

# STUDIES

## in the Spirituality of Jesuits

**"Burn-out"—Contemporary Dilemma for the  
Jesuit Social Activist**

by

**Alfred C. Kammer, S.J.**

**Other Viewpoints**

by

**Richard L. Smith, S.J.**

**Francisco Ornelas, S.J.**

**Noel Barré, S.J.**



**Published by the American Assistancy Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality,  
especially for American Jesuits working out their aggiornamento  
in the spirit of Vatican Council II**



## THE AMERICAN ASSISTANCY SEMINAR ON JESUIT SPIRITUALITY

consists of a group of Jesuits from various provinces who are listed below. The members were appointed by the Fathers Provincial of the United States.

The purpose of the Seminar is to study topics pertaining to the spiritual doctrine and practice of Jesuits, especially American Jesuits, and to communicate the results to the members of the Assistancy. The hope is that this will lead to further discussion among all American Jesuits--in private, or in small groups, or in community meetings. All this is done in the spirit of Vatican Council II's recommendation to religious institutes to recapture the original charismatic inspiration of their founders and to adapt it to the changed circumstances of modern times. The members of the Seminar welcome reactions or comments in regard to the topics they publish.

To achieve these purposes, especially amid today's pluralistic cultures, the Seminar must focus its direct attention sharply, frankly, and specifically on the problems, interests, and opportunities of the Jesuits of the United States. However, many of these interests are common also to Jesuits of other regions, or to other priests, religious men or women, or lay men or women. Hence the studies of the Seminar, while meant especially for American Jesuits, are not exclusively for them. Others who may find them helpful are cordially welcome to read them.

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Alfred C. Kammer, S.J.

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## Editor's Foreword

The American Assistancy Seminar is happy to present here a *Study* on "burn-out" by an invited associate member, Father Alfred C. Kammer, S.J. The timeliness of the topic is evident in view of the increasing number of Jesuits who are engaging in various social ministries among the very poor, where they are certain to encounter many frustrations which can all too easily result in crippling discouragements. This gives rise to problems which need serious discussion in a search for solutions and preventives. Father Kammer here tackles this topic, for which he is well qualified both by his experience among the poor and his academic achievements.

At our request he has furnished the following background about himself. He is thirty-two years old, a native of New Orleans, the second child of four in a family of professional background. After graduation from Jesuit High School in New Orleans, he entered the Society of Jesus in 1963. He received degrees of Bachelor of Arts, with major in Philosophy, from Spring Hill College, Mobile, Doctor of Law from Yale University, and Master of Divinity from the Jesuit School of Theology, Chicago.

He has long been committed to social ministries. He spent part of his time during studies, his summers, and his period of regency in various forms of social action, especially in Mobile, Atlanta, and Chicago. At present he is working in Atlanta, Georgia, as the Director of the Senior Citizens Law Project of the Atlanta Legal Aid Society.

He began this paper several years ago at the suggestion and even urging of the Reverend Ms. Peggy Way, a minister of the Church of Christ and a faculty member of the School of Divinity of Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee, who also served as a visiting professor in the ministerial faculty at the Jesuit School of Theology in Chicago. She and he were both concerned about the "drop-out" of numerous social activists whom they had personally known or known about, including Jesuits. Ms. Way's encouragement and assistance have been very important in Fr. Kammer's development of the materials in the *Study* presented below.

George E. Ganss, S.J., Chairman  
The American Assistancy Seminar



# "BURN-OUT"--A CONTEMPORARY DILEMMA FOR THE JESUIT SOCIAL ACTIVIST

by

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## Author's Introduction to the Problem and the Study

Why is it that activists in Jesuit social ministry seem to have the longevity of members of a bomb squad? Why is it that brevity seems to be the one common characteristic of a wide variety of forms of social ministry in direct contact with the poor and the problems of the poor? What the title expression "burn-out" refers to is a physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual phenomenon--an experience of personal fatigue, alienation, failure *and more*--that seems characteristic of the lives of a number of Jesuit social activists in this country.

On different people, this phenomenon has varied impact: After only a few years of direct ministry, a man may move to managing or training other activists, to further studies, or to some other apostolate; he may "drop out" of social ministry and the Society at the same time; or, perhaps worst of all, he may remain in social ministry long after his usefulness, sensitivity, creativity, and caring have ended. Then, clients become "caseloads," people become "issues" or "files," and the activist becomes a bureaucratic functionary or a raving fanatic.

The phenomenon is not unique to American Jesuits,<sup>1</sup> nor to religiously motivated activists. Researchers at the University of California at Berkeley have studied a burn-out phenomenon that appears common to many health and social-service professionals: poverty lawyers,<sup>2</sup> physicians, prison personnel, social-welfare workers, clinical psychologists and psychiatrists in a mental hospital, child-care workers, and psychiatric nurses.<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, it is important for Jesuits to recognize the existence of this problem especially since one major response to the 32nd General



Congregation seems to be a commitment of manpower in the direction of active involvement with the poor and the problems of the poor to an extent not heretofore realized.

In addition, the burn-out problem for social activists raises issues that touch every Jesuit, whether in social ministry or not. In the sphere of spiritual direction, there are problems concerning anger, frustration, hostility, and failure. In the sphere of ministry are raised questions of the exercise of power, the use of conflict, and the need for competence. In terms of world-view there is consideration of the permanent presence of evil in human society, a certain naiveté in both pragmatic political analysis and faith-vision, and the constant contrast between idealistic hopes and realistic possibilities for all "change agents." Finally, in terms of Jesuit *societas* are developed themes of alienation, identity, and community. In a very real sense, the problem and issues involved in the discussion which follows have echoes in every ministry of the Society.

At the outset, it is important for the reader to realize the limits of this issue of *Studies*. The primary purpose of these papers is to present a problem, with both descriptive and analytical materials. Because of the scope of the problem--involving psychological, spiritual, social, ministerial, and political dimensions--the presentation of a solution is impossible. Rather, my hope is that simply presenting the problem in these pages and suggesting some lines of response will contribute to a collaborative, responsive effort on the part of many others of diverse skills and experiences.

The paper begins with predominantly descriptive materials, developing in turn the strains associated with the work itself, then the experience of alienation, and finally some suggested theoretical and theological underpinnings of the burn-out phenomenon. As the discussion moves through these three sections, it changes from a more descriptive to a more analytical approach to the problem. The fourth part of the paper then suggests some lines of response that are already developing.

The base upon which this analysis is built is serious reflection upon my own experience with activists and others, over the past several years, in an attempt to understand the phenomenon; and also in the hope of



developing counter-strategies which promise healthy survival in active social ministry.<sup>4</sup>

## I. THERE ARE SIGNIFICANT STRAINS ASSOCIATED WITH THE WORK

Many social activists seem almost chronically tired, frustrated, and overextended. Why? There seem to be a number of mutually conditioning factors.

### A. Experience of Failure, Personal Imperative, Structural Awareness, Anger

When Father General Pedro Arrupe met with the Jesuit province Directors of Social Ministries in St. Louis in December, 1975, he responded to all their reports, plans, and agenda by assuring the activists that they would *fail*. Father Arrupe seems to have been speaking from a particular theological world-view in his assertion, one which sees failure as an intrinsic part of all efforts to effect societal change, efforts to build up the Kingdom of God. The view is strongly Christian and one with which Jesuits are very familiar in their Third Week experience with the suffering Christ as they were making the Spiritual Exercises.<sup>5</sup> The point here is that Father Arrupe was describing a factual, everyday experience of activists. As one Jesuit ex-organizer put it, "Everything I touched turned to failure."

For those at the grass-roots, direct-ministry-to-needs level, the sense of failure arises from the sheer massiveness of the problem. For every ten people he helps or works with, there seem to be a thousand more. And the same problems appear day after day, year after year. "Things are not, after all, getting better and better," says this experience.<sup>6</sup> A common response is to dig in deeper and become more involved--with too much to do and not enough time to do it in. This is a major cause of fatigue.

This "digging in" is related to a personal imperative about the work and the needs of the poor which is typical of people involved in these matters. In the late 60's in a Southern city, for example, Quaker neighborhood workers involved in the black community made an impassioned plea to a group of Jesuit philosophy students. They insisted that unless



something was done about poverty and racism "immediately," it would be too late. In response, the Jesuits should jettison plans to prepare themselves for later ministry (even social ministry), drop out of school, and "hit the streets."

Some observers suggest that a Messiah complex lies at the heart of this imperative, the activist believing that if *he* doesn't get things done, no one will. Others argue that guilt is the driving motivation, since activists come largely from well-to-do backgrounds, the "haves" of American society. Still others "blame" this condition on the overwhelming needs of the poor and the acuteness of their pain at the hands of the larger society. As one religious doing community organizing expressed it, "I hate it; it's the worst work I've ever done. But my faith calls me to it."

For those working at the people-and-needs level, there may be an accompanying awakening of what one Mexican Jesuit calls "structural utopian awareness."<sup>7</sup> This is the *consciousness* or awareness which arises out of contact with the mass of individual problems and affirms that there really are structural and systemic causes of the problems of everyday life in poor America and that "the system's got to change." A good example of this appeared in a *New Yorker* article on Appalachia which quoted a young social activist (not a Jesuit) as follows:

We wasted time out here for a couple of years setting up community centers, repairing schoolhouses, providing fun and games for the youngsters, and summer programs--all of which were incidental to the main concern. . . . A life-and-death struggle is going on over strip mining here that can spell doom to the future of this area. The only way to end it is to organize people, to get them together to voice their demands.<sup>8</sup>

This kind of consciousness brings with it sharp dissatisfaction with kinds of work that are designed more to meet immediate needs than to change societal structures; and for those in such work it is a part of the experience of "failure" which Father Arrupe alluded to.

Even if one is working at the structural and systemic level, however, failure can be a regular companion. "The System" often is like the mythical dragon--cut off a head and two grow back. Work hard to change some aspect of the political, financial, or legal structures of a city, for instance, and some new means of enslavement will be devised. The more



knowledgeable the activist becomes, the more pervasive and powerful do the "sinful social structures" appear. In addition, if the activist works at this structural level for too long, he may find himself out of touch with the people he intended to serve or the problems he meant to remedy in the first place. Again, frustration and failure.

Failure and frustration, in turn, give rise to pain and anger, and thence to blame, hostility, guilt, and a range of other powerful emotions.

One prominent formation superior argues that many Jesuits in direct social action are working out inappropriate anger and authority hang-ups.<sup>9</sup> The same insight was suggested by one sympathetic non-activist, who lived with a community of Jesuit organizers in the Midwest. His reaction was that "they had to have an other," and that they extended the conflict model even to dealings with their own provincial superiors. These observations suggest that such attitudes exist for men *going into* the work of social change.

Many activists suggest that anger *results* from involvement in this work. In other words, the work among the poor simply draws out the anger and anti-authoritarian elements that are present in most people, including Jesuits. Their anger, they say, would be shared by more Jesuits if the others were exposed to the experience of the poor and those working amidst them--if they had their own "consciousness raised."<sup>10</sup>

Whatever its source and however it develops, the anger is a reality for most activists. It is potentially a self-destructive emotionality. Part of the task of survival, then, is to assimilate that experience, dealing positively and creatively with it.

#### B. Violence, a Different Style, Closing Circles of Friends and Contacts, the Absence of Models

It is commonplace to refer to the *general violence* imposed by "the system" upon the poor, that which tears up families and destroys bodies, minds, and spirits. And watchers of the TV-news are also familiar with the current of *actual physical violence* that flows swiftly through the ghettos and slums of urban and rural America.

This violence is also part of the world of the activist. Surprisingly,



a significant number of activists can recite tales of actual violence and fear of violence in their lives: the bomb thrown through the legal-aid office window, dark streets and darker public-housing corridors, civil-rights marches, physical threats, and death itself. As one Jesuit activist put it, "I got burned; I saw a friend of mine killed. The 'enemy' struck back at us." This condition is absent from the lives of most other Jesuits and from the activist's own prior work. It adds personal fear and fear for fellow workers and the poor to an already difficult task; and it may be complicated by guilt and related emotions when the activist sees his own efforts or the project he is involved with as somehow responsible for violence or violent death.

Another disconcerting factor for the activist may be the "style" of the work he is involved in. This has a number of aspects. Structuring is one. Unlike the work of many Jesuits in institutional commitments, the activist's job is often unstructured, flexible, and self-starting. Besides making personal life irregular and sometimes disjointed, the lack of structure complicates the possibilities of community life. Prayer, meals, even simple relaxation are jeopardized. Without the external structure imposed by a common institution, there is a greater demand for personal and community self-structuring. This need, however, runs counter to a tendency on the part of some activists to reject "artificial structures," especially in view of the work imperative discussed earlier.

Another aspect of the style problem was suggested in a meeting of community organizers who were members of religious orders. Reference was made to the "lead organizer style": strong language, heavy smoking, long meetings, heavy drinking, late hours. . . . The same might be said of activists of other kinds for whom the pace is fast, competition is woven into the fabric of their day, and conflict is a major theme (more on this later). This style is an exhausting one for anyone, even more so for new people "breaking into" a particular work, for whom the style may actually seem necessary to the work.

A curious aspect of style--one hesitates to mention it--is the often cluttered and dirty environs of the activist, at home or at work. Whether this is a counter-cultural reaction to middle-class values or an offshoot



of an operative poverty concept or a result of being too-busy-to-clean-up, it seems to contribute to two reactions. One is the exacerbation of the tension and frustration of the work, and the other is an unwillingness of others in other ministries to share community life with some activists.

This last observation about the relations with those in other ministries raises a more general point. Activists may find the circle of their social contacts and friends becoming increasingly narrow, eventually encompassing only those engaged in the same or similar work and a few loyal others. This is partly occasioned by the fact that the poor themselves may not accept the activist on a social basis--due to differences in race, class, background, and a variety of other factors.

This narrowing could be due to ordinary human patterns of interaction in the United States, which are now more job-related than neighborhood- or family-based. This certainly is the case with regard to socializing by Jesuits engaged in other works--especially the schools. The pattern for the activist, however, may also result from a kind of siege mentality growing out of alienation from others (discussed below in Part II) or from a pervasive fatigue that inhibits development of diverse interests and new friends.<sup>11</sup> The narrowing circle of friends intensifies the anguish and loneliness produced by the job and other factors, and it inhibits a broadening of horizons that would be truly fruitful even in terms of the work itself.<sup>12</sup>

The Society of Jesus has a long tradition of men who have been committed to service of the poor and to societal change. These men of earlier generations were "rugged individualists" to some, and "mavericks" and "loners" to others. Some were this way by choice or personality or work schedule; others through community reaction against their work. Many are proclaimed as great men and were hailed--late in life--as "great Jesuits." They often have appeared unique and inimitable. Thus there are few viable "models" for younger Jesuits to pattern their activities after. There are even fewer team or community-team models. This is a critical factor when increasing numbers of Jesuits, especially younger men, have entered social ministry or expressed an intention to do so. Without models, individual or team ministry and community or personal lifestyle become unknowns, new challenges, and complicated ventures.



The absence of models also complicates the question of "training," since one of the primary modes of training in the Society has been regency, placing the young Jesuit in a school to learn while working--by doing. In the process he also learned from living with men who had been through the same experiences and chosen school teaching as their ministry.<sup>13</sup> Until there are sufficient Jesuits active in social ministry to provide models for younger Jesuits and situations for community and training, those Jesuits entering this ministry do so without a powerful aid that is available in other apostolates.<sup>14</sup>

The crunch that seems to occasion burn-out comes when the aggravating realities associated with the work itself--community, environment, the pain of the poor, overextension, style, fatigue, loneliness--run headlong into the consciousness of the enormity and complexity of the task of creating a better society or of providing any lasting assistance to even a few of the poor. The activist may be only vaguely aware of the factors clashing within him, but their impact can crumple the validity of everything he is doing and of social ministry itself.

## II. THE WORK GIVES RISE TO ALIENATION FROM JESUITS, CHURCH, SELF, FAMILY, FRIENDS

"Alienation" is an extensively overused word these days, but it is quite appropriate in the context of the discussion which follows. The prime alienations of the Jesuit activist seem to be from brother Jesuits, the Church, and himself. Secondary alienations occur with regard to family, personal friends, and society in general.

### A. Questionable Authenticity, Different Lifestyle, Lack of Support, "We-They" Perceptions

There is an image of what it means to be a Jesuit which is propounded by tradition, training, popular opinion, and especially by past and present institutional apostolic commitments. This is not unique to the Society of Jesus. On the contrary, what occurs in the Society is only one example of a larger process of "socializing," of passing on a structured reality



from one person or group to succeeding persons or groups. Sociologists Berger and Luckmann describe as *internalization* the transmitting of institutionalized patterns and processes which have been superimposed upon reality. It is the third stage in the genesis and maintenance of social structures, following upon the processes of *externalization* and *objectivation*.<sup>15</sup>

Jesuits have internalized certain images of what it means to be a Jesuit: how one lives, relates to people, and works in society. The effect of this internalization is that those who break from these patterns may have to pay a very high price for their independence. Peer-acceptance as "true Jesuits" is not readily forthcoming for those who live differently, perform different ministries, or even dress differently. This sense of alienation was articulated at a meeting of Jesuits engaged in non-traditional ministry, namely teachers in non-Jesuit educational institutions.

More than one voiced the sentiment of isolation and of missing Jesuit community life. If there were hurts expressed, and there were a few, they were related not so much to apostolic ups and downs . . . but rather to . . . the questioning eyebrows and slighting comments implying that those in "other educational efforts" are a breed apart and *somehow not really Jesuits* . . . (emphasis supplied).

What did come out of the meeting was a group of men who plan to come together again next year because, as one expressed it, "It's important; *we need to find affirmation* from one another of our *authentic Jesuit identity* as we are living it out apart from stylized apostolates in institutions" (emphasis supplied).<sup>16</sup>

This problem is more acute for the Jesuit social activist who does not even share the communality of engaging in a traditional Jesuit endeavor, such as education.

Ironically, the activist affirms within himself the alienation which he experiences from his fellow Jesuits. Since he has internalized the socialized "image" of Jesuitness, there are strong visceral doubts about the authenticity and legitimacy of his own work--and of himself. This takes place despite the fact that he can marshal extensive authority supporting and encouraging his work from popes, Councils, General Congregations, fathers general, province assemblies, and his own superiors.

The alienation from fellow Jesuits may have another source hinted at



earlier in this paper: lifestyle. The difference is between an institution-related community living a more middle-class, servant-ed existence on a campus and a simpler, self-serviced style of community located in a poor neighborhood--both styles in a sense "structured" by the work itself. More critical, however, is the often distinct "feel" to the different communities, including elements of religious experience, mutuality of expectations and "permissions," and service. These elements are what ultimately constitute "at-home-ness." Whereas in former times Jesuits moved about with only limited readjustments in personal style, the move from school community to inner-city community or vice versa cannot be done in 1978 without significant personal changes.

The feeling of alienation can be reinforced by a sense of no actual support from brother Jesuits. This has several causes: very few contacts with one another; little mutual interest in or understanding of respective ministries; and physical isolation from one another's places of work and residence. It may be that Jesuits in other ministries are themselves threatened by the activist or even hostile to his work. They may simply be so caught up in the demands of their own apostolate that they cannot offer support, even if they know how. Whatever the case, it is easy for the activist or activist community to begin to feel that their fellow Jesuits do not support them.

As the activist becomes more and more conscious of, and sensitive to, the structural and systemic features of the problems facing the poor, he can move to a "we-they" conflict perception of all of American society--including the Church and the Society of Jesus. Fr. William J. Byron, S.J., posed an important consideration in a paper prepared for the Southern Province Assembly of June, 1975:

Midway in this paper I asked, "Is our corporate apostolic service compensatory; are we throwing our weight onto the side of the oppressed?" Symbolically, justice is represented by trays in balance on a scale. The unbalance of social injustice, where one group's advantage (the down tray) is taken at the expense of another group (the up tray), calls for compensatory action. As a social group, we Jesuits should shift our weight over to the weak side. We see gaps between rich and poor, powerful and powerless, advantaged and disadvantaged. In exercising our ministry of justice, by whatever apostolic instruments, we



should, it seems to me, translate the ideal of the Third Mode of Humility into practice by choosing to be--with Christ and as Christ--on the short side of all those gaps. Where do we throw our weight? Where do we throw our wealth, our income, our apostolic energy?<sup>17</sup>

The activist answers Father Byron's question by saying that the Society largely casts its weight with the "haves," with those who at best "don't care" and at worst are the oppressors. He sees the institutional and personnel weight of the Society lined up with the "haves" in such popular dichotomies as these:

white vs. black  
 white vs. brown  
 male vs. female  
 U.S. vs. Third World  
 powerful vs. powerless  
 rich vs. poor  
 suburban vs. urban  
 well-educated vs. poorly educated.

The activist concludes that no matter how much Jesuits "tinker" with their present institutional commitments to facilitate the entry of some minority composed of the poor or disadvantaged, the Society's weight is still cast overwhelmingly on the side of the well-off.

#### B. Secular Environment, Changing Religious Identity and Practices

More than most Jesuits, the activist often moves in an alien and "ecumenical" world. The people he works for and those he works with are often Protestants, Jews, and agnostic or formal unbelievers. The closeness to these groups contrasts with the experience of alienation from familiar Jesuit and Catholic circles discussed above. Even the "enemies"--landlords, loan companies, corporations, banks, and city hall--often are strongly Catholic and have significant ties to the Society of Jesus.

Then there occurs an easy religious identification with those whose lives mirror at least the social values of the gospel--the poor and those imbued with a self-giving concern for humankind. This furthers the alienation from those whose religion has been privatized and who seem thus to



reject in fact the religion they affirm in theory. This affects the activist's own faith commitment, at least in some of its formal or "religious" aspects.<sup>18</sup> As Gustavo Gutierrez describes this experience:

For many the participation in the process of liberation causes a wearying, anguished, long, and unbearable dichotomy between their life of faith and their revolutionary commitment. . . .

Moreover, the close collaboration with people of different spiritual outlooks which this option provides leads one to ponder the contribution proper to the faith.<sup>19</sup>

This experience shatters presuppositions about who are the saved and the unsaved, who are really Christians, what is ministry. Significant concrete reactions suggested in the following paragraphs then may follow.

As the activist applies a measuring-stick of the social gospel to those around him, the size of his Church dwindles rapidly. This is accompanied by the feeling of uneasiness and even anger with the prayer and worship of the "all-inclusive" brethren of Church and the Society. As one author put it, "Submerged in the raw brutality of urban poverty, the minister quickly develops a special bitterness toward that decorative spirituality which hides indecision and evasion."<sup>20</sup> Small circles of fellow worshipers and sharers of prayer develop among those who seem to be committed to the poor by their actual living. These may be lay and/or religious and/or priests. They may also be Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, and non-formal believers. This development parallels the other kinds of narrowing of the world of the activist indicated earlier in this paper.<sup>21</sup>

An alternative reaction may be a skepticism towards, or even a total rejection of, prayer and the "spiritual life." Not only do these realities become associated with evasion and otherworldliness, but they are made all the more difficult by the imperative of the needs of the poor and the experience of failure discussed above.

But the continued wrestling with unyielding problems rips a man apart. It is true that such virile disregard of self counteracts the abstract dedication of the church's official proclamation of "preferential love of the poor." For the individual minister, though, it brings its own brand of spiritual torture. Feelings of deadness--physical, psychological and spiritual--are inevitably born from failure and fatigue. When a brother's blood has spurted out and splashed you, however, one feels guilty in retreating from the combat--even for prayer.<sup>22</sup>



What can happen then is a move to a one-dimensional--horizontal--Christianity whose demand is a total and complete dedication to "the effective realization of this love in the city's barren world of shabbiness. . . ." <sup>23</sup>

Either and both of the above two reactions have internal repercussions. They clash with the activist's prior and fundamental internalized values of "universal Church" and "formal prayer," with images of Jesuitness, religious life, and priestly service. This clash is the source of a deep-rooted discomfort and alienation within the activist himself; his present experience does not "jell" with his past. If he is unable to come to a new synthesis that speaks to the internal pain, he again will incline to abandon his present social ministry in an attempt to reclaim his past, or he will abandon his past in the Society and probably in the Church as well in an attempt to claim his present and future.

### III. THE PROBLEM HAS IMPORTANT THEORETICAL AND THEOLOGICAL UNDERPINNINGS

In moving to the question of theory and theology, this paper ventures even further from the descriptive to the analytic, and therefore to the more tentative and hypothetical. Nevertheless, the nature of the activist's underlying theoretical or theological construct has much to do with choice of ministry, evaluation of effectiveness, and eventual survival. In addition, a discussion of these matters necessarily addresses spirituality, which here means the reflection upon and articulation of religious experience. <sup>24</sup>

In a very real sense, religious experience, spirituality, and theology are all correlates. Each affects the shape and substance of the others and in turn is shaped and given substance by them. Problems in one area invariably have an impact in the other two, usually creating parallel problems there.

For the Jesuit activist, three basic problem areas arise where the need for an adequate theory and theology is most acute: (1) power and conflict; (2) utopianism and ideology; and (3) dualism. Unless the activist has some explicit or implicit framework for solving or living with these problems, he will experience serious unsettling when confronted by them, an unsettling which further aggravates his dilemma.



### A. The Use of Power and the Engagement in Conflict

One reaction repeated often by religious in community organizing is that of being "frightened" of the use of power, finding it inconsistent with gospel values, having "gentleness breakdowns." There is a similar reaction to the advocacy of conflict which lies at the heart of not only community organizing, but also our adversary-process legal system, most urban politics, and much social theory, especially under Marxist and other influences. Some Jesuit activists find this advocacy inconsistent with their Christianity, their role as religious, their priesthood.

The activist must ask himself whether this "spontaneous" reaction is true to the mark, an articulation of a felt sense of Christians that is genuinely connatural. He must examine the utilization of power in the context of conflict and ask whether it is incongruous with the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. His conclusion may be that the use of power and the engagement in conflict are inappropriate, either in certain concrete situations or at all times (a kind of pacifist stance that has strong roots in Christian history). If so, he must change his style of social ministry or opt out altogether.

On the other hand, the activist may conclude that his "spontaneous" reaction is simplistic and idealistic. It indicates that he has an inadequate social ethics operative at the point where a surface or literal reading of the gospel meets the demands of real life in the world. He may have unrealistic and naive expectations in both his faith-vision and his politics that fail to acknowledge the permanent presence of evil in the world.

Whatever the conclusion, if the activist does not move beyond his initial and instinctive reaction against the use of power and conflict and ask serious questions about the gospel, ethics, and politics, then he is caught in a bind that will not allow his commitment in this ministry to survive. He will burn out.

If he does stay with a work that involves power or conflict, then he may have to follow a different kind of analysis of "the good." He may come to believe that a literal gospel morality is not intended to cope with the complicated business of fashioning a society embodying true



Christian values. He may see that "the good" is a product of human endeavor and experimentation, where the possibilities as well as the limits of the past and the present give shape to responsible moral choices in an actually lived human situation. Then, in concrete political history, he may conclude that pursuit of "the good" not only allows but requires the use of power and conflict. (If he does reach this last point, he will then be faced with further questions of when and where and how much power or conflict are appropriate.<sup>25</sup>)

#### B. The Clash of Utopianism and Pragmatics

A second jarring clash experienced by some activists occurs between the theoretical utopianism or ideology of a "new society" and the factual complexity, provisionality, and failure involved in the processes of social change. If his "pure" utopianism cannot adequately incorporate the phenomenon of failure, he experiences danger. If his ideological stance cannot encompass the advocacy of solutions both complex and provisional, solutions that "work," he is in jeopardy. How can he make a judgment to begin one course of action or to continue another if his only real choices are ideologically unacceptable? The inability to reconcile this tension or to live with it in a meaningful fashion is an important factor in the experience of many activists who embrace their work with grand hopes and enthusiasm and abandon it disillusioned and bitter.

Eventually, if he is to survive, the activist has to ask himself how the tentative solution and the failed endeavor fit into his social theory and theology. He has to deal with the frustration and paralysis created by his own absolutes. He has to apply to his own fixed ideological structures the same liberating standards of criticism he might use on some other oppressive social structure.

This very endeavor is a walking beneath the standard of the cross. For the activist, it will be a painful journey; but the liberation of grace always encompasses an element of pain when it moves us away from ready answers to which we are securely anchored and forces us into the unknown where we must steer without certainty.



### C. A Fatal Dualism

The final critical challenge in the area of theology is dualism. Here the activist formally addresses the subtle problem which lies at the heart of the difficulties discussed above regarding prayer (vertical vs. horizontal Christianity), authenticity (Jesuit and Church vs. involvement in secular world), and religious identity ("religious practices" vs. immersion in the work and life of the poor). This dualism, posed alternately as "Church-World" or "Sacred-Profane," is central to the feeling of some Jesuit activists that social-action work is somehow "natural" while they are called to mediate the "supernatural" (envisioned in sacramental ministry and overt word-proclamation). To them comes the frequent question, "How is what you do *priestly*?"

In one sense, this is the classic Jesuit question and it situates the activist firmly in the midst of his brothers in the Society of Jesus. This question flows out of and is prompted by a spirituality which, at its best, blends divine and human action in a single vision and movement. But the obvious and simple fact that the question has been asked before does not make the answer any easier. The very persistence in the asking testifies to the difficulty of responding. Nevertheless, the unwillingness or inability or failure so to respond has been costly for activists in the past and will persist for the unwary.

Like his brothers, the Jesuit activist must be prepared to deal with this question, whether posed by others or in his own reflection. In responding, he may choose to formulate answers, or to argue that the questions themselves are bogus and arise out of false, dualistic presuppositions.<sup>26</sup> Either endeavor requires that he prayerfully reflect upon and seek to understand the universality of grace, the Incarnational reality, and the human and priestly role in the plan of salvation.

All three of these theological/theoretical questions are connected and demand a complex response which is neither easily formulated nor readily at hand. Moreover, that response must be both practical and personally synthetic (at the level of lived experience and in spirituality). Various "successful" activists seem to have built their spirituality upon some implicit resolution of these problems, and it would be well for them



to articulate their experience and to spell out their vision for the benefit of others. Other activists, on the contrary, are still caught up in these questions. This condition, coupled with alienating experiences and the strains associated with the work of social ministry, constitutes the critical burn-out dilemma. If the activist cannot fashion an adequate support system, or cope with those forces creating alienation, or address the questions of theology and spirituality, he cannot survive at what he does--not effectively, not as a whole person, and certainly not for long.

#### IV. SIGNS OF HOPEFULNESS

If this discussion has seemed negative, this is a result of the specific intention to sketch out the elements of what is a contemporary dilemma or even a crisis. It is as well an attempt to initiate a process of dialogue and discussion that will facilitate healthy response and resolution--if its challenge is picked up by the more experienced and the more expert: the psychologists, spiritual directors, theologians, and, most importantly, activists themselves. Nevertheless, some lines of a responsive development already are present which provide genuine hope. A brief sampling of these developments is given in the following paragraphs.

1. The first--and it has been the source for this paper--is that people are discussing this dilemma. Many are alert to the problems, raising questions and positing solutions. In a sense, this is the most helpful of the signs since it suggests that activists will not be mere passive and unknowing victims of the forces in their lives.

2. Serious theologians are addressing these problems. The first sentences of the Introduction to Gutierrez's *A Theology of Liberation* read as follows:

This book is an attempt at reflection, based on the Gospel and the experiences of men and women committed to the process of liberation in the oppressed and exploited land of Latin America. It is a theological reflection born of shared efforts to abolish the current unjust situation and to build a different society, freer and more human.<sup>27</sup>

The works of Gutierrez and others seriously address many of the problems indicated above, especially those in the theoretical and theological area.



These offer genuine hope, especially when coupled with the renewed interest among activists in developing a theology and spirituality which will buttress and forward their own work.<sup>28</sup> This coupling itself may be a good example of just what the blending and interplay of *theory* and *praxis* are all about.

3. Activists recently have evinced a much more intense interest in community life. This product of experience harbors real promise for the future, and it may foster both current apostolic effectiveness and the personal stability which will support more innovative and searching endeavors in terms of work and lifestyle and spirituality. At the very least, this development presently provides an important locus for expressing and sharing feelings of anger and frustration<sup>29</sup> and for countering experiences of alienation and non-support.

4. Developments in community-building have been accompanied by an intense interest on the part of some in putting together apostolic team efforts in response to people's needs and social problems. This lays the groundwork for more longevity of various projects as the "maverick" status of some past efforts is carried to a new stage, one more proper to modeling for, and the training of, new generations.<sup>30</sup>

5. Recent attention among "formation personnel" to providing younger Jesuits with diverse cultural experiences--especially among the poor--is very important. When this is supplemented with reflection upon social realities<sup>31</sup> and the acquisition of genuine helping-skills, it means that these men may be prepared for encountering the harsh realities of American poverty and injustice in the face of which many older Jesuits can only respond in frustration, "What can I do?"

This development suggests a brief remark on the element of competence in social ministry. In the assignment of men to, or the choice of, social ministry, serious consideration must be given to professional and personal competence. The former means the acquisition of skills and knowledge helpful to the work in question. The latter refers to personal growth and character such as "fits" a man to this kind of work and life. Attention to competence, of course, will not eliminate the failure and frustration and other stresses that are present in abundance in social ministry. Nevertheless, those who engage in this work should be as prepared for this



experience as training and personality may allow.

6. The growing and liberating realization of the limits (and the appropriateness) of the conflict model in social ministry is also a positive indicator. Activists have found that they cannot remain true to their own experience of life if they absolutize the evil of the oppressors and the goodness of the oppressed. Simultaneously, however, they are accepting the existence of evil and structures of evil that must be recognized, expected, *and confronted*.

7. More difficult to capture here is a growing realization of the persistence of failure in all social-change ministry, and of the need to incorporate it into spirituality without having it become an excuse for social irresponsibility and inaction. Efforts in this direction encompass reflective evaluation of redemptive suffering in Christian theology, a dynamic theology of development and history, as well as an understanding of the Incarnation that truly melds the creative activity of humankind with the grace of God active in history. All this is a kind of Ignatian unified vision.

The consideration of failure, however, is only one example of the increasing awareness of the need for every Jesuit activist to develop both a social anthropology and a theology adequate for this work. This is not meant as a "head-exercise" alone, but as an understanding that promotes wholeness in spirituality and experience as well.

8. Another development that offers hope on the contemporary scene is the growing awareness of all Jesuits in the wake of the 32nd General Congregation of their serious obligation to respond actively to the problems of the poor and to oppressive social structures. For example, this awareness is embodied in the new move to a poorer, self-servicing lifestyle in formation and other houses. This modest development alone may well ease the alienation described above in terms of different styles of "at-home-ness." On the other hand, a major move like the redirection of all our ministries to address the problems of injustice certainly would facilitate a renewed sense of communality and brotherhood for all Jesuits in terms of mission; but this development is as yet sporadic and halting.<sup>32</sup>

9. Lastly, there is among activists a refreshing interest in prayer



and reflection. Rather than a simple return to "old forms," there appears to be an attempt to develop genuine expressions of spirituality which are supportive of the activists' work because they are attuned to the breadth or universality of the Christian mystery, as well as to the ambiguity of total involvement in the "now" and of eschatological hope in the "not yet." For some, this has required merely the constant "situating" of community liturgy and personal prayer in the current social context by frequent allusions to social implications, the needs of poor people, the action of sin and grace in social structures, and the like (thus suggesting that it was not "formal prayer" but *uncaring* formal prayer that failed in the past). For others, it means experimenting with new kinds of retreats specifically attending to the social reality and our role in it, or fasting and abstention attuned to world hunger and food costs, or Scripture services occasioned by and directed towards local, national, and world political events. Despite mistakes in the process of experimentation, a growing seriousness about interiority is necessary to fashioning a viable and vibrant spirituality for a future that will be more unlike its past than in any prior age.

## CONCLUSION

That there is a problem for Jesuit social activists has been confirmed for me in numerous conversations and discussions over the past three years. Hopefully, the above presentation of the contours of the problem has been faithful to those who shared their lives. If this paper has been able to "raise high" some important questions, to indicate accurately some characteristics of the problems in service of the gospel, and to delineate some lines of a hopeful response, then it has been worthwhile. That others will move the discussion forward from here is much hoped for.



APPENDIX; OTHER VIEWPOINTS

A. AN AMERICAN REPLY: "BURN-OUT" POSES DEEPER QUESTIONS.

by

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Introduction by Alfred C. Kammer, S.J.

The first "viewpoint" presented here is a reaction to our study by an American Jesuit community organizer, Mr. Richard L. Smith, S.J., of the Oregon Province. He combines his own personal history with provocative insights into the Society's ability to respond to social injustice, and also gives some perceptive reflections on the role of anger in the life of an organizer.

Father Alfred Kammer's paper on the phenomenon of burn-out among Jesuit social activists reflects a remarkable sensitivity to a serious problem. I am grateful to Father Kammer for what he has written; it testifies to his own best hopes that we Jesuits, with our eyes open to some of the risks involved in following the 32nd General Congregation, will be able to engage even more effectively in the difficult mission of serving faith and promoting justice.

I would like to respond to Father Kammer's paper first of all by describing some of my own personal history in the Society and some of the experiences out of which I am writing. Secondly, I would like to refocus the problem of "burn-out" in a way somewhat different from Father Kammer. And thirdly, I would like to say a brief word about the anger that is seen by some as being characteristic of Jesuit activists.



## I. A Personal History

As a way of beginning, then, I would like to describe some of my own personal history in the Society over the last several years, not because I think it is particularly noteworthy or outstanding, but rather because I am discovering more and more that it is rather typical of many Jesuits now working in social ministry. As I write this, I am in my third year of theological studies and a few months shy of ordination.

I can recall that when I entered the novitiate in the late sixties, the world--and particularly the poor and powerless--were beginning to direct some enormous challenges to the Church. I think I had some awareness of those challenges, although they seemed rather abstract to me at the time. I saw the possibility of responding to those challenges as a priest and as a Jesuit, but the withdrawal from "the world" which the novitiate program involved at that time required that I place those challenges on the back burner. Consequently, at the end of my novitiate, I perceived the call to priesthood and to the Society as something that emerged chiefly out of my own prayer experience and that gave me great consolation and peace--even though it was not at that time explicitly related to the concerns and struggles of people in "the world."

When I went to Gonzaga University for my collegiate years, the Viet Nam War was in full swing. The campus was bursting at the seams with angry students vehemently attacking both the Church and the Society for remaining silent in the face of that horror. Those were difficult years for me. I felt then, as I do now, that the students at that time were basically right and I joined them in their efforts to stop the war. But in so doing, I felt caught between the involvement I had taken in conscience in those anti-war efforts and the earlier prayer experience which had confirmed my desire to be a Jesuit and a priest. These two aspects of my life seemed, as a matter of fact, to be mutually exclusive and contradictory; and I wondered if the day would come when I would have to choose one over the other. I became one of the "angry young men" of the time, feeling alienated from my Jesuit brothers as well as from those struggling to bring an end to the war and a reordering of national priorities.



Nevertheless, the anxiety of that period was not enough to outweigh the deep experience of being called by the Lord that I had received in the novitiate. Underlying the storms of that period, I still felt an abiding sense of peace that made me want to hang on to my Jesuit vocation--despite all the reasons to the contrary. As the time for regency approached, I asked and received permission to do an alternative form of regency as a community organizer in Oakland, California.

When I arrived in Oakland to begin my regency, my vision of priesthood and Jesuit vocation consisted largely of the ideals, values, moral principles, and convictions that I had formulated as a novice and as a student. One crucial ingredient was missing: the people. Working with the people in the neighborhoods in Oakland was, in many many ways, one of the most enriching experiences of my life. Someday, perhaps when I'm retired, I'd like to write poetry about them, what they did for me and what they meant to me at that time in my life. They kidded me, they challenged me, they scared me, they appreciated me, they shared with me the muck and mud as well as the simple joys of their lives. Being with them and working with them made me feel very much alive in a way I had never felt before. How could I not have wanted to be with them in their struggle to make the future better for themselves and their children?

The experience of working with the people in Oakland had a profound impact on my vocation. This time I heard the Lord's voice addressing me not so much from the realm of ideals but from the midst of the people. It was an invitation to join him there among them. That voice, coming as it did from their midst, enabled me to see why I wanted to be a priest and a Jesuit. Because of the people it all made sense. The tension that I had felt as a college student vanished because priesthood came to mean for me an even deeper immersion into their lives and struggles.

So, out of this personal experience and history, I can now say that nothing makes me feel more integral as a Jesuit than living and working among the poor. The transition it has meant for me has caused me, in a sense, to lose my vocation--only to find it in a deeper and more meaningful way.

I mentioned earlier that my reason for recounting some of my own



personal history was precisely because it is not totally unique to me; in fact, I have discovered that it is similar to that of many Jesuits now working in social ministries. The Jesuits of a community living and working in a poor section of downtown Toronto recently described their own experience in a similar way:

Besides the innovations of simplicity and apostolic insertion. . . , the most important change is that our religious and communal lives have generally ceased to be problematic for us. Before, until 1973, all of us were subject to crises of identity and crises of vocation. To some extent we look back upon these difficulties as false problems engendered by our institutionalized lives. It is simpler now, less critical, partly because we have less time to worry about such things, but more importantly because our vocation, our vows, our ordinations all seem to make a sort of practical, day-by-day, sense. A great deal of mystery remains, and a great deal of joy. . . . We are very happy.<sup>1</sup>

## II. The Problem Refocused

According to Father Kammer, work among the poor is an apostolate that manifests a unique collection of problems which contribute to the so-called burn-out phenomenon: the strains associated with the work itself, the experience of alienation, and some theoretical difficulties. This phenomenon, the paper states, belongs not only to Jesuits engaged in work with the poor, but also to many health and social-service professionals as well. I can find no place in the paper where Father Kammer indicates that the problem might exist in the more established apostolates of the Society. The conclusion, it would seem, is that the problem is intrinsic to work among the poor, such that *anyone* who chooses to live and work among the poor runs the risk of becoming burned-out--and this, for the Jesuit, might even entail the loss of his own vocation. Such a conclusion might explain the occasional reluctance of some concerned provincials, formation directors, and novice masters to encourage their men to engage in such a life and work.

Let me say at this point that *any* worthwhile apostolic work--even one that is long-established and institutionalized--is prone to problems



of strain, failure, and fatigue, and therefore is equally vulnerable to the burn-out phenomenon. Nevertheless, such problems have never been viewed by the Society as sufficient reasons for giving up or withdrawing altogether from a given apostolate--and hopefully this will not happen in the area of direct social ministry with the poor. Such a withdrawal could only mean that we are either unable or unwilling to embrace that call that we have heard repeatedly in recent years both from the Church and from the poor themselves, a call which our last General Congregation articulated so well: the call to serve faith and to promote justice. Thus, it is not work among the poor that is brought into question by the burn-out phenomenon. Rather, what the phenomenon does bring into question is the present ability of us Jesuits to meet the many demands that this particular work presents.

To put all of this in another way, the most important question we must ask is not: Why have so many Jesuit activists burned out? Rather, it is: Why are we Jesuits, with all of our training, spirituality, and material resources, successful by and large only in our involvements with the professional classes of American society? What is there about us that makes it so difficult, so problematic, for us to throw in our lot with the poor and the oppressed?

I suspect that what lies at the heart of our problem is very often our commitment to a false notion of "professionalism"; it is a type of "professionalism" that is really very unprofessional in that it is alienated from the people it is meant to serve. Today it often seems that the milieu of the "professionals" and that of "the folks" are miles apart; each milieu has its own logic, its own values, its own expectations. In fact, the two milieux are not always in harmony with each other. We could ask, for example, the welfare mother what she thinks of the "professional" social worker whose brash arrogance must be endured in order to remain eligible for welfare payments; or the low-income homeowner what he thinks of the "professional" real estate broker who just sold him a "lemon." Again, we could ask the ethnic blue-collar worker on Chicago's west side what he thinks of the "professional" university professor who keeps putting all those crazy ideas into his kid's head. The point is that rightly or wrongly the Jesuit's "professionalism" is likely to make him suspect in



the eyes of the people in the neighborhoods and on the streets.

In pointing out this problem, in no way do I want to suggest that Jesuits working in social ministry should be uneducated or incompetent. The question is not whether we should be competent or not; we clearly should be! Rather, the issue here is our ability and our willingness to divest ourselves of the trappings of a pseudo-professional milieu--the coats and ties, the technical and obfuscating terminology, the finely honed theories, the display of academic degrees, the carpeted and air-conditioned offices--in order to become more fully incarnate in the milieu of the poor. The problem is that we have so often been trained and acculturated for the former milieu and not the latter. We are not used to mingling with poor and powerless people.

The tension produced by this realization has been felt increasingly by a variety of priests around the world since the outbreak of World War II. The following words, written in 1945 by the pastor of an inner-city parish in Paris, reflects fundamentally the same problem:

Our influence upon ordinary people is not what it should be, partly because we are so different from them; we think differently, live differently, speak and act differently. In other words, we have a different culture. Our seminary training in the classics, philosophy, and theology has put us in a class apart. . . . What is the result? Usually it means that we feel compelled to surround ourselves with those who will understand our thought and our speech, and those who have tastes like our own. . . . We tend to move among and work with people who resemble us--it is easy to do so. Our objection comes from the consequent forgetfulness of the great mass of men who are not like us. Our concern is about the consequent inability to meet ordinary people, to talk to them, to make them feel at home in the "catholic" Church we represent. <sup>2</sup>

More recently, the Jesuits in Toronto that I mentioned earlier described the type of attitude they had to assume upon entering the milieu of their neighbors, a milieu in which even traditional religious values and expressions were foreign:

Most Jesuit ministries assume the existence of a Catholic context, a shared religious culture in which people apparently know what "grace," "sin," "salvation," etc., mean. We have to assume nearly the direct opposite. We are working with people whom the church long ago abandoned or perhaps never approached. In seeking to make Christ and his Church present



to these people, we cannot even presume that we know what sin and grace mean to them. But in different ways we do discover how the Lord is alive in them, and we are slowly learning how they experience his forgiveness, how they live his Passion, how the kingdom is at hand among them.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, an individual or a group of Jesuits leaves the "professional" and traditionally religious milieu in order to enter the milieu of "the folks." The transition is more than geographical; it can affect the entire fabric of their lives. But then a difficulty arises: Their superiors and brother Jesuits expect them to keep the same lifestyle, routine, spirituality, tastes, interests, and manners of speaking as they had before. What can then develop is a clash similar to the one that led to the suppression of the worker-priests in France. The French bishops, concerned by what they regarded as a loss of "ecclesiastical virtue" among the worker-priests eventually forbade them to continue their ministry. Responding to some of the initial charges of the French hierarchy, a group of worker-priests wrote:

As for more definite risks, it is true that the worker's life, the hard work, the living conditions, the fatigue, the lack of time and so on, do more often than not hinder us from carrying out the duties of regular worship required of a priest in the ordinary ministry. . . . If we are judged on such grounds, we are certainly worthy of condemnation.

On the other hand, it is certain that the working-class life, even the working-class struggle, have their own discipline and ethic, and these, what with the frankness, loyalty, courage, and risks run in encountering repression that they involve, are as good as many others. The methods used for our suppression may have to do with the ecclesiastical virtues; they have nothing to do with the working-class virtues. Which are the more Christian?<sup>4</sup>

To summarize what I have said, the phenomenon of burn-out among Jesuit social activists raises questions that all American Jesuits must face if we, as a corporate body, take seriously the mission of serving faith and promoting justice. The phenomenon must not lead us to withdraw from--or to refrain from sending men into--work among the poor. Rather, it should challenge us to equip ourselves and each other with the resources we need to meet the exigencies and demands that such a work so often entails. Moreover, we cannot regard the burn-out phenomenon as a problem of a few



people engaged in a peculiarly problematic ministry, as Father Kammer suggests. It is a phenomenon that we must view within the larger context of the Society of Jesus in this country, for it stems in large measure from our position within the American professional milieu and our general alienation from the everyday life of the poor. Unless all of us, and particularly superiors and those in charge of formation, are willing to grapple with the deeper question that this problem raises, then those who choose to live and work among the poor will continue to be regarded as an ever-dwindling number of apparently brave--or neurotic--mavericks who represent something of an aberration from the "normal" Jesuit vocation.

### III. The Anger of the Jesuit Activist

Father Kammer has alluded to several characteristics that are commonly ascribed to those Jesuits who become involved in the struggles of the poor and powerless: They do so out of a "messiah complex," or out of a sense of infantile guilt; they see themselves laboring under a sword of Damocles which, if the system is not changed immediately, will fall upon us all; they are "working out inappropriate anger and authority hang-ups" which cause them to view even their superiors and brother Jesuits as "they."

It is difficult to know the extent to which these criticisms are directed to all Jesuit activists, to a majority of them, or to only a few. Moreover, it is difficult to say in any given instance whether an individual Jesuit activist is acting out of an inflated messiah complex or out of a truly Christ-like concern for the poor who suffer injustice; whether he is working out of an infantile and narcissistic sense of guilt or out of the recognition that, in the words of the 32nd General Congregation, "We ourselves share in the blindness and injustice of our age." And it is not always easy to determine whether a man is driven by a destructive and inhuman compulsiveness or by that sense of God's burning compassion for the poor which inflamed the great prophets of the Old Testament.

It is difficult to know what to make of such criticisms, even if they appear valid at times. Similar criticisms have been raised against Jesuits in other works. We all know the trite psychological stereotypes: That



the reason an individual chooses to become a psychiatrist is because he is working out some of his own deep personal anxieties, or that one who chooses to become a mathematician works out of an idealistic worldview in which two and two must always equal four--though it rarely does in real life. Regardless of the rare appropriateness of stereotypes such as these, one would rightly hope that Jesuits, rather than fleeing from such ministries out of fear of their inherent risks, would engage in them despite those risks.

But let's look, even if all too briefly, at the anger that has come to characterize the Jesuit activist. I recall that when I arrived in Chicago a few years ago to receive some initial training in community organizing, the instructor explained to us that a sense of anger and of rage was a *sine qua non* of a good organizer. If you were incapable of anger, you were likewise incapable of organizing. Saul Alinsky himself, the belated godfather of community organizing in this country, used to say that an organizer, while burning against injustice, must also know how to "bridle his anger so that it becomes cold and hard. Then he acts with calculation." The point I make in citing these two men is this: Anger is a necessary motivation for anyone passionately concerned about justice--Jesuit included. Yet it is also recognized that it must be bridled and channeled so that it doesn't devour either the individual himself or those for whom he must be a friend and a brother. The goal of a good organizer is not to make enemies but to repair a situation of injustice--and that effort will more often than not require that one become enraged at those responsible for the injustice.

The problem of frustration and guilt which Father Kammer has also mentioned is, I think, related to the question of anger. At a Social Ministries meeting of the Maryland Province in January, 1977, those in attendance were asked if they experienced frustration and guilt as a result of the failures they encountered. One venerable old-timer who is much loved and respected by all those present at that meeting responded by saying: "I never get frustrated; I just get mad!" That was an insightful comment. When anger gets turned inward, the social minister can end up feeling frustrated and guilty as a result of failure. But if



that anger can be properly "bridled" and directed outward into the unjust situations in the neighborhood and in the larger world, it can become that sense of rage that is so crucial for any prophet wanting to change society.

If what I have said so far about anger is valid, then it calls into question a certain therapeutic model that has become prevalent among some contemporary psychologists and supervisors in Clinical Pastoral Education, and which has come to be adopted as well by some--though certainly not all--spiritual directors in the Society of Jesus. The primary objective of this model is to enable the individual to "feel good about himself" and thus to be freed for fuller growth as a person. According to this model, part of the healing function of the counselor or minister is to enable individuals to "ventilate" their destructive emotions once the sources of those emotions have been correctly located, usually in traumatic experiences of the individuals' past lives. In line with this understanding of the healing process, such counselors and ministers are inclined to view any manifestation of prophetic rage against injustice as an instance of "displacement"--a way of working out unresolved anger that most likely has its real roots in childhood traumas.

I would like to state briefly a couple of reasons why I regard such an approach to counseling and spiritual direction as inconsistent with a mission to serve faith and to promote justice. First of all, this model carries an implicit understanding of what it means to be human that is not far from that of the "self-made man" or the "rugged individualist." By placing primary emphasis on one's own personal growth and on "feeling good about one's self," this model tends to regard the human being as an isolated unit rather than as one intrinsically related to others, both politically and interpersonally. Given such a tendency, the healing process easily becomes an experiment in narcissism: an introspective process in which one looks for salvation not in one's love for the neighbor but in one's own private self, not in the subordination of one's needs and interests to those of others but in the fulfillment of one's own emotional requirements. Such a process is doomed to failure. At best, it leads to a sense of tranquility that is both illusory and ephemeral. Consequently, as the inadequacies of the "self-made man" become more apparent to us in



our own day, I would hope that spiritual directors in the Society would be instrumental in creating a new concept of what it means to be truly human, a concept that regards the human being as intrinsically "for others"--in a political as well as an interpersonal sense of that term.

Secondly, with regard to the question of anger, this therapeutic model often tends to regard prophetic rage against injustice as a neurosis. It fails to see anger as a positive gift that must be channeled and used effectively for others and for the kingdom. By encouraging an individual simply to "ventilate" his or her anger, this model ends by stripping the person of a very precious resource, one which he or she must cherish and learn to use effectively in order to become more fully engaged in the struggle for justice. Consequently, I would hope that spiritual directors in the Society would seek to bring to life in those to whom they minister a true passion for justice, a passion which utilizes in a constructive and effective way all of the emotional, intellectual, and spiritual energies that those individuals possess. By so doing, Jesuit spiritual directors will play an invaluable role in enabling their brothers and sisters to engage more and more fully in the mission to serve faith and to promote justice.

#### IV. Conclusion

As Zossima, the saintly monk of the *Brothers Karamazov*, states it: "Love in action is a harsh and dreadful thing compared to love in dreams." Father Kammer, in his description of burn-out among Jesuit social activists, has pointed out some of the harsh and dreadful realities of the call to serve faith and to promote justice. I have tried to emphasize that those realities call us to an even greater maturity and courage in committing ourselves and our resources to the poor and the oppressed. Moreover, the significance of the burn-out experience of some Jesuit social activists is such that it cannot be viewed merely as the problem of a few mavericks. The phenomenon says something about us all, and calls into question many of our "professional" instincts, our lifestyles, our formation programs, our general ability as a corporate body to fulfill the mission that our last General Congregation articulated. The phenomenon of burn-out among Jesuit social activists must be seen as a challenge to all of us; it is a reminder that love in action is different from love in dreams.



APPENDIX; OTHER VIEWPOINTS (continued)

B. A REFLECTION BY MEXICAN JESUITS ON THEIR EXPERIENCE

A Summary

composed by

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Introduction by Alfred C. Kammer, S.J.

In September, 1974, a number of Mexican Jesuits held discussions about the work they had attempted to do in depressed areas in Mexico City. Then Father Humberto Barquera, S.J., wrote a document which he entitled "Marginality" (*Limitrofía*); and this, in turn, was summarized by Father Francisco Ornelas, S.J., while the 32nd General Congregation was in progress. Subsequently the summary reached me through Father Louis J. Lambert, S.J., Delegate to the Congregation from the Province of New Orleans.

It is an analysis, more theoretical than my main *Study* above, of the philosophical and ideological factors in burn-out. This analysis is unique and important precisely because it arose from reflections-upon-*experience*, namely, from the reflections of the Mexican Jesuits who had actually been working among the poor, rather than from the lucubrations of sociologists in comfortable study rooms. These writings of Fathers Barquera and Ornelas strongly influenced me in the composition of my own main *Study* above.



The experience in question occurs when the activist perceives that a course of action, which *in principle* is possible, necessary, and just, is *in fact* subject to ironclad limits which frustrate its purposes. That perception carries with it a severe and peculiar "spending" of oneself, a reaction of pessimism and exhaustion which seems disproportionate to its visible causes. The frustration of the experience is so acute as to destroy the fabric of the person and the possibilities of the work. More than just tired or overworked, the activist feels "asphyxiated." His sensation is that he can never do more than beat his head against a brick wall.

Because this experience is common to many social activists, it has given rise to examination and reflection on itself and upon the very work of social change, an examination that has revealed a self-contradictory dynamic within the work itself. On the one hand every particular concrete effort for social change tends to be self-critical, giving impulse to efforts which would transcend the *de facto* limits of place and time and needs. Yet, on the other hand, the particular endeavor simultaneously reiterates and reinforces its own necessity for the activist.

In generalizing about the experience, we necessarily must present the experiential data of internal and external factors that are common to many activists. Any single analysis would have to analyze the factors proper to individual persons in addition to, and possibly distinct from, those which are set out in what follows.

### Internal Factors

1. The decisive internal factor would be a kind of "structural-utopian consciousness or awareness" that underlies the activist's endeavors. On the practical level it is translated into a certain attitude which arises in the social reformer when he is faced with social activism which gives configuration--"shape"--to him in contrast to the person who does not have that underlying consciousness or awareness.



Both persons attempt to accomplish a service and invest themselves in that endeavor. Both are interested in the concrete activity that is going on, and in doing it the right way. The person *without* this underlying consciousness moves within the immediately possible and obvious without asking anything for himself beyond the present and immediate task.

The social reformer, however, thinks in terms of *change* and *utopias*; he sharply contrasts what *is* happening in the work itself with what *could* happen. He discovers that what does happen has causes which are "artificial" in the sense that they are products of human intent or design or structures. Therefore, what happens is indefensible and intolerable; it cannot and must not occur. The result of this consciousness is that it creates a new anguish, a difficulty in having confidence in what the reformer himself is doing--and this difficulty in turn necessitates an emotional discharge which is more than ordinary.

2. Another important internal factor is the physical-social environment of the activist, which is usually depressing and often contributes to personal "draining-out." Some activists do manage to move fluidly within this environment. In various ways they discharge the natural tensions which the environment produces in *all* its inhabitants before those tensions become personally crushing. Variations in consciousness and awareness, however, also seem to account for the differences in the impact of this environment on diverse reformers.

3. Another explanation for the differences in environmental impact upon individuals, even when they appear to have the same level of consciousness, has to do with the *compensations* they receive in their work and world. Those who have achieved some renown as radical thinkers and teachers (with whom an activist tends partially to identify himself) find themselves with almost unlimited freedom of imagination and thought, a select and admiring audience, freedom of "action" in the realm of theoretical elaborations and daring pronouncements, and even high incomes (a trajectory shared by numerous sincere left-wing intellectuals).

The "street activist" with the structural-utopian awareness, however, finds little, if any, compensation in his activity for change. The "success" or smooth functioning of some action or activity tends to be inversely



proportional to its significance for change. "The people" themselves ordinarily have little appreciation for the activist's efforts, even less perception of how "the system" operates and, therefore, no understanding of actions calculated to question and challenge existing structures. The culture of the poor acts almost as a language barrier to satisfactory personal interaction and support for the reformer. Moreover, the "success" of the renowned radical thinkers and the large, formal government and other social programs call in question the aptitude of the activist for doing what he does and the appropriateness of his own work for achieving genuine social change. This sense of functional ineffectiveness is unconsciously aggravated by the success values endorsed by this society, especially through its media; and the aggravation is compounded by the ongoing awareness of the structural nature of the problems faced by the activist which seem to require concrete and effective responses.

### Antidote

The antidote to the experience may lie in the hope that the convictions and charism regarding one's own mission achieve a deep personal level and that the activist acquire an adequate spiritual or theoretical construct. If this depth of conviction and charism is present, then living through thankless efforts may be seen as a reasonable price to pay for new possibilities. Those interior limitations indicated in the preceding section which are more psychological and cultural are overcome by accepting the status of "foreigner-pilgrim" in the system and even with "the people" themselves--as one who is walking, and thereby forging a way *for* others, against the common current for the sake of structural change.

### External Factors

Even though these interior limitations can be overcome by a certain asceticism and mystique, there are external limitations on activism and reform which do not correlate with the interior well-being of the activist and which therefore decisively affect the work of social change. These



factors take their toll regardless of "who" the reformer is and whether he is personally "together."

1. The political system itself tolerates innovative and even revolutionary action, but only on a symbolic level. When a course of action appears as a genuine threat, even a distant one, to what is the established order or when it effectively unmask the evils of the operative system, the system reacts violently. There remains only the possibility of clandestine action--small-scale and dubious--or half-hearted action. The system, however, appears so far-reaching and effective that it can be changed only by action which is equally far-reaching and counter-effective; and that seems impossible.

2. It is difficult to have confidence while making conjectures about the success of broad, far-reaching "movements." New models of change and possible ways of living have to be searched for, basically by trial and error. In this search, however, we reproduce the very factors discussed above, those which are conducive to all of the interior limitations and barriers. Yet, successful small-scale experiments have to be taken one step further. They must be implemented on a broad base since it is neither possible nor reasonable to continue mere experimentation indefinitely. This broad implementation on a necessarily institutional level, however, would be stopped by the system or neutralized by being cut off from its revolutionary dynamic.

3. The third external factor is the very smallness of the work of direct social action. When any work is done by an activist with the structural-utopian consciousness, he soon understands the underlying structure of the particular problem and learns the techniques of social change--including the fact that the daily work of social action itself reaps too small a harvest. The sensitive and studious activist then needs a base or environment that is broader than the initial educational group or small cooperative; yet that smaller task has to be done.



APPENDIX; OTHER VIEWPOINTS (continued)

C, A RESPONSE TO THE MEXICAN JESUITS FROM  
A FRENCH WORKER-PRIEST

by

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Introduction by Alfred C. Kammer, S.J.

This final viewpoint is a response to the Mexican document, written during the 32nd General Congregation by a French worker-priest, Father Noel Barré, S.J.

It addresses the burn-out experience from an entirely different approach of immersion among the workers and their "deep-rootedness." It also strongly influenced the main *Study* above.

Everything that you analyze as internal or external causes of the experience of those who work for social change with an informed conscience seems to me to match our working experience. It is the subject of our exchanges and discussions among those involved with direct service of the poor, namely "social-action" or "worker" priests.

The most profound cause of the difficulty is that "the System" which alienates is not only well defended and protected by those who are profiting from it and making it work, but also *by any who submit to it*. The system "structures" the latter group interiorly, whether they realize it or not. To become aware of this process and its implications takes time, experiences which make one eager for something else, and concrete involvements which are so personally upsetting as to produce uneasiness with other types of social settings and social relations.

Ten years of life among the workers have caused me to appreciate the difficulties and to see, not so much the solutions, but possible avenues towards liberation and freedom.



I believe that the risk of the experience is greater for those who come from outside--motivated by idealism or ideology--and who mistake their desires for realities and their hopes for possibilities of immediate action. Men who are born in oppression and poverty and who have become aware of their plight are better armed to survive, despite the odds and against all opposition.

That is why I give so much importance to "worker deep-rootedness," to spontaneous, daily friendship without hope of success, to patience for resting or remaining at a level of the "least things"--never undertaking to do more than the people themselves can handle from their own resources. This is tough; but if we do not accept this condition, we remain on the outside as stranger, and we build on sand.

When I went to work, my fellow Christian workers told me two apparently contradictory things:

There is an important and urgent work which must be done; and we don't know very well how we should apply ourselves to the task. You will see this very quickly because you already have a theoretical understanding and a conscience very alive to the changes that must be made.

But it is absolutely important that you say nothing, that you do nothing, that you play a subservient role for a long time, a very long time. . . . Otherwise you will not become one of these men and women. Accept the unjust salaries that it is necessary to accept to have work. Do not speak back to unjust or injurious words if your fellow workers cannot do so.

This is the experience. It is a long, sad passageway for some. During this time one needs to share with the others who are more or less forced into the same space, especially with the people who were born there, who raised themselves to another life there. The "change of life" in my group or with the worker-priests is fundamentally to discover *there* a sense of this life.

If the "option for justice" strongly demanded by the provinces of Latin America raises a question for me, it is exactly for this reason. If we wish to work *with* the people, and not as technocrats, we will encounter this risk of the experience and it is absolutely imperative that we give ourselves the means not to perish.

Maybe it is a question of undertaking less work to do, but with patience, in brotherly communities, outward-going and well founded. I am distrustful of the enthusiasts and the programs of idealists of all sorts; or at least I fear for them and for the people who invest their lives in following them.



FOOTNOTES

I. On BURN-OUT--CONTEMPORARY DILEMMA, by Alfred C. Kammer, S.J.,

- 1 Both Mexican and French Jesuits involved in work amidst the poor have experienced something closely akin to the burn-out and reflected on their experience in the hopes of finding ways of healthy survival. See Appendix: Other Viewpoints, on pages 32 and 37 above.
- 2 An analysis of the federal legal-services program states that current annual turnover among legal-services lawyers is 33%. See Legal Services Corporation Memorandum of March 2, 1977.
- 3 The California study describes the effect of the burn-out as a loss of emotional feeling for the persons they are working with, treatment of clients or patients in detached or dehumanized fashion, "distancing" by the worker as a way of coping with stress, and eventual resignation from the job. Along the way, the service worker or professional often develops cynical and negative feelings about his or her clients or patients, and begins to treat them as numbers or files.  
  
The study also indicated significant correlations between burn-out and alcoholism, mental illness, marital conflict, and suicide. See "Burned-Out," by Christina Maslach, in *Human Behavior* magazine, September, 1976, pp. 18-22. See, also, "Consultant Burnout," by Michael D. Mitchell, in *The 1977 Annual Handbook for Group Facilitators*, pp. 143-46.
- 4 For my own personal background see the Editor's Foreword, p. iv above.
- 5 See Dominic Maruca, S.J., "The Graces of the Third and Fourth Weeks," in *Soundings: A Task Force on Social Consciousness and Ignatian Spirituality* (Center of Concern, 1974), pp. 25-27.
- 6 Of course, governmental studies in this country have indicated repeatedly that the poor are in fact getting poorer in relation to the prosperity of the rest of the country, the cost of living, their share of social "goods" and the like.
- 7 The person with this awareness is described as thinking in terms of change and in utopias. He or she sharply contrasts what is happening in his or her work with what could happen. He or she discovers that what happens in society has causes which are "artificial" in the sense that they are products of human intent or design or structures. Therefore what does happen is indefensible and intolerable; it cannot and must not occur. The result of this consciousness is that it creates a new anguish--a difficulty in having confidence in what the reformer personally is doing--which in turn necessitates beyond-the-ordinary emotional discharge. See Appendix, B, pages 32-36 above.
- 8 "Annals of Law--The Liberty of Every Man," Richard Harris, *The New Yorker*, November 3, 1975, p. 55.
- 9 One wonders whether the generalization itself might not be symptomatic



of the gulf that exists between activists and Jesuits who are in the work of formation or spirituality--a gulf that is filled with *judgments*.

- 10 It is interesting to note that the 32nd General Congregation called for increased exposure to and experience of the problems of the poor as a necessary foundation to any serious decision-making in regard to choice of ministries. See *Our Mission Today*, nos. 35, 49, 50, 73; and "Poverty," no. 5.
- 11 What happens also to retreats, vacations, reading, non-job-related workshops and seminars, and sometimes a sense of humor? There are observations in the California study that indicate significant roles in burn-out played by deteriorating health, lack of vacations, drugs, lack of exercise, lack of outlets for stress, and the like.
- 12 This phenomenon has a parallel impact upon activists who are married. As one person observed to me, "Of all the activists of the sixties whom I knew, none of their marriages survived."
- 13 Gail Sheehy, in her recent best seller *Passages*, gives particular stress to the role of "mentors" in the move of young men and women into their adult careers. Her analysis provides interesting input not only into reflection upon the regency experience, but also upon the roles played by particular older priests on the faculty in the initiation and development of scholastics (N.Y.: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1976).
- 14 Another important factor in entry into social ministry is finances. The activist is often concerned not only for his living expenses but also for the cost of any programs he may wish to initiate. The further he moves from traditional work for which he might draw a salary from Church, private, or public agency, the harder it is to find supporting resources and the more time must be expended in fund-raising.
- 15 "The process involved in the genesis and maintenance of social structures is summarized by Berger and Luckmann as occurring in three inter-related stages:
  1. *Externalization*: the process by which the person superimposes order on his or her environment, impresses his or her image on the world. This is done in order to provide meaning to the environment and to make it more useful for human purposes.
  2. *Objectivation*: the process by which the product of the person's externalization is experienced as an autonomous reality which now in turn confronts the individual as an external and coercive fact. The facticity of this reality is frequently expressed in remarks such as 'That's the way things are,' or 'the way "they" want it,' and the like.
  3. *Internalization*: the process by which the structured reality, the institutionalized patterns and processes which result from objectivation, is passed from generation to generation in the course of what psychologists call 'socializing.' This makes it possible for newcomers to be taught how to live by the existing ways and thus to survive in a highly-structured milieu."



- Peter Henriot, S.J., "The Public Dimension of the Spiritual Life of the Christian: The Problem of Simultaneity" in *Soundings: A Task Force on Social Consciousness and Ignatian Spirituality* (Center of Concern, 1974), p. 13.
- 16 Anthony J. Adams, "Jesuits Share Views on Diversified Works," *National Jesuit News*, February, 1976, p. 12.
  - 17 William J. Byron, S.J., "The Social Dimension of Jesuit Group Apostolates," printed in *Proceedings of the New Orleans Province Assembly--Session 5 (1975)*, p. 60.
  - 18 Here I am following the distinction discussed by Charles E. O'Neill, S.J., regarding "faith" and "religion" in "Acatamiento: Ignatian Reverence in History and in Contemporary Culture," *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, Vol. VIII, No. 1 (January, 1976), p. 8.
  - 19 Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1973), p. 136.
  - 20 T. J. McDonnell, "Transubstantiating the Wasteland," *Worship*, Vol. 47, No. 2, p. 93.
  - 21 This development may be aggravated further by the actual interference of Church hierarchy attempting to prevent the work of the activist or to set "requirements" more appropriate to other contexts, such as place of residence, religious attire, specific religious practices, and the like.
  - 22 McDonnell, op. cit., p. 95.
  - 23 Ibid.
  - 24 This assertion applies as well to the so-called "atheistic humanist," who has some theoretical construct which serves in place of theology and "informs" his or her "spiritual life"--fundamental attitudes towards others, life, history, time, meaningfulness, and self-value, all of which serve as a basis for concrete action.
  - 25 In considering each and all of these questions, the activist's initial response of caution or even repugnance will act as a kind of "critical consciousness" that will test and strain all his attempts at formulating responses or answers.
  - 26 See Michael J. Buckley, S.J., "Jesuit Priesthood: Its Meaning and Commitments," *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, Vol. VIII, No. 5, pp. 159-61, in which the author rejects the hyphenated-priest model and the distinctions which give rise to such a model.
  - 27 Gutierrez, op. cit., p. ix.
  - 28 One group of West Coast organizers has met weekly in an endeavor to frame a spirituality of community organizing. While theirs was reportedly an often frustrating and frustrated enterprise, it may well be that it will contribute to the broader movement.
  - 29 The California study has apparently indicated that burn-out rates are



lower for those who are able to express, analyze, and share their feelings about their work with their colleagues,

- 30 In terms of funding, the move on the part of some American provincials to create "social-projects funds" is a good sign that future activists, while attentive to securing their own funding, need not make finances the sole determining factor in their response to needs, especially in the embryonic stages of a project.

On February 1, 1977, thirty-eight members of the Maryland Province submitted a proposal to the U. S. provincials for the appointment of a full-time staff person who would assist U. S. Jesuits involved in community organizing, development, and housing in such matters as fund-raising, personnel development, and communications. This, too, could be a very helpful development.

- 31 It would be unfortunate if formation staffs do not invite activists to join in the process of review and reflection with the men in formation. This could be a prime opportunity for collaboration, increased understanding, and sharing of insights and skills.
- 32 See the discussion on problems in responding to the 32nd General Congregation's mission of faith and justice in "Jesuit Spiritualities and the Struggle for Social Justice," by Connolly and Land in *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, Vol. IX, no. 4 (Sept., 1977).

## II. On A. AN AMERICAN REPLY, by Richard L. Smith, S.J.

- 1 Jesuit Community of West Avenue and The Red House, Toronto: unpublished letter to Eugene K. Culhane, S.J., and Luis González, S.J., February 1, 1977, p. 4.
- 2 Abbé Michonneau, *Revolution in a City Parish* (London: Blackfriars Publications, 1958), p. 131.
- 3 Jesuit Community of West Avenue and The Red House, Toronto (see note 1 above), pp. 7-8.
- 4 Petrie, John, *The Worker Priests: a Collective Documentation* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1956), p. 166.



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