grow along with material prosperity concentrated in the hands of a few (D.3, n.5). The awareness is also growing of human rights (n.6), of the interdependence of persons and peoples (n.7). There are real attacks on human life from before birth until death (n.8). There is aggression against the environment (n.9). But at the same time, in each of these aspects, the awareness is growing of the need to oppose the abuses. In this regard the communities of solidarity are in the forefront (n.10). The realism of the vision requires coming down to particulars and seeing the problems of Africa (n.12), Eastern Europe (n.13), indigenous peoples (n.14), the excluded (n.15), refugees and displaced (n.16).

From the cultural point of view (D.4), diversity is characteristic of today's world. In the First World a secular culture is advancing and no longer believes in the Church. In Asia, Christianity continues to be seen as foreign to age-old Asian cultures. Urbanization generates enormous

masses of people who live on the edges of the cities, uprooted from their traditional rural cultures, creating a new cultural synthesis. In Africa it is a matter of valuing the local cultures (n.5). Native peoples are resurgent, though facing the threat of powerful and damaging forces, and rediscovering their strength and dignity (nn.5 and 11).

Finally, on interreligious dialogue, Decree 5 opens with a panorama of the religions of humanity in statistics (n.1) and then touches upon the value of native religions (n.4); the great religions: Judaism (n.12), Islam (n.13), Hinduism (n.14), Buddhism (n.15); and the fundamentalist phenomenon (n.16).

For Ignatius the **examen of conscience** does not mean merely worrying over more or less morbid feelings of guilt, but comes from the loving consideration of God's daily blessings and calls. In this way sin is perceived against the broadest horizon of forgiveness and mercy, reflecting on the constant calls by which God communicates with and leads each person to a more decided love.

For this reason the decrees on the mission reiterate **the memory of the divine benefits**, especially regarding the relationship faith-justice, the innovation which the Society has lived in the last twenty years:

That commitment was a wonderful gift of God to us, for it put us into such good company — the Lord's surely, but also that of so many friends of his among the poor and those committed to justice. As fellow pilgrims with them towards the Kingdom, we have often been touched by their faith, renewed by their hope, transformed by their love (D.3, n.1).

And analyzing the daily life of faith it says:

Our service, especially among the poor, has deepened our life of faith, both individually and as a body: our faith has become more paschal, more compassionate, more tender, more evangelical in its simplicity (D.2, n.1).

The **recognition of sin** is indispensable for anyone who would remain within the horizon of God's gracious goodness. The main shortcomings to be underlined here are, on the one hand, the danger of separating action on behalf of justice from its authentic source in faith; and, on the other, the lack of personal and institutional courage to change according to the demands of a faith seeking justice (see D.3, n.2). The decree on culture includes a much longer list of our failures in action (see D.4, n.12).

Underlying the attempt both to contemplate the world and to examine our conscience is the Ignatian stance of **learning from experience**. This appears clearly in the four decrees on mission. In "Servants," which serves to articulate the different aspects of mission, what is learned from experience is expressed most felicitously in very short evocations of the Society's activities in each of the great regions of the world: Africa, Asia, Latin America, Eastern Europe, Western Europe, the United States (D.2, n.2). The decree on justice appeals to experience and declares that the "promotion of justice arises from our faith and makes it deeper" (D.3, n.3). Moreover it is experience which leads to highlighting certain critical situations of injustice requiring Jesuits to act (nn.11-16). The decree on culture begins by referring to the experience of GC 34 itself, testifying to the awareness of the cultural diversity and the need to treat the theme "Gospel and Culture." The decree on interreligious dialogue recalls that "our experience in the service of faith and promotion of justice over the last twenty years has brought many of

us into closer contact with believers of other religions" and to the discovery that God "leads believers of all religions to the harmony of the Reign of God in ways known only to Him" (D.5, n.5).

### **By way of conclusion**

This panorama lets us discern what grace the Lord has granted to the Society in GC 34. At the same time it is a promise, the promise that we Jesuits will try and put what we propose into practice. For grace does not produce laws but conveys a promise: that God must help us in order to show us the path which He has inspired us to. In this spirit the introductory decree concludes:

Ultimately, the Society of Jesus is the mysterious work of God, calling us to live and labour in the vineyard of Christ our Lord. We can and should be good instruments revitalizing our lives and renewing our ministries [813]. But, finally, we must stand in surrender to the hope with which Ignatius ends the Constitutions, trusting that God will sustain this Society which bears the name of his Beloved Son [812]. We praise this God of our Lord Jesus Christ, asking his Spirit to be our guide as we live out what we have written here and journey with confidence and humility as servants of Christ's mission (D.1, n.14).

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## **In SEARCH of a TALKING POINT on HUMAN RIGHTS**

**Francis X. Hezel, S.J.**

Nothing can raise the emotional level of a conversation as quickly as a sudden shift to the subject of human rights. This is especially but not exclusively the case in Asia, where national leaders, tired of the carping criticism of the western press, peevishly argue that human rights are a creation of the West. Cultures differ, the argument goes, and the West would do well to solve its own problems (which stem in part from libertarianism) before admonishing others on abuses. The Western penchant for pushing human rights on non-western nations, some maintain, is just one more example of neocolonialism.

Because of the controversial nature of human rights, I suggest that we begin our conversation elsewhere. A starting point I think we can all agree upon, whatever our culture and religious tradition, is the dignity of the human person. Buddhists, Christians, Muslims all affirm the brotherhood (or sisterhood) and dignity of each human being.

To affirm the dignity of the human person is not to say that the individual is all-important, or to deny that each one has genuine social responsibilities. It is to recognize that the human person



is something more than a cog in the wheel of society — a being who has importance in him/herself. It is to recognize that there is something sacred in a person.

Such an affirmation is important because everywhere and in all times there has existed a tension between the individual and society. The tension takes some of the colour of the old analogy of the battle between the elephant and the ants. Societies, large and powerful as they are, can usually look after themselves very well. Individuals, especially unimportant ones, generally have a much harder time. What is there to ensure that the ants don't get trampled in this cosmic battle? There are two "moral commodities" that have protected individuals long before the invention of the concept of individual rights: justice and love.

The moral codes developed in societies were one means of safeguarding the interests of human individuals. The Old Testament ethic, which we should remember was the product of an Asian culture, laid out in considerable detail the responsibilities of persons towards one another. Implicitly, therefore, it also described what individuals could expect from one another and from the state: what today we might refer to as their "rights." Men were not to have their oxen slaughtered, their wife or daughter seized, or their house burned at the whim of their neighbour or of the state. To live under the law, whatever form this law might take, was to be shielded and sheltered to some degree.

Another device that protected the poor and the powerless was the ethic of compassion found in nearly every society. Old Testament Israel enjoined on its people the sacred duty of defending and showing compassion toward those unable to protect their own interests: the widow, the orphan and the stranger. Other Asian societies were not much different. A Thai political scientist, Dr. Chaiwat Satha-anand, expressly mentions compassion as a traditional virtue of his own country. A term like compassion, one of "the wealth of homegrown concepts for rights activists to choose from," is part of the Thai vocabulary and a more acceptable term than human rights, he maintains.

In no traditional societies throughout the world can we expect to find a charter of individual rights. This is as true of pre-modern Europe, by the way, as of Asia. Human-rights terminology is as alien to Africa, the Pacific, and the rest of what is called the Third World as it is to Asia. The very concept of individual rights is regarded with suspicion among most older people in the part of the Pacific in which I work, and my guess is that it meets with similar skepticism in other parts of the world.

To understand why this is so, we must recall the more traditional view of human society. In the past people tended to think of social structures as divinely ordained rather than as fabricated by human beings. The structure of society was usually in the shape of a pyramid with the ruler at the top, nobles below him, and other classes ranked in descending order down to the very base of the pyramid. The god who had created this society entrusted power to its rulers, who were in turn expected to provide for the welfare of their subjects. Society was a given, and the members of a society were thought to have no more right to reshape their society than they had to transform their own nature.

In these traditional societies, static and hierarchical as they were, the person was first and foremost defined as a social being. Emphasis was placed on the individual's contribution to society as a whole, with each person having a fixed position and a set of duties and responsibilities to the society. Personal satisfaction was very much a secondary consideration,

almost a byproduct of one's social status. The prevailing social ethic in such societies was grounded in individuals' duties to society, rather than in what they might expect to receive from others. Any formal rights that individuals possessed were linked to their status rather than to their personhood as such.

This is not to say that persons were regarded as mere chattel. Even if individual rights were not named as such, the dignity of individuals was implicitly recognized and protection afforded them, as we have seen. It would have been impossible for societies to function without providing some safeguards for the lives and property of their members. These safeguards were embedded in a code of justice, whether this was expressed in legal terms or not, and the ethic of compassion offered an additional protection for the individual.

All this was slow to change in the West. Individualism is said to have stemmed from the Enlightenment that sprang up in Europe in the 18th century, but this is far from the whole story. The intellectual currents emphasizing the importance of the individual that swept Europe at this time did not emerge from a vacuum. The mercantile development and the rise of the modern nation-state were the wellsprings from which the stress on the individual flowed. It is no exaggeration to suggest that this stress could never have happened except in reaction to the forces of modernization that were at work on Europe at that time. Individualism and the new emphasis on individual rights were, at least in part, a reaction to statism.

As the powerful new modern state rose in Europe, perceptions of society began to change. The state came to be seen no longer as a divine creation but as a product of human forces. It was viewed as a man-made institution to which individuals voluntarily surrendered some of their freedom so as to achieve certain common goals. Why this profound change? Perhaps it can be attributed to growing self-awareness. Possibly the mighty new state was seen to present a greater threat to the individual than the ancient society.

The Catholic Church bitterly resisted this new mode of thinking, which was known as Liberalism, for two centuries. In fact, the Church continuing issuing its condemnations of this revolutionary mindset long after most of Europe embraced it. Only in the last decade of the 19th century, with the publication of *Rerum Novarum*, the first of the modern social encyclicals, did the Church give her tentative blessing to this new way of thinking.

Why the sudden turnabout in the position of the Catholic Church? Because it was obvious that people in modern Europe were not being adequately provided for by their societies. The Industrial Revolution, while working technological wonders in the West, had taken an enormous social toll of the people who provided the labour. The cities were crowded with people seeking work in the new factories, women and children were labouring long hours for a pittance, and thousands lived in appalling misery. Governments, which were supposed to bear the responsibility for seeing to the welfare of their citizens, were too enthralled with the economic gains to be reaped by industry to do so. In response to this crisis the Catholic Church began to develop an ethic of individual rights. Although the Church's concern was initially the economic rights of the individual, it soon developed a theory of political rights when Marxism threatened to sacrifice political liberty for the sake of economic advancement.

The Catholic Church has developed her rights ethic in each succeeding encyclical since then. In doing so, it has been obliged to walk a delicate balance. While maintaining the rights of individuals, the Church continued to assert the social nature of the human person. In other

words, the person remains a social animal with obligations to other individuals and to society at large. Moreover, the Church's rights ethic must be grounded in the freedom of the person, but without losing sight of the end toward which each one is ordered. In other words, freedom is not an absolute, but a necessary condition to enable persons to achieve the goals for which they were created. Finally, the rights ascribed to individuals had to be rooted in an intelligible order (which was called "human nature"), even though it had to be acknowledged that the human person was affected by historical changes. Hence, human beings have always had inherent "rights" (even if they were not always called that), but circumstances in our modern day have made it necessary to draw attention to these rights for the protection of the person.

The ethic that has grown from the recognition of individual rights has not been without its problems. Misunderstandings have arisen. More traditional societies have often felt bludgeoned by what is taken to be a western category of thought. People in Micronesia have reacted strongly and negatively to the new emphasis on rights, for they see the traditional communitarian base of their society shattering in today's modern world. The rights ethic is seen as one more blow to the communal nature of society, this one, an ideological assault in the name of libertarianism: the radical freedom of the individual to do and be what he or she wishes. With their old world slipping away, many feel that a reminder of communitarian responsibilities is much more called for today than an appeal to individualism.

There is much truth in some of these charges. Irresponsibility has often been condoned in the name of "individual freedom," as it probably will in future as well. Cultures on the threshold of modernization fear that radical individualism will spell the loss of the traditional values that have sustained them for centuries, even millennia. Yet, all this should not blind us to the simple truth with which this paper began. Whatever our cultural and religious tradition, we can agree on the basic fact that each person possesses human dignity. A human being is not simply the building block of society, or the drayhorse whose sole destiny is to bear any burden and labour without complaint for the good of society.

In the inevitable tension between individual and society, the social nature of the human person must not be slighted. Human beings are bound to others in their society by a covenant. But if society itself enjoys a quasi-sacral quality, so does each person in that society. The human being is an end in itself. If modernization, with its market economy and its centralized political power, seems to imperil the very foundations of society, it also threatens to grind the human individual under the wheels of progress. The human rights ethic developed in the West is an historical response to that danger. What strategy will Asian nations, who have faced this crisis more recently, use to protect the individual? Whatever the strategy chosen and the terminology employed, this remains the hidden but central issue in the great debate over individual rights.

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The death penalty comes up for debate from time to time in nearly every society: to apply it? to abolish it? to re-introduce it? It is a debate into which Jesuits are often drawn.

Human life, a gift of God, has to be respected from its beginning to its natural end. Yet we are increasingly being faced with a "culture of death" which encourages ... war, terrorism, violence and capital punishment as ways of resolving issues.... We need to encourage a "culture of life" (GC 34, D.3, n.8).

When President Ernesto Samper of Colombia proposed to re-introduce the death penalty, the Society's *Programa por la Paz* made the following declaration.

## "No more flame to the fire!"

Horacio Arango, S.J.

The President of Colombia's recent proposal to re-introduce the **death penalty** for atrocious crimes, as well as some surveys showing majority support for the idea, make a reflection on this government initiative both timely and urgent.

The life and dignity of every person, without any exception, is the fundamental value to proclaim and protect if we want to build up an authentically human nation and society. Every human being, by the very fact of being human, has the right to life, and no one, including the State and the justice system, can assume the prerogative of deciding when this right is lost. Respect for the absolute value of the life of any person cannot change even when it is a matter of judging the actions of those who have committed atrocious crimes like kidnapping, forced disappearance, genocide, torture or murder.

The imposition of the death penalty constitutes a cruel and inhuman punishment which degrades those who dictate the sentence and carry it out as much as the victim. It degrades the person to be executed because it turns him/her into a defenceless victim to be treated like an object to be destroyed and discarded. It degrades those who feel authorized to carry out the sentence because it places them within a justice of vengeance and hatred, performing an act just like the one that is supposed to be condemned.

I think vividly of Jesus of Nazareth who did not condemn any man or woman. He believed that changing one's life, straightening one's path, repairing the evil, was always possible, and so He sought people's conversion. Jesus, I remember, urged that good be returned for evil, proclaimed mercy, taught prayer for one's enemies, and made mutual pardon among human beings a condition for God's pardon. Of course this love of Jesus in no way means permissiveness or impunity, but it does oblige me as a Christian to take a radical stand against the imposition of a punishment which defaces human beings, the very face of God.

As a priest I am also obliged to bring good news to the country in which I live, to encourage fraternity in this tempest of hatreds, and to reject expressly and publicly all forms of violence, including violence carried out by decree.

Besides these fundamental reasons, there are other considerations which we cannot ignore in the political debate recently launched by the President and other prestigious leaders of Colombia.

In the last four years, Colombia has racked up an average of 30,000 deaths by homicide per year. This makes us the country wherein life suffers the greatest risks and outrages. To live in Colombia is really difficult. Ours is the most dangerous democracy in the world. Here we have the *de facto* imposition of the death penalty as perpetrated by the parties in armed conflict, by obscure groups with the misnomer of "social clean-up," and by a hundred and one forms of private justice. In a country where deliberate acts of violence take the lives of nearly a hundred people each day, how can one reasonably argue for the re-introduction of the death penalty? This would be, if I may say so, to throw gasoline on a blazing bonfire.

Expert jurists consider the Constitution of Colombia to be a charter of rights, over and above a manual of State functions or the duties which the Constitution obviously also clearly affirms. The political Charter had to raise to the constitutional level rights which should be taken for granted, like the right to life or the right not to be tortured, not to suffer forced disappearance, or not to have one's civil guarantees violated. The 1991 Constitution was an attempt, still relevant today, to neutralize an overwhelming violence and achieve peace. The introduction of the death penalty, besides being unconstitutional, would also represent a set-back in the peace process, and display us to the world as a nation which, without even having developed its new constitution, is already changing it in a fundamental way.

Colombia has signed international treaties which prohibit the application of the death penalty. It signed the American Convention (San José, 22 November 1969), which was approved by Law 16 of 1972 and came into effect on 18 July 1978. Regarding the right to life, the Convention says explicitly, "**The death penalty will not be re-introduced by those States which have abolished it**" (Article 4, n.3). By the time Colombia signed and ratified this instrument for the protection of human rights, the death penalty had been abolished. These treaties not only take juridical precedence over the constitution and laws of the country (Constitution, art.91), but also express commitments assumed before the international community in terms of the protection of human rights.

Internationally the trend is towards the abolition of the death penalty, and this is an achievement of humanitarian consciousness in all inhabitants of the planet. Last year Spain, in the midst of the terrorism of ETA, ruled out the death penalty even in case of war.

In the last two decades our country has suffered a serious crisis in the administration of justice. Without overlooking many positive efforts in the justice system and the integrity of the vast majority of its functionaries, we must also admit that nearly all crimes in Colombia remain unpunished. An ineffective justice system, lacking the necessary infrastructure and institutional support and submitted to pressures and threats: could such a system — in the supposed application of the death penalty — guarantee a justice which is impartial and really clarifies what happened and provides the accused with an adequate defense?

Moreover the death penalty, in those countries which avail themselves of it as a sanction, is a punishment which clearly fails to dissuade criminals. As long as public morality does not change, there will always be those ready to go after money and power at whatever price, including the risk of their own life.

In my country I do not want to see judicial processes deciding if a human being will continue to live or not, no matter how guilty s/he is of acts which I also energetically condemn. I do oppose and will oppose the death penalty for whatever person, whoever it may be. If capital punishment is re-introduced, then we will have to struggle even harder to defend life, without ever wavering from the course of denouncing the vile stupidity of such punishment.

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February 1996

If you have recently made a statement on the death penalty in the name of a Jesuit institution, please send a copy to the Social Justice Secretary. Anyone who is faced with the issue of capital punishment and wants to review what others have said, please feel free to request a copy of these statements from the Secretary.

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## LETTERS and COMMENTS

To the Editor, *Promotio Justitiae*:

In issue 63 (March 1996), as part of the Introduction, you printed a geographical table of Jesuits and Jesuit houses according to the ranking of nations in the *Human Development Report 1995*. (As you note there, a similar list appeared in *PJ* 54, February 1994.) At the end of the Introduction, you suggest that this can be used to ask about the situation of Jesuits — implicitly, Jesuit presence in less developed countries.

Your basic point, that Jesuits are called to work for human development, is obviously valid. But I would suggest that the list can be misleading (and therefore unfair); using statistics to support an argument, when the statistics are misleading, will only lend support those who do not want to acknowledge your basic point.

1. Most importantly, you are comparing COUNTRIES with INDIVIDUALS. For validity, you must compare objects that are similar; in this case, it would have to be the total population of the country with the total number of Jesuits in the country, or for example Jesuits per 1000 inhabitants. Since membership in Jesuit houses varies from 2 to more than 300, listing the number of houses is similarly misleading.

2. Secondary considerations which compound the problem:
  - a. What is the Christian population of the country, and the Catholic population?
  - b. How free are Jesuits to enter a country (e.g., Saudi Arabia) or to promote human justice in that country (e.g., continental China)?
  - c. Are there historical factors which affect the number of Jesuits present?
3. A related question: is physical presence in a country necessary for the promotion of human development in that country? What are Jesuits doing for human development in whatever country they are found?

I repeat that I do not question your basic point; I would only suggest that your argument in support of the point needs refinement and nuance.

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Dear Fr. Michael:

I am, as you might guess, an enthusiastic reader of *Promotio Justitiae*, and I especially liked the treatment in *PJ* 59 (March 1995) of inculturation.

In Andrés Tornos I like the expression, "a whole manner of being in the world" as a concept of "this is the culture." Perhaps I'd say, "this is the inculturation," when being in a culture different from one's own. The phrase I think is a very happy one, and it consoled me a lot to appreciate it.

"Witnessing in a Post-Modern Age," by Geoffrey Williams, I find magnificent. The article encompasses an entire, on-going meditation which the young people, whose life I share in the jungle, can live and reflect upon. I also find truly wonderful the concepts of religion in contrast with spirituality, of narcissism versus eco-community, and of the capacity to pass from dualistic professionalism to the prophetic integration of public and private life.

*PJ* 60 (May 1995) I liked, too, especially the complete document by the Commission on Evangelization and Culture.

"Ecology versus Mammon?" of Chryso Pieris seemed to me very prophetic. It is really lovely.

Development of the under-developed countries is not the solution. Not even sustainable development.... What is needed is not the development of the Third World but the de-development of the rich industrialized countries.

*Promotio Justitiae* 64 (1996), 60

Yes, the experiences of life have brought Chryso to understand things this way. His experience should turn into prophecy for us. Really solid and synthetic, the whole article.

Thanks for everything! I end wishing you and the whole team working on *Promotio Justitiae* a blessed year of 1996, full of solidarity and justice for the weak peoples of the world.

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