

Not Just “Jesus and Me”
The social dimensions of the *Spiritual Exercises*
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I think that it very obvious to those who have made the *Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola* that they reflect the strong apostolic perspective and worldwide dimension which belonged to Ignatius and which animated so many of his early companions to set out across the world to so many different places and in so diverse ways—often to give their lives on the journey or when they arrived. We can think immediately of a number of examples from the *Exercises*:

1. In the *Principle and Foundation*, Ignatius writes: “All the other things on the face of the earth are created for man and that they may help him in prosecuting the end for which he is created.” [No. 23]¹
2. In reflecting on the sin of Adam and Eve, we are directed to consider: “how on account of that sin ... how much corruption came to the human race, so many people going the way to hell.” [No. 51]
3. In the *Call of Christ the King*, we hear his words: “It is my will to conquer all the world and all enemies and so to enter into the glory of my Father...” [No. 95]
4. In the *Incarnation* meditation, second prelude, we are invited “to see the great capacity and circuit of the world, in which are so many and different people” [No. 103]; and then to look down on the earth with the Trinity and hear them resolve, “Let us work the redemption of the human race...” [No. 107].
5. In the Meditation on the *Two Standards*, first we contemplate Lucifer, “how he issues a summons to innumerable demons, and how he scatters them, some to one city and others to another, and so through all the world, not omitting any provinces, places, states, nor any persons in particular.” [No 141]
6. And, then in the same meditation, we contemplate Christ, “to consider how the Lord of all the world chooses so many persons—apostles, disciples, etc.—and sends them through all the world spreading his sacred doctrine through all states and conditions of persons.” [No. 145]
7. Then, in the *Contemplation for Attaining Divine Love* at the conclusion of the *Exercises* “to consider how God works and labors for me in all things created on the face of the earth—that is, behaves like one who labors—as in the heavens, elements, plants, fruits, cattle, etc., giving them being, preserving them, giving them vegetation and sensation, etc.” [No. 236]

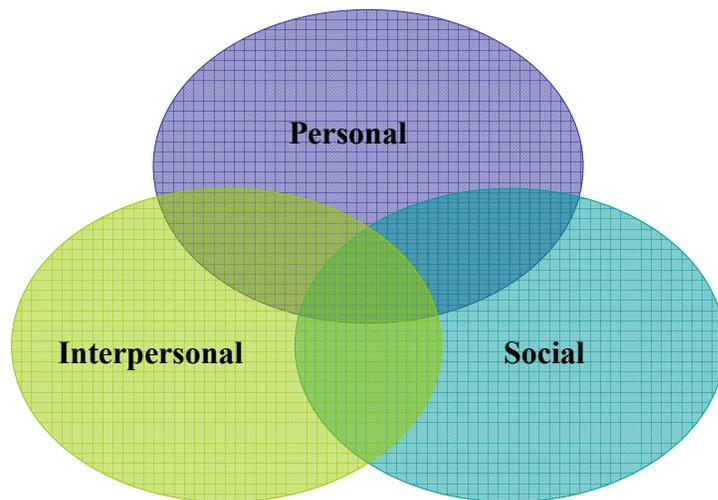
There can be no doubt that Ignatius saw widely and desired even more grandly to follow Christ to the ends of the earth.

Tonight, I want to show how, in recent decades, two separate lines of theological development, drawing upon different sources, have intersected to enrich our understanding of the

Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius with a more profound understanding of its social implications. The first is biblical and the other is based in the social sciences.

The important biblical stress to which I refer has been the emphasis upon “salvation history” especially insofar as it is a narrative of God’s relation with a **people**—even a “pilgrim people of God” as used by Vatican II. One very important aspect of this has been the theme of solidarity among the Hebrew people, of corporateness in their identification at various times with the nation, a particular leader or king, and with one another, even to the extent of shared sin or guilt. The notion of God’s relationship with this people has been furthered by subsequent ecclesiological understandings of the successor Church of the New Covenant as Mystical Body, Community, and Sacrament of encountering God.²

Our increasing knowledge of the nature of the human person and of human society, especially through the social sciences, comprises the second important factor affecting our understanding of the *Exercises*. We are all-too-importantly realizing that there are strong correlations and determinisms operative between individuals and various “social structures” such that discussion of individual change or conversion must necessarily confront and respond to the issue of the interaction of person, persons, and structures or institutions.



By this I mean that we can speak intelligibly and accurately of a personal, interpersonal, and social dimension of life--of each life and all reality. As the Jesuit Peter Henriot observed some years ago:

The spiritual life of a Christian is marked by a true integrality only if the public dimensions of his/her existence is attended to. This will mean incorporation of contemporary socio-economic-political insights into spiritual counseling and retreat

directing, much as the insights of psychology have been incorporated.³

This is not merely an assertion about the *locus* of the human person who relates to God, not just that there are various matrices or systems within which each of us is situated. Rather, this understanding is about *who we are*, that is to say, that these three dimensions are constitutive of the person as such. The social-economic-political arrangements are the “self projections of the person, the consequences of a dialectical process of interaction between the individual and his/her environment.”⁴ And, insofar as there is a dialectic, not only are our institutions projections of our ourselves, but we in turn are structured in our consciousness, behavior, and being by these institutions or structures. As Fr. William Barry put it, “The social or public institutions of our world are part of us as persons and we are immersed in and responsible for them.”⁵ Paulo Freire puts it another way. The “social I,” he says, is “formed in the socio-cultural relations of the social structure...”⁶ Finally, in paragraph five of their pastoral on economic justice, the U.S. bishops state the same understanding quite simply: “People shape the economy and in turn are shaped by it.”⁷

If the *Exercises* are to facilitate a “radical conversion experience” of a person in relation to God, then we must attend to what these two sources—biblical scholarship and social science insights—tell us. Oddly reinforcing and “verifying” one another, each development addresses the nature of that relationship and each situates the person and God in a social/corporate context. What these insights coincide in telling us is that neither “I” nor “God” are accurately known or encountered without “we.” As the Jesuit José Magaña explains:

In the *Exercises* the relationship between “God and myself” is essential. Of course. But in order that this affirmation be correct, by “God” we must understand the God of the Bible and of the History of Salvation: the God Who is just, holy, omniscient...but also committed to His people and to His Covenant, the God Who is liberator of the oppressed...And by “myself” we must understand a “myself” that enters into solidarity with others, a commitment to the people in whom one is inserted, who is its “raison d’être”...Unfortunately there are still many bad habits of individualism, and by “God” is understood a God of the greco-roman-tridentine apologetics...not the biblical God. By myself is understood an individualistic “myself.”⁸

The conversion experience itself, then, which the *Exercises* are designed to enable, must be true to the participants as the really are, as is shown by an analysis of revelation and experience. To do otherwise would be to distort the notion of God and/or the human person.

Someone hearing this presentation, without understanding its full import, might assume that what it requires is that personal conversion enabled through the *Exercises* must be “applied subsequently” to social situations or institutionalized injustice in the world. This too would be a mistaken understanding. What recent developments suggest, rather, is an integral role of considerations from the social/institutional sphere in the preparation, direction, and “completion” of the exercitant (the person “making” the *Exercises*). Some specifics of this outlook are the content of the rest of this presentation.

One note: the ability to explain as director or understand as exercitant the following

points may vary greatly in what we have been calling the “individually directed” retreat and the “preached” or conference-style retreat. In the latter, the “preacher” can spell out some of the implications of these insights for the sake of the group of retreatants. In the “individually” directed retreat, some of these points may come out organically or spontaneously in the individual session, could be developed in the scripture texts recommended by the director for prayer, or could be in ancillary reading given to the retreatant. In special situations where the exercitant moves from an ongoing relationship with a spiritual director into the actual *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius, this awareness could be promoted prior to the retreat experience (more about this in my first point in a moment).

As illustrations, not exhaustive, of this approach, I want to focus on five areas of the *Exercises*: (1) the remote preparation of the individual retreatant; (2) creation and the principle and foundation; (3) the reality of sin; (4) the person and mission of Jesus Christ; and (5) the *Contemplation for Attaining Divine Love*.

I. Remote Preparation

One way of articulating the goal of the experience of the *Exercises* is to allow and enable the exercitant to be truly free to meet God in making a fundamental life choice, one that is for God and God’s service. To have this happen, there must be, not only personal psychological and spiritual freedom, but also liberation from cultural, social, and other related determinisms. Consistent with this interpretation is an understanding of grace as fundamentally “liberative.” The offer of God’s relatedness and the real possibility created in the human person must be seen as requiring and enabling freedom from all those forces which affect that relationship.

Concretely, this understanding means that the director can help the exercitant to find out his or her true self only by a process that identifies these determinisms *and their specific impact* upon both the “I” and one’s concept of “God.” Otherwise, what may be thought to be the guidance or “movement” of the Holy Spirit at some point during the *Exercises* well might be some social, cultural, or other factor. This searching-out of these determinisms in order to know who we are should be preparatory to any further progress, since, if it is not done, these hidden forces could affect any stage of the *Exercises*.

Specific “remote preparation” for the *Exercises*, then, now a practice among some directors, might focus on the “God” of the potential exercitant. Is this the God of Christianity? Is it the God of a people who are and are called to be a community and in whom God resides and moves? Or is it a God of America, of “white folks,” of individualists, of males, or of market-driven success and failure, who somehow is not *immersed in* the lives of ordinary and poor people. My favorite image for this is found in *Psalms 115* and *Psalms 135*:

The idols of the nations are silver and gold,
the handiwork of men.
They have mouths but speak not;
they have eyes but see not;
they have ears but hear not;
nor is there breath in their mouths.

Their makers shall be like them,
everyone that trusts in them (Ps 135: 15-18).

In this search for “sufficient liberty” that precedes the *Exercises*, the review of the exercitant’s personal history would have to take account of how society and the individual person have interacted to structure both the person’s history and his or her perception of it.

The exercitant would also have to see that the social/structural dimension is not only part of the objective world, but of the *subjective*—Freire’s “Social I.” This would involve perceiving the ways in which one has dealt with past possibilities and internally structured responses to past situations.

This means discerning not only how we see them, if we do, but how we are affected by them, whether we see them or not. These systems, institutions, and socio-political-economic arrangements are self-projections of us as persons and are consequences of a process of interaction between individuals and their environment. Simply stated, this insight reveals that social structures interact with individuals in at least three ways: first, we as social beings structure our lives, usually for good purposes; then, these structures take on a force, power, and existence of their own, comparable to ours in many senses; and finally, we are shaped by their existence and power.

Social psychologists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann⁹ describe this process with these three terms: **externalization, objectivation, and internalization**. They proposed that these are actually “three dialectical moments in social reality,” each of which “corresponds to an essential characteristic of the social world.” In their summary form: “**Society is a human product. Society is an objective reality. Man is a social product.**”¹⁰ The result of the internalization is that the social structure:

...is so accepted by the people who live it and whose lives it affects and controls that it is accepted as ‘the way things are.’ The structure has taken on the power to ‘create’ people. It affects their lives and attitudes by their simple participation in the structure.¹¹

This process of integral self-awareness should not be seen as merely negative or inhibiting.

Part of the objective world that is in dialectic with oneself as a Christian entering upon the *Exercises* is a social and corporate history of God and God’s people. And, subjectively, there is a “self” structured not only in terms of that general history but also in terms of a personal, social, and corporate matrix. This means that the economy of grace in any individual’s life has been mediated by others and by a “Church community.” For me, at the time I first made the *Spiritual Exercises* in 1963, that ecclesial community would have been the pre-Vatican II U.S. Church in the more specific forms of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish and Jesuit High School in New Orleans. The “I” of the exercitant which then meditates on, prays over, and interacts with the “objective stories” of Salvation History in preparation for the *Exercises* is itself a *social being* in a far more real and intense sense than that polite phrase suggests.

Freedom is attained, then, only by going through the kind of preparation indicated here—

by reflecting upon the “who” of God and the determinisms affecting that perception, and by proceeding through a kind of historical and social examination to a “true” self-awareness. As indicated earlier, this is no mean task; rather, it is often wrapped in fear, hopelessness, and blindness. Making this preparatory journey into our unknown is itself a work of grace, a liberating action that is both gift and the possibility of greater gift in the *Exercises*.

II. Creation and the First Principle and Foundation¹²

At the beginning of the *Exercises* Ignatius places a consideration called *The Principle and Foundation*. It begins with the statement that we are “created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord” and by this means to save our souls. Everything else is created to help us in this purpose of our lives and to be used to the extent that they do this... and no more... or less.

Since the principle and foundation are about the creation of us and our world, the exercitant is helped greatly to meditate on what Scripture says about creation. When we turn to the first pages of the Hebrew Scriptures, we discover there the two creation stories which open the book of *Genesis*, each flowing from a different oral tradition among the Hebrews. The first and historically “newer” version, beginning with verse 1:1 and continuing to 2:3, is the familiar seven-day creation story, fashioning order from primordial chaos. On the first day God said, “Let there be light,” and so forth, until on the seventh day “God rested.”

What is important in these creation narratives is not the science—or mythology—that was the currency of the day, but the underlying theology or faith assertions which the authors intend to convey, namely, what they wanted their readers to *believe*. In the seven-day creation story, the events of most days end with the same key theological affirmation: “God saw that it was good.” It is fundamental to what is now called creation spirituality¹³ and to both Jewish and Christian revelation that what God saw was **good**. The very subjects of creation -- the earth, stars, plants, animals, and, ultimately, humanity—are essentially, by their nature, good.

This goodness proclamation may seem self-evident to some people. Many of our cultural messages and even our religious attitudes, however, are diametrically opposed to the *Genesis* view that God looked upon the completed creation and found it “very good” (*Gen 1:31*). This opposition can be found in Gnostic and other philosophical traditions dominated by a body/spirit dualism or religious traditions that disdain feelings and emotions. Contemporary American society’s persistent quest for new means and measures of self-esteem betrays its profound doubt in even the fundamental worth of human persons; and too much economic development occurs with rank disregard for the basic value of the natural universe around us.

The second and older *Genesis* story begins in the very next verse (*Gen 2:4*) after the seven-day version. In this story, instead of the progression from light and darkness to water and land, then to fish, birds, animals, and so forth, the storytellers open with Adam’s placement in the garden. “The Lord God then took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden, to cultivate and care for it” (*Gen 2:15*). God then creates the animals for Adam, and Adam names the animals. In the scriptures the naming event was a sign of power or dominion over the one named; it is also a sign of relationship, of the bond which humans have with nonhuman creatures.¹⁴ This same theme appears in the first creation story as well when the man and woman

are instructed by the Lord to subdue and “have dominion” (*Gen 1:28*) over the earth.

This reveals the second critical faith affirmation of the *Genesis* narratives, namely, the *dominion* which humanity is to have over this creation. Not only is creation good, but we as humans are gifted by the creator with responsibility for and dominion over the earth around us, over all creation. It is important at this point to distinguish *dominion* from domination or exploitation. To have dominion is to be like the Lord (**Dominus** in latin) who first poured out life into creation, to be procreative and co-creative. We then recognize and act from an awareness that we are intimately related to the earth in a mutually nurturing and life-giving communion.

This sense of dominion of creation extends far beyond what we normally associate with the natural environment, e.g. earth, air, and water. Blessed Pope John Paul II understood the biblical mandate and responsibility to have a double object: it is applicable to what he called the “creation given” of the natural world; and it includes the “creation enhanced” that refers to all that we’ve done with creation since we as working people, **homo faber**, began cultivation of the land.¹⁵ Buildings, science, technology, societies, institutions, schools, laws, games, rules, customs, music, languages, economics, and books -- all these components of reality have come to be from the purposeful goodness and providence of God through the instrumentality of human hands, labor, and co-creativity. They now come under the scope of human responsibility for dominion.

Ultimately, the *Genesis* texts are saying, we have been given all that is good, and we have care and responsibility for it. Goodness and dominion are the first two critical faith assertions in the creation stories. But with them comes a *caveat*: we are not owners! We are tenants and caretakers of the earth in a sense deeply rooted in the scriptural understanding that this is God’s earth, created good by God. That insight profoundly affects, not just our self-knowledge, but our use of the earth and our respectful and even reverent care for the earth and for creation’s giftedness. As the U.S. bishops put it:

Creation is a gift; women and men are to be faithful stewards in caring for the earth. They can justly consider that by their labor they are unfolding the Creator’s work.¹⁶

So compelling is this sense of responsibility and so destructive are attitudes of domination and ownership in the world today, even towards nature as given, that religious commentators have reclaimed the concept of *stewardship*. While “dominion” is essentially accurate, using the word “stewardship” provides the appropriate nuance to the biblical faith insight. In a legal term, we are “trustees” of the earth, charged with its care for our own generation and generations to come who are meant to be its continuing beneficiaries, says Pope Benedict.

A third and related insight of the early Scriptures is captured in the single phrase, “I will be your God and you will be my people” (Lev 26:12), an almost short-hand summary of the intimate bondedness between Yahweh and the Hebrew people which is expressed through the covenant of Sinai. There, in the dramatic climax of the *Exodus* event and journey, the divine liberator, who had acted as the “next of kin”¹⁷ in freeing the enslaved Israelites from Egypt, freely bonded them to one another and to Yahweh as one family. As one scholar put it:

Rather, in divine providence it was the momentous achievement of Moses to perceive Yahweh as desiring to form one family with His people, as intervening in history to maintain their freedom for His service and thus revealing the bonds of fraternal justice and fidelity to the oppressed as primal expressions of His Will for all time. The God of Moses was Yahweh, a God of radical justice, not caprice, a generous and loyal kinsman to those who truly love Him (*Exod 20:6*) and an ever present redeemer in times of oppression.¹⁸

Thus, the inspiration of Moses to intrinsically connect the nature of the Lord Yahweh and the demands of social justice was “radical” in the sense of the latin **radix** (root, foundational). The Israelites then were constituted a covenant community in which the Lord Yahweh really dwelled, first in the tent of a nomadic people and then in the fortress-sanctuaries and towns of the people as they settled the Promised Land.

This religious insight of the Hebrew Scriptures is a far cry from the “Jesus and me” spirituality that some Christians have adopted as their individualized version of the Judaeo-Christian heritage. On the contrary, the scriptures maintain strongly that our spiritual heritage is *innately communal* from the very first days that a nomad God made common cause with a chosen people. In radical contrast to the dominant ethic of American individualism, the Scriptures portray human existence as communal in nature and “that an adequate definition of an individual requires some reference also to community.”¹⁹ A woman religious who had worked in South Africa shared with me a similar Zulu insight: **umuntu ngununtu ngabantu** (“a person is a person by means of -- because of -- other people”).

Three key concepts, then, are at play here—*goodness, stewardship, and community*. Each fleshes out the meaning of our creation in the “image and likeness” of God and our understanding of Ignatius’ *Principle and Foundation*. At the heart of each is a revelation of God, a sharing of some aspect of God’s own truth and life, which in turn reveals to us a corresponding aspect of our own truth.

First, in the very dynamic of creating, the Creator shares the very fact of divine existence and goodness—God’s own goodness. In so doing, we are created “very good” in our own being and becoming. Second, God shares divine dominion over the creation, and, in that very instant, endows us as co-creators, stewards of the earth with a dominion of responsible and reverent care for the world. Third, God reveals divine kinship with us by freely choosing to dwell with the human community. We are thus constituted as a community of sisters and brothers to one another, one interdependent family with the Lord Yahweh in our midst.

In directing the exercitant, other Scriptural texts can be used to further deepen these themes, such as Covenant, Jubilee, and the privileged place of the *Anawim* (the widows, orphans, and strangers) at the heart of biblical justice. The Second Vatican Council underscored the social nature of the human person in these words:

Man’s social nature makes it evident that the progress of the human person and the advance of society itself hinge on each other. For the beginning, the subject, and the goal of all social

institutions is and must be the human person, which for its part and by its very nature stands completely in need of social life. This social life is not something added on to man. Hence, through his dealings with others, through reciprocal duties, and through fraternal dialogue he develops all his gifts and is able to rise to his destiny.²⁰

Last year, the columnist David Brooks, after extensive time spent with doctors, scientists, and others, commented on their findings about the human person in these words:

Finally, we are not individuals who form relationships. We are social animals, deeply interpenetrated with one another, who emerge out of relationships.²¹

In this way, the more recent work of scientists and doctors is deeply consistent with the faith tradition found in the Scriptures.

III. Social Sin²²

Another key area of the *Exercises* for our consideration tonight is the treatment of sin. In this case, I am referring to the necessary expansion of our understanding of sin by the reality of *social sin or sinful social structures* and how they too must be part of the exercitant's reflection on his or her relation to God, grace, and freedom. The Church of the twentieth century came to this awareness out of what I call four key insights.

The first insight calls for simple observation: look at the world around yourselves. Much as Ignatius does in the *Incarnation* exercise, we are invited to look upon the face of the earth. As the U.S. bishops did in opening paragraphs of *Economic Justice for All*:

And beyond our own shores, the reality of 800 million people living in absolute poverty and 450 million malnourished or facing starvation casts an ominous shadow over all these hopes and problems at home.²³

Read the newspaper ... watch the news ... look at your community.... The exercitant coming to the retreat has years of seeing reality or at least as much of it as he or she has actually done or actually can absorb.

The second insight: reality is structured. Besides you and me as individual persons and the chairs we sit on and the earth we walk on, there are what we call social structures²⁴ which are as real as we are. I discussed this earlier using the three-steps of Berger and Luckmann: *externalization, objectivation, and internalization.* For several decades now, theologians and the hierarchy have been speaking about **sinful social structures**. These are those which, like individual sins, destroy life, violate human dignity, facilitate selfishness and greed, perpetuate inequality, undermine fidelity, and fragment the human community. As such they embody evil in the way individual sinful deeds do.²⁵

In his 1987 encyclical letter on *The Social Concerns of the Church*, Pope John Paul seems at first to accept the analysis of sinful social structures which I have described. His term is the "structures of sin," but his analysis ties these structures much more acutely to the acts of

individuals.

...it is not out of place to speak of "structures of sin" which, as I stated in my apostolic exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, are rooted in personal sin and thus always linked to the concrete acts of individuals who introduce these structures, consolidate them and make them difficult to remove. And thus they grow stronger, spread and become the source of other sins, and so influence people's behavior.²⁶

In a footnote, the Pope lays out four ways in which individuals are responsible for sinful social structures, quoting his earlier apostolic exhortation [NB: I have added the four numbers]:

Whenever the church speaks of situations of sin or when she condemns as social sins certain situations or the collective behavior of certain social groups, big or small, or even of whole nations and blocs of nations, she knows and she proclaims that such cases of social sin are the result of the accumulation and concentration of many personal sins. It is a case of (1) the very personal sins of those who cause or support evil or who exploit it; (2) of those who are in a position to avoid, eliminate or at least limit certain social evils but who fail to do so out of laziness, fear or the conspiracy of silence, through secret complicity or indifference; (3) of those who take refuge in the supposed impossibility of changing the world and (4) also of those who sidestep the effort and sacrifice required, producing specious reasons of a higher order. The real responsibility, then, lies with individuals. A situation -- or likewise an institution, a structure, society itself -- is not in itself the subject of moral acts. Hence a situation cannot in itself be good or bad.²⁷

Human responsibility is thus retained in John Paul's analysis in that the human relationship to all sinful institutions and systems is as: (1) creators, supporters, or exploiters; (2) accessories through complicity or indifference; (3) accessories through fatalistic avoidance; and (4) accessories through consecration of the status quo. (Churches, of course, are the most articulate exponents of consecration of social systems or structures, both in the world around them and within the churches themselves.)

The third insight is that the systems and the structures are not working. Not working well, if you prefer. Or they are working well for some people, a small minority of the world's peoples, and not working well for hundreds of millions of others. Not only are the macro-systems not working well, but they are creating extensive injustice, poverty, and human suffering across the world. In addition, the repeated and more insistent message of the bishops and popes in modern times is that the situation is getting worse, not better. The awareness that systems are not working extends to:

- Schools that don't teach.
- Prisons that don't rehabilitate.
- Cities that don't work.
- A food and agriculture system that pays farmers not to grow while many people go hungry.
- A health care system that is too costly and which 45-50 million can't access.
- An economic system that makes some very rich and others very poor.

All this is the proper and necessary concern of the Church because it affects, not just the dignity of human life, but the very existence of human life itself. And so we speak of “social sin” or “sinful social structures”; and we cannot reflect on sin in a contemporary retreat without the enrichment of the very concept by the Church’s teaching of the twentieth century ... and how our personal sins are connected to it, which is the point emphasized by Pope John Paul II.

The fourth insight is that our response to sinful social structures involves working for justice in the sense of confronting sinful social structures and building the graced social structures that counteract them and build the Reign of God.

IV. Following Jesus

Our focus in the second week of the *Exercises* is on Jesus the Nazorean and our prayer is to know him more intimately, love him more passionately, and follow him more closely. God says to us, I have decided to become human to free humanity from the alienation, loneliness, hatred, and destruction of sin. COME WITH ME. And with this invitation, we enter into the revelation of God the Son, whom we will come to know as Jesus the Nazorean. We are invited to companionship with him (*cum-pano*). Here I want to highlight two important things: an understanding of the *context* of his ministry and one contemporary emphasis on the *focus* of his ministry.

Context of Ministry

Here it is important for the retreatant to have a more updated view of the world in which Jesus lives and carries on his mission. Jesus is presented to us as a carpenter. Our twenty-first century image of carpenters is filled with pictures of middle-class union members working in their own shop or on an urban construction site, driving a truck with their name stenciled on the doors, owning their own home and boat, and being paid a solid union wage on an hourly basis. We read the sacred texts as modern people who live in large urban areas, work in a highly technological society, drive to the supermarket, and who espouse values like democracy, individualism, universal education, and upward mobility, all of which are very recent developments in the millennia of human history. As Jesuit scripture scholar *Jerome H. Neyrey* explains:

Jesus lived not in a city, but in a small insignificant village. In Mark’s gospel, for example, Jesus never enters a city at all until he goes up to Jerusalem for Passover. He lived exclusively in the peasant villages in the countryside. Jesus was an artisan; this meant that his family was landless, and so he was a day laborer. This put him near the bottom of the social ladder of his day.²⁸

As Neyrey further explains, drawing on a growing body of studies applying the social sciences to the time of the Scriptures, Jesus lived in an agrarian society unlike our industrial and technological one. His world was highly stratified with a few aristocrats (three to five percent) at the top, living in the cities and controlling most of the wealth, largely land. The aristocrats are joined by a small “retainer group” consisting of scribes, priests, and merchants.

Ninety percent of the people in Jesus' society are located at the bottom of the social ladder. Few of these people live in the cities; most are peasant farmers or, worse, day laborers or slaves. "Jesus is part of that ninety percent." Neyrey further explains the conditions under which the peasants worked:

Peasants, moreover, lived narrow, confined lives. They were always heavily taxed, and taxes in Jesus' time in Galilee could devour fifty percent of the produce. With heavy taxation, drought, and the like, peasants basically lived a subsistence existence, just on the edge of survival. Many of them were being rapidly forced off their land at this time because of debt foreclosure.²⁹

When Jesus talks of the forgiveness of debt, then, it will carry major significance among his largely peasant audiences.

Those of us who are U.S. residents have been socialized in a country where the separation of church and state is a tenet of our Constitution and a factor in the communities in which we reside and in our understanding of our own religion. It was not so in Jesus' time, and that is a critical factor in understanding his mission and message. As Neyrey explains, "... 'power' and 'religion' were almost totally intertwined in Jesus' day."³⁰ Imagine *contemporary Iran*, he suggests, where religious leaders also function as the political elite. In Jesus' society, the Jerusalem Temple, along with its system and priesthood, were controlled by the high priests and the Sadducees, who were the dominant political strata as well. They even collected taxes for the Romans.

Lastly, it is important to remember that Jesus lived in very turbulent and violent times. Numerous "bandits" rose up against the local authorities and the grinding tax system. There were also many "prophets" who proclaimed a new deliverance from oppression in Judea. Similarly, many others proclaimed themselves "king" and sought economic reforms in the frightful plight of the peasants. Neyrey concludes that this would shape the perceptions of Jesus by all who heard him or heard of him:

Jesus was a very "political" figure, in the sense that he would be perceived by peasants and elites alike as having much in common with the host of messianic prophets and peasant kings flourishing at the time. The issue is not that Jesus urged political revolution or any such social program. Rather, given the pervasive scene of endlessly arising prophets and (bandit) kings in Jesus' time, his words and actions would naturally lead people to think of him in terms of these political currents.³¹

With the vast differences between the views of the rich and the poor, Jesus would be seen in radically different terms. When the peasants acclaim him as a "king," Herod, the Temple, and the Jerusalem elites would view Jesus as a constant social and political threat. This background can help the retreatant and the director then to better appreciate both the actions and words of Jesus and the reactions of various people in the gospels.

Focus of Ministry

Here I want to draw upon two aspects of the ministry of Jesus that come together to emphasize the strong social theme of reconciliation at the heart of who Jesus is and what he was about. The first is something he said; the second is something he did... repeatedly.³² The first text is the beginning of his public ministry in the fourth chapter of *Luke*:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to captives,
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
and to proclaim the acceptable year
of the Lord.

[Oxford Annotated, *Luke 4:18-19*]

There are at least two very critical aspects of this text, strategically placed in this Gospel. First, this text does not appear in *Isaiah*; ... at least not in the form which *Luke* provides. Rather, two texts from *Isaiah* have been melded together, with the more spiritualized passages removed and the more concrete, physical, socio-economic portions emphasized: *good news to the poor, release to the captives, sight to the blind, and liberty for the oppressed*. How would the overtaxed, poor, and oppressed people whom Neyrey described hear this in the Gospel.

Second, the passage concludes with “*to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.*” What is the “acceptable year of the Lord?” Many scholars would say it was a clear reference to the *Jubilee* year, the time prescribed in *Leviticus* for the restoration of right relationships among the people and with Yahweh their God. The U.S. bishops commented on this Lucan text this way:

Jesus himself is the proclamation of the Great Jubilee. "Today," He added, "this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing" (Lk 4:21). In the fullness of time, it is Jesus who proclaims the good news to the poor. It is Jesus who gives sight to the blind and frees the oppressed. By His words and above all by His actions, Jesus ushered in a "year of the Lord's favor," becoming in His passion and death the ransom for many (Mk 10:45). "The Jubilee, a 'year of the Lord's favor,' characterizes all the activity of Jesus."³³

Jesus is presenting himself against the background of Jubilee, asserting that his ministry is about setting relationships right between God and the people and among the people with one another. In 2008, the 35th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus followed this line of thinking about this Lucan text in these words:

With this action he rooted himself and his ministry in the tradition of the Jewish prophets who passionately proclaimed God's justice, the duty of the people of Israel to establish right relationships with God, and with one another (especially with the least among them), and with the land.

From this, the Jesuit General Congregation, following Pope John Paul II in *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, emphasized the importance of this triple reconciliation: with God, with other people, and with the environment.³⁴ From *Challenges to our Mission Today*:

16.- We are sent on mission by the Father, as were Ignatius and the first companions at La Storta, together with Christ, risen and glorified but still carrying the cross, as he labours in a world yet to experience the fullness of his reconciliation. In a world torn by violence, strife and division, we then are called with others to become instruments of God, who “in Christ reconciled the world to himself, not counting their trespasses”.¹⁸ This reconciliation calls us to build a new world of right relationships, a new Jubilee reaching across all divisions so that God might restore his justice for all.]

18.- As servants of Christ’s mission we are invited to assist him as he sets right our relationships with God, with other human beings, and with creation. “Our world is the theatre of a battle between good and evil”, the Holy Father reminded us:²⁰ and so we again place ourselves before the Lord in the meditation on the Two Standards. There are powerful negative forces in the world, but we are also aware of God’s presence permeating this world, inspiring persons of all cultures and religions to promote reconciliation and peace. The world where we work is one of sin and of grace.

So, in listening to and praying over the Lucan announcement of the Jubilee in Jesus, the exercitant can be graced to see Christ as one who reconciles us to God, to one another, and to creation and who then calls his followers to the same threefold mission of reconciliation.

Jesus the Healer

One of the most significant and continuing actions of Jesus is healing of the sick, possessed, and disabled. In chapter one of *Mark’s* gospel, in a busy day at the beginning of the Galilean ministry, Jesus cures a Demoniac, heals Simon’s mother-in-law, and, at sunset, he touches a crowd of the ill and possessed who are brought to the door of the house of Simon and Andrew. Later, when he sends his disciples out on mission, he charges them to cast out demons and to heal the sick: “Then he summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits to drive them out and to cure every disease and every illness” (*Matt 10:1*).

Healing is also an early sign in the Acts of the Apostles of the power of Christ’s Spirit active in the person of the apostles after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus into heaven (*Acts 3:1-10*). In the centuries that followed, healing became an intrinsic part of the church’s ministry and continues as such in a vast network of hospitals, nursing homes, parish nurse services, and home health services. Why is healing so central to the ministry of Jesus?

In Jesus’ society, those who were ill or disabled—often considered to be caused by possession by a demon—were isolated from the community. *Leviticus* required, for example, that those who were judged to have leprosy were to cry out, “Unclean, unclean” (13:45-46), when approached by others. Like sickness or disability today, people were marginalized by their condition and alienated from the community.

What does Jesus do when he encounters those who have been cut off and marginalized by sickness and disability? First, he steps across the boundaries and social barriers around them. Then, in direct violation of the religious laws, he touches them; Jesus puts his hands on their

eyes, ears, tongues, or other affected areas. By that action, Jesus risks being declared unclean himself and ostracized just as they have been.³⁵ After he touches and heals these people, Jesus usually instructs them to return home (*Matt 9:6-7; Mark 2:11, 5:19, 8:26; Luke 8:39*) or, with lepers, to go and show themselves to the priest (*Matt 8:4; Luke 5:14,17:14*) so that they could be declared clean and then allowed to return home (*Lev 14:8*). He is restoring them, not just to good health, as important as that is, but back to their families and communities, setting relationships right among them. Healing brings the reconciliation that is central to the Jubilee tradition and, as Jesus himself claims, a sign that the reign of God is among them (*Luke 11:20*).

In contemporary society, sickness and disability continue to isolate people from their families and communities. Some diseases legally require isolation or quarantine, even today. In addition, our struggle over recent decades to effect architectural, mechanical, or social changes on behalf of persons with disabilities is often called “handicapped access,” reflecting the fact that, without these changes, such persons were often unable to participate in the life of the community in public buildings, supermarkets, movie theatres, museums, and even places of worship. Healing ministry, then, can be seen today as an expression, not only of God’s compassion and healing, but of the covenant with God that requires covenantal relationships among all people.³⁶

V. GOD LABORING/CONTEMPLATIO

At the conclusion of the *Exercises* in the *Contemplatio ad Amorem*, St. Ignatius first reminds us of two important aspects of true love: first, that love is a matter of action, not words; and, second, that love consists in mutual sharing. In the points which follow, the *Spiritual Exercises* present a God who is present in all of reality, who works persistently to draw the world back to unity and to God, and who calls us in love and to act to en flesh that love in all of reality. Again, this is a worldview which positions God in all the arts, sciences, disciplines, and fields of knowledge, within all the elements and disciplines of a university like Loyola, and in all of the structures and systems of any society, laboring to draw things to God. It is this worldview which has called Jesuits to the crossroads of faith and history, of church and world, of graced and sinful social structures, where we have seen our vocation as situating us in the midst of the world, especially the city, and determined to find God there and to bring the gospel into all aspects of that world. GC34 in 1995 put it this way [*Characteristics of Our Way of Proceeding*]:

The God of Ignatius is the God who is at work in all things: whether laboring for the salvation of all as in the *Contemplation to Attain Love*, or working immediately and directly with the exercitant as in Annotations 15 and 16, or as Christ the King laboring for the liberation of the world, or as beginning, preserving, directing and advancing the Society of Jesus as at the beginning and end of the Constitutions.

For Jesuits, therefore, not any response to the needs of humankind will do. The initiative must come from the Lord who is working and laboring in events and people, here and now. God invites us to join with him in his labors, on his terms, and in his way. The way of finding and joining the Lord, laboring to bring everything to its fullness, therefore, is key to the Jesuit Way of Proceeding. It is the Ignatian method of prayerful discernment which can be described as “a constant interplay between experience, reflection, decision

and action, in line with the Jesuit ideal of being ‘contemplative in action’” (GC32, D 4, #73). Through individual and communal apostolic discernment lived in obedience, Jesuits take responsibility for their apostolic choices in today’s world. Such discernment reaches out, as well, to embrace the larger community of partners with whom we labor in mission. [Nos. 7 and 8]

But the impetus of the *Contemplatio* is not just about Jesuits. These perspectives and graces are intended for all the exercitants—designed to move them out of prayer and contemplation into all aspects of the world around them. Having seen the great conflict between good and evil, having heard the call of the King to follow, and seeing God laboring in all of reality, the exercitant—moved by love—finally asks the Lord to be empowered to respond as lovers do:

Take, O Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and all my will; all I have and possess; you have given it to me; to you, Lord, I return it; all is yours, dispose of it entirely according to your will. Give me your love and grace, because that is enough for me.

In conclusion, I began with the affirmation of the apostolic thrust and worldwide vision of Ignatius which are integral to his *Spiritual Exercises*. What I have tried to illustrate this evening is that contemporary Scripture scholarship, certain insights of social sciences, and contemporary Church teaching have come together to underscore this apostolic and worldwide vision, but with a deeper understanding of the essentially social nature of the human person, sin, the Call of Christ, and the work of God in the world into which the retreatant is missioned by God’s love.

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1. Almost all citations to the text of the Exercises are taken from David L. Fleming, SJ, *Draw Me into Your Friendship: The Spiritual Exercises, A Literal Translation & A Contemporary Reading* (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996).
 2. See Avery Dulles, SJ, *Models of the Church* (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., Ind., 1974), especially chapters three and four on the Church as Mystical Communion and as Sacrament; and E. Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God* (New York: Sheed A& Ward, 1963).
 3. Peter J. Henriot, SJ, “The Public Dimension of the Spiritual Life of the Christian: The Problem of ‘Simultaneity,’” *Soundings*, p. 14.
 4. *Ibid.*, p. 13, drawing upon the work of sociologists Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor, 1967), pp. 53-67.
 5. William A. Barry, SJ, “Contemplative Prayer and the Study of Theology,” in *Theology Digest*, Vol XXIV, No. 2 (Summer, 1976), pp. 145.
 6. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1970), p. 151.
 7. *Economic Justice for All*, No. 5.
 8. José Magaña, SJ, *Ignatian Exercises: A Strategy for Liberation* (Jersey City: Program to adapt the Spiritual Exercises, 1974).
 9. Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1966, Anchor Books Edition, 1967), pp. 47-62.
 10. *Ibid.*, p. 61 (emphasis in original).
 11. William R. Callahan, SJ (formerly), “The Impact of Culture on Religious Values and Decision-Making,” *Soundings*, p. 10.
 12. My treatment of creation draws heavily on chapter one of my book, *Doing Faithjustice: An Introduction to Catholic Social Thought* (Paulist Press, 1991,1992,2004).

¹³ While initially confined to the writings of a few theologians, such as Matthew Fox, O.P., author of *Original Blessing* (Santa Fe: Bear & Company, 1983), creation spirituality and theology recently have received far more attention from Church authorities, especially in the context of a developing concern for environmental responsibility. Pope John Paul's 1990 World Day of Peace message was entitled, "The Ecological Crisis: A Common Responsibility." In November, 1991, the U.S. bishops issued their first pastoral statement on the environment entitled, "Renewing the Earth." Cf., also, "And God Saw That It Was Good": Catholic Theology and the Environment, edited by Drew Christiansen, SJ, and Walter Grazer (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1996).

14. Anne M. Clifford, C.S.J., "Foundations for a Catholic Ecological Theology of God," in Christiansen and Grazer, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-46, at 25.

15. Cf. Pope John Paul II, "On Human Work," September 15, 1981, No. 4.

16. U.S. Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for All: Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy*, November 13, 1986, in *Origins*, November 27, 1986, Vol. 16, No. 24, pp. 409-455, no. 32.

17. "The unknown God was understood and described in terms of the known man and his world. One such institution of special import is the figure of the go'el, the "redeemer" or "recoverer" who is so called because as next of kin he bears the solemn obligation to step in and recover any enslaved relative (or property) and to restore him to his proper position within the family." Richard J. Sklba, "The Redeemer of Israel," in *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 34, No. 1, January, 1972, pp. 1-18, at 13.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

19. Anthony J. Tambasco, *Blessed are the Peacemakers* (Mahweh, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1989), p. 11.

20. Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 1965, no. 25.

21. David Brooks, *The New Humanism*, *The Times-Picayune*, March 12, 2011, p. B-5.

²² My treatment of social sin draws heavily on material in chapter five of *Doing Faithjustice*, *op. cit.*

23. "Economic Justice for All," No. 4 (emphasis in original).

24. I am using "social structures" and "social systems" without the precision of any one school of social science or the disagreements between schools. As was true for the authors of *Above Every Name*, "The reader will find that the term 'social system' is often used without being sharply distinguished from terms like 'structure' or 'institution.'" *Ibid.*, p. 5. Systems will tend to have broader applications to combinations of arrangements, institutions, and patterned ways of doing things, while structures and institutions will tend to be more particular or localized. The several examples used in this chapter will suggest more content to the meaning and, especially, the operation of these systems and structures in human living.

25. Wesley Theological Seminary professor of biblical theology Joseph Weber describes this reality in these terms: "The demonic is not an abstract force that can be separated from human existence or from the social and political structures of the world. The demonic forces exist in and through structures. They enter human existence in such a way as to be inherent in human existence." Joseph Weber, "Christ's Victory over the Powers," in *Above Every Name*, *op. cit.*, pp. 67-82, at 69. Weber argues that, while a variety of names are used for the demonic forces -- principalities, lords, gods, angels, demons, spirits, elements, Satan, and the devil -- the terminology all expresses the power of Satan.

26. Pope John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (The Social Concern of the Church), December 30, 1987, No. 36 (*Origins*, March 3, 1988, Vol. 17, No. 38).

27. *Sollicitudo*, footnote 65, quoting *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, AAS 77 (1985), p. 217 (numbers inserted in text).

28. Jerome H. Neyrey, S.J., "Jesus the Peasant: Viewing Jesus in a Cultural and Social Perspective," in *The Catholic World*, January-February, 1993, pp. 19-23, at 19-20.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

31. *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

³² The treatment on jubilee and healing draw from chapter two of *Doing Faithjustice*, *op. cit.*

33. United States Catholic Conference, *In All Things Charity: A Pastoral Challenge for the New Millennium* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1999), p. 14, referencing Pope John Paul II, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, no. 11.

34. GC35, *Challenges to Our Mission Today*, 2008, no. 13, citing Pope John Paul II, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 1994, nos. 11-13.

35. "In addition, both social and religious rules existed concerning what one could or could not touch. To touch

something/someone considered unclean was to become unclean oneself. Lepers were, of course, unclean, as were the dead. A menstruating woman was unclean. In each case, contact with such persons demanded an elaborate ritual of purification. However, Jesus touched lepers, he touched the dead, and he was sensitive to a menstruating woman's touch. ... We accept that Jesus frequently touched the people he healed, but within his cultural milieu, this was truly astonishing." Juliana Casey, I.H.M., *Food for the Journey: Theological Foundations of the Catholic Healthcare Ministry* (St. Louis: The Catholic Health Association of the United States, 1991), p. 23.

36. *Ibid*, pp. 50-53.