

## A BRIEF HISTORY

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Care for the poor and sick was a prominent feature in St. Ignatius' life from the moment of his conversion and a marked characteristic in the apostolate of the first companions and most early Jesuits. As General in Rome, fully occupied with the care of a rapidly expanding order and in writing its Constitutions, Ignatius still found time to promote a wide variety of charitable works for homeless beggars, the hungry, penitent prostitutes, orphans and even converts from Judaism. His instructions to Lainez and Salmaron to visit hospitals and minister to the poor while acting as Papal Legates at the Council of Trent set the pattern for future generations of Jesuits, large numbers of whom died ministering to the sick poor during the various epidemics that plagued Europe and the New World before the discovery of modern medicine. To more famous names, such as Peter Claver or Aloysius Gonzaga, must be added the 1,190 Fathers and Brothers who, according to Fr. Alegambe's catalogue, died as victims of charity serving the sick during the hundred years following St. Ignatius' death. Not all this activity was confined to the traditional corporal works of mercy. There is no doubt that some, such as the reductions in Paraguay or Fr. Antonio Vieira's defense of negro slaves in Brazil which led to his expulsion, would approximate to what we now understand as the social apostolate.

However, in its modern acceptance, the term "social apostolate" or others like it, such as "social action", came into general use around the time of and partly due to *Rerum Novarum*, of 1891, the first papal encyclical to address the social problem in its entirety. Leo XIII's call to action marks a turning point in the Church's understanding of her role in the world. Henceforth the entire Christian people is called not merely to acts of charity, but to reconstruct society: a task clearly beyond the scope of private piety or the personal exercise of corporal works of mercy. This call is based on the understanding that the institutions and structures of the new industrial world are themselves responsible for misery and injustice and therefore need to be changed. Such a change can only be achieved by organised effort, by a social apostolate in the strict sense of the word.

Early Jesuit initiatives were, in accordance with the appeals of the encyclical, centred around workers' education and the spreading of Christian social teaching. *Action Populaire*, the first Jesuit social institute, was founded in Paris by Fr. Gustave Desbuquois in 1903 with the specific intention of helping young workers train and organise themselves. In 1923 the *Institut d'Etudes Sociales* was set up to give regular courses in Christian social teaching. In England, the Catholic Social Guild was started in 1909 and the Catholic Workers College at Oxford in 1921, Fr. Charles Plater being largely responsible for both. In Germany Fr. Heinrich Pesch, regarded by some as the father of modern Catholic social thought, published his five-volume work *Lehrbuch der Nationalen Okonomie*, Manual on the National Economy, from 1905 to 1923 and thus provided the link between *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno* which continued to be developed after him by his two disciples, Frs. Gustav Gundlach and Oswald von Nell-Breuning. In Spain there was early Jesuit involvement with the *círculos obreros* and the centre *Fomento Social* was founded by Fr. Sisinio Nevares in 1927. Similar developments took place in other

European countries and, especially after the 1931 publication of *Quadragesimo Anno*, began to spread elsewhere. The pioneering work of Fr. John La Farge who founded the Catholic Interracial Council of New York in 1934 and of Fr. Leo Twomey in the New Orleans Institute of Social Order had a deep influence on Catholic social thought in the United States.

It was not however until the GC 28 in 1938 that the major legislative body of the Society specifically addressed itself to the social apostolate for the first time. Its Decree 29 declared that social apostolic work, as understood in *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno*, is fully proper to the Society, should be commended to all, promoted everywhere and considered among the most important ministries of our age. It was described as consisting in giving spiritual help to workers and employers through the Exercises and religious talks, explaining the social teaching of the Church, and promoting social groups and organisations. There should be special care for the poor in rural areas and urban suburbs. The principles of social justice should be taught in our schools and studied by scholastics during philosophy and theology. To achieve all this it would be necessary to set up *centra actionis socialis*, centres for social action, staffed by full-time trained Jesuits. And the Congregation added that, if a particular Province or country found itself unable to spare men for this work, then the Provincial and his advisors should take a close look to see what other works could be relinquished in favour of "a more universal good" (D.29, n.15).

Taking place immediately after the war in 1946, GC 29 was even more aware of the importance of the social problem. Again in its Decree 29, it called on all Provinces or regions to set up as soon as possible, if they had not already done so, a *Centrum aliquod actionis et studiorum socialium*, a Centre for social action and research. To the calls of the previous Congregation were added the challenge to exercise a social apostolate in other ministries and the pertinent observation that efficacy would depend much on austerity of life.

Three years later, on October 10th 1949, Fr. Janssens published his well known **Instruction on the Social Apostolate**, the first time a General addresses the whole Society on this topic. After pointing out that World War II had prevented the implementation of the last two General Congregations "in an orderly and persevering manner" (2), he renews the call to set up Centres of Information and Social Action whose principal function "should not be so much to further actual social works, but to teach the theoretical and practical social doctrine to others, especially to priests, educated laymen, and the better educated working men, and to help them by counsel and advice" (13).

But direct action among the poor and under-privileged is also advocated, together with the need for some fathers "to take part in the actual manual toil of the mines, the factories, or the workshops" (15). Other apostolic works of the Society must also strive to "establish a right social order," especially colleges whose students "should not acquire any spirit of a special, privileged social class" (19). But perhaps the most striking and original part of the Instruction, foreshadowing subsequent developments, is the call for the whole Society to become "trained to that sincere and active charity which today is called 'a social attitude' or 'social-mindedness'"(8). To achieve this,

it is necessary that Ours should see what it means to spend a whole life in humble circumstances, to be a member of the lowest class of mankind, to be ignored and looked down upon by other men; to be unable to appear in public because one does not have decent clothes nor a proper social training; to be the means by which others grow rich ... and at the same time to behold about one the very men for whom one works, abounding with riches, enjoying superfluous comforts, devoting themselves to liberal studies and the fine arts, loaded with honours, authority and praise (9).

Such an "unbalanced state of mankind" is unjust and calls for profound change on our part

to prevent our Society from justly being classified with the rich and capitalists, we must direct with utmost zeal many of our ministries towards the poorer classes.... It is certainly necessary, especially in some Provinces, that superiors make sure our ministries are not almost exclusively conducted among the rich and the cultured (17).

The effects of this letter can be seen both in Fr. Janssens' own government of the Society and in social initiatives taken in a growing number of Provinces around the world. The General renewed his appeal on several occasions (for example, the 1953 Congregation of Procurators) and attempted to define a genuine social apostolate in ever clearer terms. On the canonization of Joseph Pignatelli he wrote:

In the Instruction I gave on the Social Apostolate, I tried to distinguish between beneficent works and what is today called social action. The first of these forms of charity, the only one known in the time of St. Joseph Pignatelli, is good. Our Lord Jesus Christ praised it and the Church has always recommended it. It helps the suffering members of Christ in this world. It can never disappear because "there will always be poor among you." The other form of charity is better: more universal and more lasting, it expresses a higher degree of love. Beneficent works soften some distresses; social action suppresses, as far as possible, the very causes of human suffering. It is the whole of Christ's mystical body that is made healthier and stronger.<sup>1</sup>

In the Provinces, the repeated calls to establish social institutes were beginning to take effect. In the Far East, Fr. Walter Hogan founded the Institute of Social Order in the Philippines in 1946. Later he became the first executive secretary of SELA (Committee for the Development of Socio-Economic Life in Asia), started in 1959 at the request of Fr. Janssens to co-ordinate the social apostolate of the then Far East Assistancy. In 1951 the Indian Social Institute was founded by Fr. Jerome D'Souza and located first in Pune, then in Delhi. In 1954 the Institute of Social Order was founded in Australia by Fr. William G. Smith. And in 1951 a Faculty of Social Sciences was set up in the Gregorian University in Rome with an invitation from Fr. Janssens to send scholastics there for a biennium even before their theological studies. Similar developments took place in Africa, with INADES (*Institut Africain pour le Développement Economique et Social*) founded as an offshoot of

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<sup>1</sup> *Acta Romana* 12 (1954), 696.

*Action Populaire* in 1962 in Abidjan, Silveira House in 1964 in the then Rhodesia, and CEPAS (*Centre D'Etudes pour l'Action Sociale*) in the then Belgian Congo in 1965.

But it was especially in Latin America that efforts to strengthen and, in some cases, start a social apostolate were concentrated. In 1955 Fr. Emmanuel Foyaca was appointed Visitor to Latin America "*de re sociali*, on social matters," with power to act in the name and with the authority of Father General. Over the next few years, social institutes (*Centro de investigación y acción social*, CIAS) were set up in most Latin American countries with some, such as the *Centro Bellarmino* in Santiago, rapidly acquiring fame and influence. Many young Jesuits were directed to study the social sciences. There was some opposition and, in 1960, Fr. Janssens wrote to Latin American Provincials exhorting them to examine with their consultors each point of his 1949 letter together with Father Visitor's *Memoriale*, and to send him a progress report within two months. Two years later, he wrote again to congratulate them on results achieved and emphasise the urgency of this apostolate. The same year, Fr. Foyaca was appointed international Social Secretary for Latin America with his office in the Curia in Rome.

With the election of Fr. Arrupe as General in 1965, the promotion of justice as an indispensable element in the service of faith gradually came to be recognised as central to the modern Jesuit's identity and mission to the world. This was in large measure due to Fr. Arrupe's own leadership. As the many collections of his writings show, not only was he himself a tireless promoter of the social apostolate, both writing and speaking on a wide range of world issues in a way no previous General had done, but he also insisted from the start that the social or justice dimension should be present in all our apostolic work. GC 31 which elected him had itself recommended that "in the entire course of Jesuit training, both theoretical and practical, the social dimension of our whole modern apostolate must be taken into account" (D.32, n.4b). As well as confirming what previous Congregations had said about social centres, it attempted to define more distinctly the nature of the social apostolate which was seen as comprising those activities having as their objective: **not only** to provide the poor and underprivileged classes of society with the amount of temporal and spiritual goods required to lead a more human life, worthy of their vocation and dignity, **but mainly** "to build a fuller expression of justice and charity into the structures of human life in common" and thus to enable every one, not only to have a sufficient amount of temporal and spiritual goods, but also "to exercise a personal sense of participation, skill and responsibility in all areas of community life."<sup>2</sup>

Barely elected, Fr. Arrupe also turned his attention to Latin America in an attempt to complete what had been started by Fr. Janssens. In July 1966 the first meeting of the Latin American CIAS took place in Lima and concentrated on clarifying the nature and purpose of a CIAS. It also asked Father General to set up a coordinating council for the CIAS to replace the existing secretariat and to make an official declaration on the Society's standpoint regarding social conflict in Latin America. Fr. Arrupe reflected on the CIAS role and promulgated their formal statutes:

The fundamental purpose of a CIAS (like the fundamental purpose of the social apostolate) is to transform minds and social structures to a greater awareness of

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<sup>2</sup> GC 31, D.32, n.1 quoting the "Instruction" and John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra* and *Pacem in Terris*, *passim*.

social justice, especially in the area of popular promotion so that "every man may be able to exercise a personal sense of participation, skill and responsibility" in all levels of human life.<sup>3</sup>

A Latin American coordinating council for the CIAS, the CLACIAS, was set up with Fr. Hernan Larraín as Executive Secretary and four regional coordinators. And Fr. Arrupe deliberately directed this "official declaration" to the whole Society: "It is sad and serious that there are still in the Society today, even among those who occupy positions of great responsibility, some who have not understood the urgency or prevalence of social justice."<sup>4</sup>

In May 1968, the Provincials and Vice-Provincials of Latin America met, together with Father Arrupe, in the retreat house of Gávea, Rio de Janeiro. A fruit of that meeting was the so-called *Letter of Rio*, addressed to all Latin American Jesuits, one of the constituent documents of the social apostolate in the two assistancies. In September 1968 Fr. Arrupe appointed Fr. Francisco Ivern his advisor for the social apostolate and at the same time set up in the Curia the Jesuit Secretariat for Socio-Economic Development (JESEDES), today the Social Justice Secretariat. Its principal functions were: (1) to promote socio-economic work and doctrinal studies connected with it; (2) to foster closer contacts and the exchange of information among Jesuit social centres; (3) to ensure that, through the Society and its members, the Church be actively present in the main international associations and congresses concerned with development; and (4) to establish a close relationship between the Society and Church organisations such as the Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace.

A year later, Fr. Ivern and his Secretariat were strengthened by the appointment of a nine-member international Jesuit Commission for Social and Economic Development activities. Five members were chosen from developing countries and all were expected to be actively engaged and/or experienced in the socio-economic development field. This Commission held three meetings (1970, 1971, 1973) and made a significant contribution to forming Jesuit policy for its expanding social apostolate. In a report drawn up in preparation for GC 32, Fr Ivern lists 26 social institutes staffed by 170 full-time Jesuits and notes the many different forms the social apostolate is beginning to take in other apostolic fields: education, communications, pastoral and missionary work, and international organisations.

With its commitment to promote justice in solidarity with the voiceless and the powerless as a constitutive part of the mission to proclaim the Gospel (cf D.4, n.42), the 32nd General Congregation gave the Society's social apostolate new emphasis and direction. Especially important was the insistence that the promotion of justice is not one apostolate among many, reserved for a few specialised experts: "For us, the promotion of justice is not one apostolic area among others, the 'social apostolate'; rather, it should be the concern of our whole life and a dimension of all our apostolic endeavours. Similarly, solidarity with men and women who live a life of hardship and who are victims of oppression cannot be the choice of a few Jesuits only. It should be a characteristic of our communities and institutions as well." (47-48). Also important was the repeated emphasis on the structural

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<sup>3</sup> *Acta Romana* 14 (1966), 794-95, cf. GC 31, D.32, n.1.

<sup>4</sup> P. Arrupe, S.J., Letter on the Social Apostolate in Latin America, *Acta Romana* 14 (1966), 790, n.8.

causes of injustice (6,27,31) and the consequent need for serious social analysis to understand these and identify appropriate remedies (44). Finally there was a strong call, again addressed to all Jesuits, to experience themselves "the hard, everyday consequences of injustice and oppression" (35), to share more closely the life of the poor, and even to learn from them (50).

Many Church documents, such as the 1971 Synod of Bishops' *Justice in the World* and statements from many regional Bishops' Conferences, reflected changing conditions in the field of socio-economic development and a new understanding of the social apostolate. Terms such as 'justice' and 'liberation' began to replace 'development', while 'grass-root participation' was seen as essential to any genuine process of growth. JESSEDES in the Curia became simply the Social Secretariat and Fr. General's Advisory Commission for Socio-Economic Development was disbanded in favour of more flexible *ad hoc* meetings of different groups in the future. Fr. Arrupe alluded to some of these changes in his Report on the State of the Society presented to the 1978 Congregation of Procurators.

In the social sector properly so-called we see new commitments, both personal and institutional. The Social Institutes or Centres which played such an important role in the past are passing through a crisis in some places. They are trying to adapt to new needs by linking themselves more closely with those working at grass-root level and by co-operating with other sectors of the apostolate (education, pastoral, theological and interdisciplinary reflection, etc.) and thus extending their field of action.<sup>5</sup>

The range of new commitments in the social field can be gauged from a 1979 publication of the National Office for Jesuit Social Ministries in Washington which lists 798 Jesuits engaged in social ministries in the United States in no less than nineteen different fields or types of work. A similar directory published the following year by the Indian Social Institute in Delhi lists 246 Jesuits in India with training in the social sciences and also engaged in a wide variety of social work.

A lengthier examination of new tendencies was undertaken in June 1980 by a seminar on "The Social Apostolate in the Society Today" held in the Curia and carefully prepared by means of a preliminary questionnaire and preparatory document. In addition to Fr. Arrupe and his principal advisors, it was attended by 23 participants from 17 countries who were either directors of Social Institutes or regional Co-ordinators/Advisors for the Social Apostolate where such existed (East Asia, India, Italy, Latin America, United States). The four themes discussed indicate social apostolate priorities since GC 32:

- the social apostolate today;
- the role of a social institute;
- integration and co-ordination of the social apostolate with other apostolic activities and sectors;
- international issues and co-operation.

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<sup>5</sup> *Acta Romana* 17 (1978), 464.

Though no one definition either of the social apostolate or of a social institute was proposed, the following characteristics suggested for a 'new-look' CIAS are worth noting since they show the distance travelled since the first initiatives of Fr. Foyaca:

1. A group of Jesuits radically committed to the promotion of justice in solidarity with the poor;
2. which seeks structural change in society and not merely the conversion of individuals;
3. with the aim of contributing to the building of a new and more just society based on participation;
4. which determines priorities and decides on action through the use of a scientific analysis of reality, an analysis not only of structures but also current events and trends; and also from an outlook of Christian faith;
5. associating itself in various ways with those who share the same ideal of transforming society;
6. in critical dialogue with groups that seek change in a different way from us;
7. and which pursues the goal of communion with the Church and the whole Society.<sup>6</sup>

In an important talk at the end of the seminar, Fr. Arrupe stressed the fact that a genuine social apostolate must integrate faith and justice and that such an integration will find its deepest expression in Christian love.

In this way our social apostolate, our struggle for justice is something quite different from and much superior to any type of merely human promotion or to purely philanthropic, social or political work. What moves us is the love of God in himself and the love of God in men. Thus our work is apostolic in every sense and, as such, fully Jesuit and in accordance with our charism.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Promotio Justitiae* 18 (July 1980), 98.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 128.