



# Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits

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Jesus' Parables  
and the  
Faith That Does Justice

*Michael L. Cook, S. J.*

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A group of Jesuits appointed from their provinces in the United States.

The Seminar studies topics pertaining to the spiritual doctrine and practice of Jesuits, especially American Jesuits, and communicates the results to the members of the provinces. This is done in the spirit of Vatican II's recommendation to religious institutes to recapture the original inspiration of their founders and to adapt it to the circumstances of modern times. The Seminar welcomes reactions or comments in regard to the material which it publishes.

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Gerard L. Stockhausen, S.J., teaches economics at Creighton University and is a member of the formation community at Campion House in Omaha, NE (1990).

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Faith That Does Justice**



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**Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits**

**24/5: November 1992**

Antonio M. de Aldama, S. J.

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*Antonio M. de Aldama, S. J., studied in Spain, Belgium, England, and Italy. He is a former secretary of the Society of Jesus, the post occupied earlier by Juan de Polanco, St. Ignatius's closest collaborator in writing the Constitutions. For forty years Father Aldama has devoted himself to research and publication on the history, life, and constitutional structure of the Society of Jesus.*

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*David L. Fleming, S.J., is the editor of Review for Religious and author of many articles on prayer, the religious life, spiritual direction, and retreats. He has been a member of the faculty of St. Louis University in St. Louis and of Weston School of Theology in Cambridge and has lectured extensively and given workshops both in the United States and abroad.*

## ***For your information . . .***

Sixty Jesuits from Europe, Africa, Asia, and North and South America met at Chantilly near Paris at the end of September for the Second International Colloquium on the History and Spirituality of the Society of Jesus. The overall subject of the colloquium was the interplay, the reciprocal relationships, of Jesuit apostolic activity and Jesuit spirituality during several central or defining periods in the history of the Society. Those periods stretched, for example, from the founding years of the Society in the sixteenth century to the very different restoration decades of the nineteenth century. But no matter which apostolates the Jesuits at a particular time undertook and no matter how they expressed and lived out Jesuit spirituality, at each turning point members of the Society had to respond at least implicitly to two questions. They had to ask themselves how they regarded and valued and responded to the world in which they lived and worked, and how they valued and dealt with and responded to change. The papers presented at the colloquium furnished fascinating instances how in word but especially in deed Jesuits answered those questions in times past. They also provided plenty of material for reflection on how we answer the same questions today.

While I was away at that meeting, the rest of the staff of the INSTITUTE OF JESUIT SOURCES stayed faithfully at their work here in St. Louis. One of the results of that work will come from the press in this month of November. We shall publish in one volume the first complete English translation of all the writings of Francis Xavier. This long labor of love could not reach completion at a more appropriate moment; for 1992 is the four hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the year, 1542, in which Francis Xavier set foot in India, to begin there his extraordinary epic of missionary work and travel. The INSTITUTE OF JESUIT SOURCES is happy to mark the occasion with this complete collection of Xavier's works. But we could never have done so if it were not for Father M. Joseph Costelloe, S.J., presently at Creighton University and for many years librarian at the Jesuit Curia in Rome. He is the translator of all these letters and instructions, just as he was the translator of the four volumes of Georg Schurhammer's great life of Xavier. We are all in his debt for the devotion and persistence with which he labored despite his many other responsibilities.

Another early Jesuit traveler of equal importance for the young Society was Jerónimo Nadal. At the bidding of Ignatius and as his vicar, Nadal visited Jesuit houses in almost one hundred cities of Italy, Spain, Portugal, France, Germany, Austria, Bohemia, and the Low Countries to interpret the Society's manner of life, to make public and explain its Constitutions, and to share his knowledge of and insight into the mind of Ignatius. No early follower of Ignatius was more important than Nadal, because he was then and has been ever since "the recognized authentic interpreter of the Ignatian vision and spirituality." Now at last a full-length English biography of this extraordinary man has been published, thanks to Fathers William V. Bangert, S.J., and Thomas M. McCoog, S.J. Father Bangert, already known for his masterful history of the Society and for his biographies of Pierre Favre and of Claude Jay and Alfonso Salmerón, began to work on this biography in the early 1980s but was unable to complete it before his death in 1985. Fr. McCoog, himself a historian and a friend and former student of Fr. Bangert, edited and completed the work and has done so very well. Loyola University Press published the book just last month. It tells us vividly not only about Nadal but also about many others among the first generation of Jesuits. Buy it; you'll like it and learn from it.

If all goes well, the INSTITUTE OF JESUIT SOURCES will add further to the English-language material about Nadal. The INSTITUTE hopes to publish in the course of the coming year a volume of translated selections from his works. They do not translate easily: as one of the people working on the project remarked, "if he weren't so important, I'd give up on the job." But Nadal is that important and we shall keep at the project. Look for the results next year.

*John W. Padberg, S.J.*  
*Editor*

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# Jesus' Parables and the Faith That Does Justice

## I. Introduction: To Know, Love, and Follow Jesus

Each of us has a faith-image of Jesus. It arises out of the multiple and varied experiences of our lives. Especially and most centrally for Jesuits, it arises out of the very personal and transformative experience we call the Spiritual Exercises. What is key to the power and process of the Exercises is our capacity to enter imaginatively into the story of Jesus. What we seek is to know him more intimately, to love him more ardently, and to follow him more faithfully. The question behind the text of the *Exercises* is not any question that we can put to Jesus, but finally and fundamentally the question he poses for us: Who do you say that I am? That question must be a self-involving question for us, because it cannot be answered apart from the question of who we are as disciples. That surely is the dynamic of Mark's Gospel. In telling the story the evangelist invites us to enter in, to participate, to find ourselves in the story. Jesus as experienced in the Spirit and imaginatively appropriated within the Marcan community, now expressed in written form, is the parable of God. Christian spirituality, including the Jesuit variety, is a matter of personal appropriation, of living witness through discipleship, of the mystery that is Jesus.

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Michael L. Cook, S.J., whose area of specialization is Christology, is associate professor of religious studies at Gonzaga University. His address is Gonzaga University, Jesuit House, Spokane, WA 99258.

There are many avenues of approach to this Jesus, none more privileged for us than the personal meditative experience evoked in the Spiritual Exercises themselves. But the Exercises presume the still more privileged witness of the biblical text, which in turn presumes the life and death of Jesus. Our primary experience of Jesus is one of faith lived out in the community of disciples we call Church and in the particular companionship of his Company. But as pilgrims and companions who would know, love, and follow him, we surely want to know what he was like in his human and historical life; we surely are interested in and want to take seriously what he took seriously. The distance of time and text create difficulties, however. One difficulty is that we are overly familiar with the story. We know the text perhaps too well: we have routinized the story, if not trivialized or literalized it; we have defused the shock to the imagination that Jesus should evoke in us. Indeed, the failure is not one of faith or loyalty, but of imaginative participation in the story. Paradoxically, another difficulty is the reverse side of this one. The world of the New Testament remains strange and remote for us; the language, the culture, the people are not necessarily what we imagine. The temptation of Christian interpretation has been toward a kind of methodological Docetism that overly spiritualizes the person of Jesus and individualizes our relation to him in terms of personal salvation. The temptation has been to absorb the historical Jesus into the proclaimed Christ and so lose sight of his particularity as a human being and of the concreteness of his concerns with the social, political, economic, and religious context of his day. Nowhere is this tendency more evident than in the sphere of social justice. Jesus is often portrayed as one who was concerned about our spiritual well-being, our "eternal life," but who had no immediate and practical concern about our material needs, particularly those of the poor and oppressed. Even the beatitude for the poor has become so universalized and spiritualized as to be meaningless.

A case in point is the parables which Jesus himself told in order to communicate what he meant by the kingdom of God. Do our Lord's parables have anything at all to do with the Society of

Jesus' current emphasis on the faith that does justice? "The Society proclaims that the service of faith through the promotion of justice is the 'forma omnium' that must be integrated as a priority into every one of our apostolates."<sup>1</sup> I am convinced that Father Kolvenbach's formulation of and insistence upon the pervasive and central character of the faith that does justice will remain vague and unrealistic, if not actively resisted, unless it can be shown to be grounded in the primary commitment of every Jesuit, flowing from the Spiritual Exercises, namely, the following of Jesus.<sup>2</sup> There are, of course, many approaches to the biblical concern for justice that would reinforce our basic commitment as followers of Jesus.<sup>3</sup> I have chosen the parables for two reasons: first, they bring us to the very heart of Jesus' ministry<sup>4</sup> and so

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<sup>1</sup> Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., Address delivered to Assembly 1989: Jesuit Ministry in Higher Education (Washington, D.C.: Jesuit Conference, 1989), 1.

<sup>2</sup> This is John C. Haughey's point in his essay "Jesus as the Justice of God," *The Faith That Does Justice*, ed. John C. Haughey, Woodstock Studies, No. 2 (Ramsey, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1977), 264: "I believe that Christians will stand pat in their attitudes toward justice and the injustices that surround them until they see the ideal the Church is preaching incarnated in the person of Jesus."

<sup>3</sup> See John R. Donahue, "Biblical Perspectives on Justice," *The Faith That Does Justice*, 68-112. For example, one might focus on the Gospel of Luke, as in John H. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972); Richard J. Cassidy, *Jesus, Politics, and Society: A Study of Luke's Gospel* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1978); John R. Donahue, "The Good News of Peace," *The Way* 22, No. 2 (April 1982): 88-99. Or one could concentrate on the Gospel of Mark, as in Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (Maryknoll: Orbis Press, 1988). For a much more extensive and in-depth survey of such literature, see a forthcoming issue of *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* by John R. Donahue, "What Does the Lord Require: A Bibliographical Essay on the Bible and Social Justice."

<sup>4</sup> "It is generally recognized today—despite the need for a critical analysis of every single parable and the history of its tradition—that the parables belong to the bedrock of the tradition about him" (Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology: The Proclamation of Jesus* [New York: Scribner's, 1971], 30).

raise in an acute and striking way the question of how concrete and specific was Jesus' own concern for justice; second, as stories that have metaphoric impact, they have a wondrously rich potential to come alive in new and unforeseen ways in the context of our own times and our own concerns for justice.

To explore this theme, I will first place myself in the context of contemporary trends in biblical interpretation; second, I will offer an analysis of the parable as a literary form; third, I will describe in summary fashion the socio-historical context of Jesus' ministry; finally, I will offer for reflection a selection of parables that afford striking insight into the concreteness and specificity of Jesus' concerns for social justice.

## II. Contemporary Trends in Biblical Interpretation

### 1. From History to Text and Back

Biblical scholars have developed a great variety of methodological approaches to the biblical text. My concern here is only with the New Testament. The historical approach which has dominated biblical criticism from the late eighteenth century to recent times has been primarily interested in the genesis of the biblical text from the historical ministry of Jesus through the period of oral proclamation in the early Church (form criticism) to the final editing (redaction criticism) and writing (composition criticism) of the text. The concern is with "the world behind the text." The question of the historical Jesus,<sup>5</sup> with which this essay is concerned, is a legitimate one, but the possibilities afforded by the historical method impose limits upon it. It is not a question of getting back to Jesus "as he really was," but rather of seeking

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<sup>5</sup> For an analysis of the history of the question, Church teaching, and contemporary thinking, see Michael L. Cook, *Guidelines for Contemporary Catholics: The Historical Jesus* (Chicago: The Thomas More Press, 1986). I would also highly recommend John P. Meier, *The Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (New York: Doubleday, 1991).

through the witness of the biblical text itself those elements within the developing oral and written traditions of the early Church that one can say with reasonable historical certitude have their originating ground or source in Jesus himself.

It is not simply a matter of finding individual sayings which are beyond doubt authentic and moving out from these to those which are closest to them. What one is looking for is a *group* of sayings sufficiently distinctive that, although one cannot be sure of the authenticity of any one of them, one can say with some confidence that taken as a group, they represent characteristic features of Jesus' teaching.<sup>6</sup>

To affirm what is distinctive or characteristic of the historical Jesus does not deny, on the one hand, that Jesus was a man in continuity with his times or, on the other, that what can be said about him is a construct of historical method heavily dependent on sources which are the product of the early Church's Easter experience and which, therefore, are primarily concerned with communicating his present significance as Lord and Christ. Nonetheless, as part of the total tradition about him, the question of the historical Jesus is a legitimate and necessary one for Christian faith. What we know of him through historical reconstruction serves both to concretize our faith-image of him, as the memory of him embodied in the Gospels did for the early Christian communities, and to control the tendency to re-create him in our own image, to overly spiritualize and universalize him, and so lose his particularity as a first-century Jewish man of obscure and humble origins.

The dominance of the historical approach has given way in more recent times to a great variety of approaches, of which the literary in the sense of focusing upon the text or work itself ("the world of the text") has become the predominant concern. This, in turn, has given rise to a focus upon the audience for which the work was written (audience criticism), to the ideological biases of

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<sup>6</sup> John Riches, *Jesus and the Transformation of Judaism* (New York: Seabury, 1982), 53 (italics in original).

the text or its interpreters (ideology criticism), to sociological and anthropological approaches (cultural criticism), and so forth. These latter developments represent a return to what is still fundamentally the historical question, but this time with a broader range and a more subtly refined set of analytical tools.

Finally, we should mention that the process of interpretation would not be complete if we did not take into consideration "the world before the text"; that is to say, if we did not appropriate to the present and beyond the text's meaning as understood throughout the entire history of Christian interpretation—what has been called the "transformative understanding of the subject matter of the text."<sup>7</sup> Ultimately, this is the question of this essay: **How can we appropriate the alternative view of the parables as proposed here and integrate it into our Jesuit spirituality, inspired as it is by the Spiritual Exercises and committed to the service of faith and the promotion of justice?**

## **2. Parables: The Primacy of Story**

Israel tells the story of Exodus to communicate what she means by the holy Name (Exod. 3:14). Jesus tells stories to communicate what he means by the kingdom of God. The Church tells the story of Jesus to communicate what she means by the Son of God. Contemporary biblical criticism has put great stress on the centrality and importance of narrative. In my view, the

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<sup>7</sup> Sandra M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1991), 169. Her book is an excellent analysis and synthesis of contemporary approaches to New Testament interpretation. She outlines her theory of interpretation under the threefold rubric of "the world behind the text," "the world of the text," and "the world before the text." She views the New Testament text as the product of the "paschal imagination": "the theological-spiritual imagination of the believing community, which transformed its historical experience into a dynamic image of Jesus the Christ as locus of divine revelation" (p. 127). For a brief summary of contemporary trends in biblical interpretation, see John R. Donahue, "Things Old and New in Biblical Interpretation," *The Way*, Supplement 72 (Autumn 1991), 20-31.

primary way that God communicates with us is through story.<sup>8</sup> The concern of this essay is with Jesus in his historical ministry. If the parables "belong to the bedrock of the tradition about him" and if, as I would maintain, they represent his favorite and characteristic way of proclaiming the kingdom of God, then how do we have access to the "original" parables, to their sufficiently distinctive character, that is, so that we can say with reasonable historical judgment that this or that parable belongs to the teaching of Jesus rather than to the teaching of the early communities or of the evangelists?

If we are to answer the question adequately, we must combine two approaches of contemporary biblical interpretation. The first is to analyze parable as a literary form. In parable research "the literary genre of parable controls the process of interpretation."<sup>9</sup> This is true insofar as the parables are handed on to us as literary artifacts already interpreted and re-presented in the texts of Mark, Matthew, Luke, and Thomas.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the fundamental question is whether parables have a distinctive form as a genre, one which can be differentiated from their literary use in the Gospels as allegories about God or moral example stories for the community to imitate. The question, in a word, is how parables create meaning in their own terms as distinct from their recontextualization in the gospel narratives. It should be noted that the evangelists' use of the parables as allegories or moral example stories is perfectly legitimate in the changed situation of proclaiming the risen Jesus as the parable of God. The proclamation about Jesus has displaced his own focus on the parabolic nature of the kingdom. But our concern is with what the parables might have meant in the originating context of Jesus' historical ministry. This

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<sup>8</sup> See Michael L. Cook, "Revelation as Metaphoric Process," *Theological Studies* 47 (1986): 388-411.

<sup>9</sup> Schneiders, *Revelatory Text*, 117.

<sup>10</sup> The gospel of Thomas is a noncanonical gospel discovered at Nag Hammadi in Egypt in 1945. It is much disputed today whether it is a late-second-century Gnostic gospel or a mid-first-century wisdom gospel.

brings us to the second approach: the use of sociology and cultural anthropology to analyze the socio-historical context of Jesus' ministry. What context of meaning can such analysis provide for understanding the original import of the parables? We will treat each of these approaches in turn.

### III. How Parables Create Meaning

"At its simplest the parable is a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life, arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness, and leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought."<sup>11</sup> This frequently cited description of the parable has come under criticism and reinterpretation, but it still offers a good point of departure for discussing the literary form of the parables. A more adequate description in the light of contemporary advances in literary criticism is the following: "A parable is a *mashal* that employs a short narrative fiction to reference a transcendent symbol."<sup>12</sup> I will discuss the four points as outlined by Dodd but qualified by more recent parabolic research as I understand and interpret it.

- "A metaphor or simile." Strictly speaking, a parable is neither a metaphor nor a simile in form. Parables are stories which have metaphoric impact. The point at issue is whether these stories are merely illustrative so that, once we have the point of information (a moral example to be followed or an allegorical reference to God), we can dispense with the story. Such a view assumes that we already have an idea of the kingdom and the story merely serves as an illustrative example (as in Aristotle's understanding of *parabolē* as a type of example story).

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<sup>11</sup> C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (New York: Scribner's, 1961), 5.

<sup>12</sup> Bernard Brandon Scott, *Hear Then the Parable* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 8. He discusses it in detail on pages 8-62. The Hebrew word *mashal* means "to be like" and is the genus for various subtypes, for example, proverbs, similitudes, parables, and the like.



Contemporary emphasis in parable research is upon the more fundamental character of the parables as inviting participation rather than merely communicating information.<sup>13</sup> Rather than simply clarifying the less known (the kingdom) by the better known (illustrations drawn from everyday life), the parables as stories seek to draw the listener into the story so that there is real participatory identification with what happens or fails to happen within the dynamics of the story itself. Thus there is no standpoint from outside whereby one can adequately interpret the parable. The reality of the kingdom is the parabolic world created by Jesus' poetic imagination. Parables are "fictional redescriptions" of reality.<sup>14</sup> The metaphoric impact lies in the shock to the imagination created by the new way of seeing and hearing the world the listeners thought they knew. The parables speak of that world but in ways heretofore unimagined.

It should be emphasized that parables are "short narrative fictions." Thus, under the genus of *mashal* they are not figurative sayings or similitudes but stories; that is to say, they involve some sort of sequence of events. As "fictions" they reinterpret a cultural context which, in the case of Jesus, is primarily but not exclusively the first-century experience of rural peasants in Palestine. As "short" they reflect the characteristics and structures of oral cultures. Because of the danger of forgetting, the important

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 42-47. Scott offers a brief summary of parable criticism beginning with Adolf Jülicher's critique of the allegorical method. C. H. Dodd and J. Jeremias represent a turn from Jülicher's moralizing generalizations to a quest for a single point in a specific situation. I have been much influenced by Robert W. Funk, *Language, Hermeneutic, and the Word of God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), which stresses the realistic impact of metaphor, and by John Dominic Crossan, *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), which accents the paradoxical and polyvalent character of the parables. For another approach that stays closer to the meaning of the parables in the actual context of Mark, Matthew, and Luke, see John R. Donahue's excellent *The Gospel in Parable* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988).

<sup>14</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor* (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1977), 244f.

thing is to “think memorable thoughts.”<sup>15</sup> Thus the parables employ stock characters and plots. They are sparing in details and so intensely focused. They use the oral devices of repetition, set formulae, and threefold patterns. Above all,

[p]arables are examples of concrete thought, not abstract thought. Nor are parables substitutes for or even illustrations of abstract thought. Oral peoples think concretely. “The kingdom of heaven is like . . .” is not a simple way of talking to simple people, but it is the way an oral culture thinks. Our attempts to translate parables into abstractions, into parables of grace, advent, and so forth, are just that—translations into our way of thinking.<sup>16</sup>

- This leads to Dodd’s second characteristic: “**drawn from nature or common life.**” Jesus’ parables take us “into the midst of throbbing, everyday life. Their nearness to life, their simplicity and clarity, the masterly brevity with which they are told, the seriousness of their appeal to the conscience, their loving understanding of the outcasts of religion—all this is without analogy.”<sup>17</sup> Jesus walked with his people some thirty years before he ever spoke a word of public proclamation. He lived in a rural peasant village, although, if he truly was a carpenter (Mark 6:3, Matt. 13:55), he probably traveled from village to village to offer his specialized services. When he finally did speak, he spoke with the authority of one who had lived in deep solidarity with the experience of his people and who, as his words and deeds indicate, was particularly sensitive to the plight of the poor and oppressed.

Commentators usually offer some type of organizational schema from outside the parables whereby to view them; for example, Crossan treats them under the rubric of time as parables of advent, reversal, and action; Scott, in the light of the ordinary, everyday character of the parables, employs a more useful schema

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<sup>15</sup> Scott, *Hear Then*, 35, employing the work of Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (New York: Methuen, 1982), 34.

<sup>16</sup> Scott, *Hear Then*, 37. Compare this with Dodd, *Parables*, 5: Parables are “the natural expression of a mind that sees truth in concrete pictures rather than conceives it in abstractions.”

<sup>17</sup> Jeremias, *Proclamation*, 30.

that centers around the social life and culture of Jesus' day. Thus he treats one group under the horizontal relationships of "Family, Village, City, and Beyond"; a second under the vertical relationships of "Masters and Servants" (embodying the model of client and patron); and a third under the artifacts of daily life as "Home and Farm."<sup>18</sup> The first two deal with the social dynamics of insider/outsider and superior/subordinate, the last primarily with agricultural processes. Although all the parables are relevant to our theme, we will treat a selection of those that touch the vertical relationships as a challenge to the existing power structure of the day.

- **"Arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness."** Jesus' parables were surprising and disturbing to his contemporaries. He talked about the ordinary, everyday, familiar realities of his day, but in such a way that the ordinary became extraordinary, the everyday unique, and the familiar unfamiliar. The distinctiveness of the parables lies here. The stories do not turn out as expected. The common wisdom of the day and the mythic assumptions about societal structures and their eventual resolution are set on their ear. "Let the one who has ears to hear, hear!" (Mark 4:9, 23). A good way to hear the parables is to ask oneself: What is it about this parable that I don't like? What is it that shocks me or upsets my comfortable, ordered world? We must first try to hear the parables as Jesus' hearers might have heard them; but we cannot finally separate interpretation from the way we hear them today, conditioned as we are by the distancing of time and text.

- **"Leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application."** Jesus did not tell people what to do, but he did call them to a radical conversion of mind and heart (*metanoieite* as in Mark 1:15). He invited them to enter into the parabolic world of his creative imagination and so enter into the kingdom of God. The metaphoric impact of the parables could only take place through participation. Jesus' listeners had to be responsive to the

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<sup>18</sup> Scott, *Hear Then*, 72-74; Crossan, *In Parables*, 34-36.

implications of the parabolic teaching; and, whether they were peasants or masters, poor or rich, scribes, Pharisees, or members of the temple aristocracy, they each had to take responsibility for these implications according to their specific life situations. Jesus undoubtedly had a stock of parables which he repeated on various occasions. Each person would hear them differently. Many, of course, refused to listen and so did not allow them to touch their minds and hearts. Because the parables “reference a transcendent symbol” which for Jesus was the kingdom of God, they cannot be reduced to a single point addressed to a single situation or audience. The metaphorical character of the parables means that they are polyvalent and so always open to the possibilities of new meaning. Nonetheless, because Jesus spoke these parables, we must first understand them in the linguistic context of the kingdom of God and in the cultural context of first-century Palestine. It is to this second point that we now turn.

#### **IV. The Socio-historical Context of Jesus’ Ministry**

**T**he mission of the historical Jesus can be characterized as a prophetic call to renewal. Marcus Borg reminds us of the multiple ways we can consider Jesus—as Spirit-filled charismatic who healed in the power of the Spirit, as sage who challenged conventional wisdom with subversive wisdom, as founder of a renewal or revitalization movement within the village communities of Israel, and as prophet who spoke words of judgment in the face of the social crisis of his day. In all of this, Jesus connects the experience of Spirit with the social and cultural concerns of his day and so seeks the transformation of his social world.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Marcus J. Borg, *Jesus, A New Vision: Spirit, Culture, and the Life of Discipleship* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987). The book is a very readable account of Jesus’ historical ministry and includes results from the more recent approaches of sociology and cultural anthropology. Although much in this approach is hypothetical and open to debate, Borg’s central contrast between “the politics of holiness” of Jewish renewal movements in first-century Palestine (Essenes, Pharisees, resistance

Like all the prophets, he was a conscience to his people, calling them forth from the present crisis to their true vocation as people of God and light to the Gentiles. He sought to renew and transform social relations especially in the peasant life of local village communities. He went about with the Twelve (symbol of a renewed Israel) in the towns and villages of Palestine, seeking to bring the kingdom into the lives of the oppressed peasant class. In effect, he called for a social revolution. "In the presence of the kingdom of God he mediated God's liberation to a discouraged Jewish peasantry and offered some fundamental guidance for the renewal of the people."<sup>20</sup> Yet it is possible to overdraw Jesus' concern for the poor and oppressed and to forget that his message was aimed at rich and poor, powerful and oppressed alike. The most important thing about Jesus' historical ministry, it seems to me, is his utter rejection of any form of exclusivity, that hardness of heart even among his own disciples (Mark 6:52, 8:14-21) that insisted upon the mentality of insider/outsider.

As prophet to his people Israel, he evoked through word and deed the deepest heritage of Israel's past, bringing it into conscious awareness so that the response of his contemporaries might in turn be creative of the kind of future that God intended from the beginning. One image that had such evocative power was the kingdom of God. It was less current but still connected to the more popular images such as the "Day of the Lord" and "God as King." The basic convictions of the time might be characterized as follows: (1) God is the only King over Israel (and not Caesar, therefore), (2) God wills the liberation of the people from oppression, and (3) God's intention will be effective through the mediation of human history. Jesus employed apocalyptic imagery, such

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fighters), which sought to maintain Jewish separateness and purity by radicalizing Torah, and Jesus' "politics of compassion," which seeks to overcome boundaries and create an alternative community of inclusivity and reconciliation, seems to me fundamentally sound and correct.

<sup>20</sup> Richard A. Horsely, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence: Popular Jewish Resistance in Roman Palestine* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 326.

as God's kingdom, to evoke the memory of God's liberation (especially as Passover) and to fire the imagination to consider how that liberation might be realized in the here and now.<sup>21</sup> The contradiction experienced between God's promise to the Chosen People and the crisis of oppression under the imperial power of Rome would inspire a variety of mythic resolutions. "The symbol of the kingdom of God evokes the myth of God's ruling over the world and restoring that world to his chosen people."<sup>22</sup>

Jesus' parabolic teaching explodes any mythic resolution that would distract or alienate the people from the social, political, economic, and religious conditions which they were actually experiencing. By his deeds as well as his words, he challenged both the moral perfectionism of certain scribal and Pharisaic interpretations of strict observance of the Law and the political collusion of the temple aristocracy with the oppressive power of Rome. His parables are of central importance in this context, because in both form and content they subvert the established myths and inspire the imagination to creative new possibilities for those who have eyes to see and ears to hear. He thus calls for a radical social transformation within Israel, one that will be a direct challenge to the power structures of both temple and empire. To make this

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 121-45. Horsely offers a well-aimed critique of modern reconstructions of apocalyptic that would see the hope expressed in it as outside and alien to human, historical reality. Rather, apocalyptic is subversive protest in the midst of crisis and persecution and seeks liberation from oppression through active resistance. There has been much debate among biblical scholars over the relative predominance, as well as the significance, of the apocalyptic vis-à-vis the prophetic orientation in Jesus' ministry. In my view, Jesus employed apocalyptic imagery in the prophetic manner described. See Michael L. Cook, *The Jesus of Faith: A Study in Christology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), 36-51.

<sup>22</sup> Scott, *Hear Then*, 422. He sees the hoped-for resolution of the implied disjunction between the promises of God and everyday life to take the shape of either "apocalyptic myth," which looks to a future redeemer and/or another world (the kind of apocalyptic rejected by Horsely above), or "wisdom myth," as offering various kinds of advice as a way to cope with everyday life. I maintain that in his parables Jesus rejects both of these options, at least implicitly.

point more specifically, we now turn to a reading of some of the parables of Jesus, selected because they focus on the social dynamic of power, particularly the relation between superior and subordinate. The purpose once again is to show how these stories have imaginative, metaphoric impact within the social, political, economic, and religious context of Jesus' day.

## V. A Reading of Selected Parables

In what follows I will be drawing to a great extent upon Scott's very fine book, especially his particularly illuminating socio-cultural analysis. Yet in each case I will offer a sometimes different, sometimes modified view of the outcome of the parable, that is, of the intended metaphoric impact. The dynamics of parable as he describes them lead me to question his final stress on *parabolē*, which literally means "to throw beside," as if the stories were merely a parallel to the kingdom rather than the reality of the kingdom. This can lead too easily to abstract generalizations, causing the reader to forget that "oral peoples think concretely." In addition, I would still subscribe to the "romantic" view that the parables as metaphoric bear on "ontological reality," namely, on the way things are. Jesus, as I emphasized already, is describing the actual conditions of first-century Palestinian peasant life, but in such a way that he is redescribing that reality. Thus, he is not indulging in flights of fancy or wild imaginings. He is talking about the stuff of life and he is saying through the power of metaphor that this is the reality of the kingdom. No one parable exhausts the reality of the kingdom but each one expresses that reality as lived here and now in the life of his listeners. If they are to enter into the kingdom of God, they must enter into the parabolic world created by Jesus' poetic imagination. What this implies, however, is a radical transformation of the world as they know and experience it, a world that is concretely and inseparably social, political, economic, and religious. It also implies that the text combined with the socio-historical context of first-century Palestine does give us reasonable access to "the world behind the

text”; that is, through such analysis we can hear the “distinctive voice” of Jesus and so come as close to the intention of his mission as is historically possible.

○ 1. *A Man Had Two Sons*<sup>23</sup> (Luke 15:11b–32)

<sup>11b</sup>There was a man who had two sons. <sup>12</sup>The younger of them said to his father, “Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.” So he divided his property between them. <sup>13</sup>A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. <sup>14</sup>When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. <sup>15</sup>So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. <sup>16</sup>He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. <sup>17</sup>But when he came to himself he said, “How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! <sup>18</sup>I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; <sup>19</sup>I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.’” <sup>20</sup>So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. <sup>21</sup>Then the son said to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.” <sup>22</sup>But the father said to his slaves, “Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. <sup>23</sup>And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; <sup>24</sup>for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!” And they began to celebrate.

<sup>25</sup>Now the elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. <sup>26</sup>He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. <sup>27</sup>He replied,

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<sup>23</sup> The titles given to the parables are already an interpretation and are frequently misleading. I am following Scott’s usage of naming the parables by the opening words of the parable itself. The translations of the parables are all taken from *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha* (=New Revised Standard Version), ed. Bruce M. Metzger and Roland E. Murphy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).



"Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound." <sup>28</sup>Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. <sup>29</sup>But he answered his father, "Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. <sup>30</sup>But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!" <sup>31</sup>Then the father said to him, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. <sup>32</sup>But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found."

There is no more fundamental human relationship than that of parent to child. In Jesus' day the social structure was patriarchal, beginning with the local village community and extending by analogy through the various intermediate structures to the high priesthood. Patriarchy literally means the "rule of the father," namely, a system in which the father's word was absolute law in the family. Jesus calls that structure into question and replaces it with "an egalitarian nonpatriarchal pattern of relationships."<sup>24</sup> In this parable he offers such an alternative vision by telling a story about how fathers treat sons and sons treat fathers, as well as how brothers relate to one another. The story is not an allegory in which the key to understanding the story lies outside the story itself, for instance, that the father stands for God, the younger son for repentant Israel (Christians?) and the elder for the unrepentant scribes and Pharisees. Luke, in his redaction of the parable, orients it in this direction by the introductory contrast between "the tax collectors and sinners" and "the Pharisees and the scribes" (15:1-2), so that the following parables are meant to illustrate the theme of repentance; that is, verses 17-19 in the parable are now interpreted in line with verses 7 and 10 as illustrating the joy in heaven over one sinner who repents. Along this

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<sup>24</sup> Horsely, *Jesus*, 232ff, suggests that in Jesus' day the traditional patriarchal family was in crisis because of heavy indebtedness leading to the loss of land and the breakup of families.

same line, it is plausible, though not absolutely necessary to our argument, to think that Luke may have added verse 32 (which repeats verse 24) in order to keep the focus on the repentance of the younger son and so distract from the nonrejection of the elder. The story has much more impact, it seems to me, if it ends at verse 31: "Child (*teknon*), you are always with me and all that is mine is yours."

Scott offers an illuminating understanding of the opening verses (11b-13) as evoking two stock themes that would be immediately understood by Jesus' listeners. The first has to do with the legal code of inheritance. In what would appear as a surprising and foolish act, the father jeopardizes the family honor by giving the younger son the right of both possession and disposition of the property. Indeed, as the text says, he divided his very life between them. Since disposition normally assumes the death of the father, the younger son in actually disposing of the property effectively pronounces his father dead. The second theme, a point often overlooked, is the mythic theme of the younger son who is often pictured as something of a rogue but still the favorite of the father. One need only think of the tradition of Israel's inheritance coming through the younger son: Abel, Isaac, Jacob (Joseph and Benjamin); Moses, David, Solomon. Thus, the parable opens on an ambivalent note, which quickly becomes tragic as verses 13c-16 describe the younger son's utter failure and complete degradation. In his desperation he has moved outside his family and people and sought help from a foreigner who sends him to feed swine (symbol of the degraded Gentile world), yet does not give him even the carob beans that the swine eat.

If we mentally bracket Luke's theme of repentance, verses 17-20a are consistent in portraying the son as one who calculates his situation in terms of his present need (hunger) and of his legal status as one who has forsaken his religion and destroyed both his inheritance and the honor of his father. The unexpected and surprising moment upon which this half of the parable turns comes in the actions of the father as described in verses 20b-24. Another often overlooked or ignored theme is the maternal imag-

ery centering around the hunger of the son whom the father feeds. This father acts more like a mother than a patriarchal father. The moment he sees his son "while he was still far off," the father does three things that would not be expected of a patriarchal father in his position.

First, he "was filled with compassion." While the Greek root *splagchna* connotes being deeply moved from within one's very bowels, the Hebrew *rahamim* is a plural form derivative from *rehem*, the womb, and thus connotes the kind of feeling a mother has for the child of her womb. Whether in Greek or Hebrew, the image as used by Jesus in his parables and of Jesus himself in his healings evokes far more than a mere feeling of pity (as it is often translated). Rather, it connotes such an identification with the suffering of another that the other's suffering becomes one's own, so intense and personal that it moves one beyond mere feeling or sentiment to action, that is, to doing everything in one's power to alleviate the suffering—as a mother would do for the child in her womb and as Jesus did in his healing ministry.

Second, the father "ran." The image is extraordinary, especially given the extreme shame the son had brought to the father. But this father does not stand on his prerogatives or status. The image is one of great eagerness, relief, joy, at the sight of his son. And then, thirdly, he does what every mother would do. He literally "fell upon his neck and covered him with kisses." At this point, the father becomes the controlling subject of the story. He ignores the son's rehearsed speech, reinstates him completely as his son (the best robe—the father's own?—the ring, the shoes), and feeds him with a great banquet. Everyone—father, son, servants, and audience—goes into the feast amid general rejoicing, and so the story is a comedy with a happy ending, were it not for the elder son.

The mythic theme of the younger son as a rogue and favorite includes the elder as uptight and less favored. In spite of the younger son's previous degradation, the audience would tend to identify with him. The servant in verses 26f reminds the elder

that after all this is “your brother.” His arrogant refusal to go in and partake of the feast shames the father and cuts the elder son off from his father just as much as his younger brother’s actions had done. In effect, he violates the commandment to honor one’s father and mother. Yet the elder sees himself as one who has been a faithful servant in contrast to “this son of yours” who has dishonored the father and devoured his life. Jesus’ listeners would view the elder son as arrogant and self-righteous. But it is the father’s view which takes everyone by surprise. The elder son is not rejected or banished. He is addressed with a term of maternal tenderness (*teknon*) and described as a companion and co-owner. “Child, you are always with me and all that is mine is yours.” End of parable!

“The parable’s scandal derives from its subversion of the mytheme’s power to resolve between the chosen and rejected.” Both are chosen. “The father is interested neither in morality nor in inheritance. He is concerned with the unity of his sons.” Scott is certainly correct that the parable evokes an understanding of the kingdom as open to all so that one group is not rejected in favor of another. “The parable radically rejects Israel’s self-understanding of itself as the favored, younger son. The kingdom is universal, not particularist.”<sup>25</sup> This is true but, in my view, shifts the focus too much from the father to the brothers. It is the actions and attitudes of the father that are the most surprising and unexpected and that would have the most concrete and immediate implications for the daily lives of Jesus’ listeners and, indeed, on all levels of society. Is it possible to imagine a patriarchal father treating his two sons as this father does? Indeed, can such a patriarchal father, in the immediate and concrete conditions of village life as known and experienced first-hand at that time, imagine himself acting this way? If so, the whole structure of the patriarchal family, the way fathers treat sons and sons treat fathers as well as the way brothers treat one another, is given a new and dramatic shape. The kingdom of God is experienced in

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<sup>25</sup> Scott, *Hear Then*, 125.

just such relationships for those who are open, who have ears to hear, who can imagine such a new possibility for themselves. For Jesus, the kingdom evokes the image of God alive, active, and present, not apart from but in the midst of human life. Thus, the parable is not an allegory about God, although it can be and has been used as such. Rather, the metaphorical nature of Jesus' parabolic teaching reveals that God is normally experienced in and through the mediation of human relationships, the most fundamental of which is that of parent and child.

○ 2. *A Rich Man Had a Manager (Luke 16:1b-8a)*

<sup>1b</sup>There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was squandering his property. <sup>2</sup>So he summoned him and said to him, "What is this that I hear about you? Give me an accounting of your management, because you cannot be my manager any longer." <sup>3</sup>Then the manager said to himself, "What will I do, now that my master is taking the position away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. <sup>4</sup>I have decided what to do so that, when I am dismissed as manager, people may welcome me into their homes."

<sup>5</sup>So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he asked the first, "How much do you owe my master?" <sup>6</sup>He answered, "A hundred jugs of olive oil." He said to him, "Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it fifty." <sup>7</sup>Then he asked another, "And how much do you owe?" He replied, "A hundred containers of wheat." He said to him, "Take your bill and make it eighty."

<sup>8a</sup>And the master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly.

Luke places this parable immediately after the preceding. It is intended as an exhortation to faithful discipleship as the introduction (v. 1a) and the various attempts at application (vv. 8b-13) make clear. Whether from Luke or from preceding oral tradition, the various applications show how difficult it was for the early community to make sense of the parable. It is still difficult, and most people avoid this parable like the plague. Some commentators would omit verse 8 entirely from the originating structure; but, without the final surprising statement that the lord-master (*ho kurios* used four times at verses 3, 5, and 8) "commended the

dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly," the parable would lose its metaphoric impact.

With this parable we turn from the social concerns of family and village to the relations between patron and client. The rich man is a powerful master who can exact his own version of justice; the manager, while evidently entrusted with very much, is vulnerable before the master's power and is the character with whom the audience would sympathize. Indeed, verses 1b-2 clearly emphasize the manager's status as victim. The use of *dieblēthē* (from *diaballein*) means that the charges were brought against him "with hostile intent." The master's response is what would be expected of the rich and powerful. There is no trial, no chance for self-defense—simply condemnation and punishment. However, while audience sympathy for the steward remains strong, it becomes ambivalent with the description of the manager's immediate reaction in verse 3. The manager appears as one who has identified himself with the comforts and prerogatives of the rich.

The manager's actions in verses 4-7 have been described as a "picaresque comedy . . . the story of a successful rogue."<sup>26</sup> The audience would delight in the fact that here is a rogue unjustly treated who is getting even. If the parable ends at verse 7, as some would have it, then it is simply an entertaining picture of every peasant's desire to put one over on the master. But the surprise and shock come with the master's response in verse 8a. Directly contrary to normal expectations, the master does not condemn the manager or react with violence by throwing him into prison to be tortured; rather, he praises him for acting shrewdly! However, the praise has a barb to it, for the manager is unequivocally characterized as unjust or dishonest (*ton oikonomon tēs adikias*). Thus, the listeners' earlier stereotyping of the master as typical of the rich and powerful and their identification with the manager's action of getting even are both called into question

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<sup>26</sup> Dan O. Via, Jr., *The Parables: Their Literary and Existential Dimension* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 159, cited by Scott, *Hear Then*, 263.

and demand reexamination. Scott concludes that the normal world of patron and client where justice is equated with power (both the power of the rich man to get what he wants and the power of the victim to get even) clashes with the parabolic world where justice is now equated with vulnerability. "The hearer in the world of the kingdom must establish new coordinates for power, justice, and vulnerability. The kingdom is for the vulnerable, for masters and stewards who do not get even."<sup>27</sup> I agree with this conclusion, but would want to lay greater stress on the utterly unexpected response of the rich man. In the practical, real world of Palestinian peasant life, could the rich and powerful imagine themselves acting specifically and concretely as this rich man does? If so, what a transforming effect this would have on the relations between rich and poor, powerful and weak.

○ 3. *A Landowner Went Out Early (Matt. 20:1b-14a [14b-15])*

<sup>1b</sup>A landowner went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. <sup>2</sup>After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. <sup>3</sup>When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; <sup>4</sup>and he said to them, "You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right." So they went. <sup>5</sup>When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. <sup>6</sup>And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, "Why are you standing here idle all day?" <sup>7</sup>They said to him, "Because no one has hired us." He said to them, "You also go into the vineyard." <sup>8</sup>When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, "Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first." <sup>9</sup>When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. <sup>10</sup>Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. <sup>11</sup>And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, <sup>12</sup>saying, "These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat." <sup>13</sup>But he replied to one

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<sup>27</sup> Scott, *Hear Then*, 266.

of them, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? <sup>14</sup>Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. <sup>15</sup>Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?"

This is another parable that raises the question of justice explicitly. The landowner says in verse 4c, "I will pay you whatever is right" (*dikaion*). Matthew locates this parable within the general theme of contrast between the Pharisees (first) and the disciples (last) which runs from 19:1 to 20:28. The parable proper is enclosed within the saying about the reversal of first and last (19:30–20:16). Verses 14b–15 may also belong to Matthew's redaction, for these verses serve to reinforce the general theme of the eschatological reversal as God's free choice, and the corresponding contrast between evil and good. This they do by employing the proverb at verse 15b, which literally means, "Or is your eye evil because I am good?" Again, the metaphoric impact of the parable appears to me to be much stronger if it ends with the rather abrupt and startling reply "Take what belongs to you and go!"

The social setting is again that of patron to client, only this time of an employer seeking to hire free laborers. As with the parables in general, there are many things that the parable does not tell us, for instance, the time of year, the reason for the urgency, why the idle laborers were not found earlier, and so on. The first half of the parable (vv. 1–7) focuses on one thing: the landowner agrees to pay the first laborers a denarius a day (which is the subsistence wage for peasants) and to pay all the rest "whatever is just." The second half (vv. 8–12) focuses upon the apparent injustice of the landowner who pays the same wage to those who worked twelve hours as to those who worked only one hour. The outrage of those who had worked all day speaks for us all. The landowner appears blatantly unjust.

Yet the response of the landowner with which the parable ends (vv. 13–14a) breaks the pattern of patron/client relations by singling out one of the laborers, calling him "friend" (*hetaire*), and insisting that he had done him no injustice (*ouk adikō se*). If the



further insistence upon being able to do what he chooses with what belongs to him (vv. 14b-15a) is secondary, then the parable ends with the surprising but very strong claim that indeed justice has been done. Scott sees the parable as subverting the popular understanding that equates wages with worth. It explodes an accounting in which justice is based in a hierarchical relation between individuals. But he sees this as relativizing justice for the sake of the kingdom. What counts is the call (the parable's metaphor for grace) to go into the vineyard. Thus, the landowner's generosity is focused not on the wages but on the need that all have to be equally invited.

In my view, Scott dismisses too easily the parable's specific concern for the poor.<sup>28</sup> A peasant would know all too well the bitter experience of seeking work all day and coming home without even a denarius to maintain his family.<sup>29</sup> Once again we have a story of a rich and powerful landowner (at least he is such relative to the destitution of the laborers) who by his surprising and unexpected action breaks through a notion of justice based on competitive economics and reaches a more fundamental sense of justice, namely, the basic right that every human being has to the resources of society necessary for simple survival. This, by the way, has been a common theme in papal social teaching from Leo XIII to John Paul II. Each laborer, whether he worked all day or just one hour, needs the subsistence wage just to feed, clothe, and maintain his family. The parable is a challenge to those who control the resources of society to give priority to fundamental human needs; but it is also a challenge to all of us, rich and poor alike, to overcome the competitiveness into which we have been

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 282. He refers to Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (New York: Scribner's, 1972), 37, among others.

<sup>29</sup> Douglas Oakman, *Jesus and the Economic Questions of His Day* (Lewis-ton, New York and Queenston, Ontario: Edwin Mellen, 1986), 17-91, analyzes in terms of production and distribution the desperate situation of rural peasants in first-century Palestine. A comparison could be made to indigenous peoples almost anywhere in the world today, for instance, the Quechua and Aymara people of Peru's altiplano.

socialized. Why can we not rejoice at the good fortune or the free gift that another receives, rather than grumble and complain at a perceived injustice based in this case on values measured by competitive economics? In the kingdom of God, competitiveness and jealousy give way to concern for the basic needs of each one, and this most fundamentally on the level of simple economic need.

○ *4. A Man Planted a Vineyard (Mark 12:1b-8)*

<sup>1b</sup>A man planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a pit for the wine press, and built a watchtower; then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. <sup>2</sup>When the season came, he sent a slave to the tenants to collect from them his share of the produce of the vineyard. <sup>3</sup>But they seized him, and beat him, and sent him away empty-handed. <sup>4</sup>And again he sent another slave to them; this one they beat over the head and insulted. <sup>5</sup>Then he sent another, and that one they killed. And so it was with many others; some they beat, and others they killed. <sup>6</sup>He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, "They will respect my son." <sup>7</sup>But those tenants said to one another, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours." <sup>8</sup>So they seized him, killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard.

This parable occurs in all three Synoptic Gospels and in the gospel of Thomas, #65. Because it has been allegorized by all the sources, it is often dismissed as a creation of the early Church; thus it is not considered to be a parable originating with Jesus. Each version offers an interpretation of salvation history and so no one version stands out as the prototype. However, contrary to many commentators, I would maintain that the version in the Gospel of Mark, with the modifications noted below, has the same kind of distinctiveness as the group of parables we are analyzing in this essay. Clearly verses 9-12 are secondary. The question and answer mute the metaphoric impact of the parable and redirect it toward the conventional wisdom of punishment for evil. The citation of Psalm 118:22, which was an early apologetic text in reference to Jesus' death and resurrection, in addition to the reaction of the opponents of Jesus at the end, turns the para-

ble into an allegory about God's salvific plan culminating in Jesus. Likewise, Mark's use of "beloved" as qualifying the son is intended to recall the divine voice at the baptism (1:11) and at the transfiguration (9:7). Finally, the elaboration of the vineyard in terms of Isaiah 5:1-7 may or may not be original. Mark and Matthew have it; Luke and Thomas do not. Certainly, it would cohere with Jesus' mission to renew Israel.

The various sources are inconsistent when they recount the number of times servants are sent, giving rise to another problem. Scott prefers the simple sending of a servant twice, as Thomas has it, because the riot of violence in the Synoptic accounts "leaves the owner's behavior not only foolish but incomprehensible."<sup>30</sup> However, I would contend that this is precisely where the metaphoric impact of the parable lies. Since Matthew and Luke try to bring some order into the sendings by employing conventional threefold patterns, Mark's almost casual remark that the owner sent "many others; some they beat, and others they killed" (v. 5c-d) serves to break the convention in favor of the exaggeration characteristic of Jesus' parables. Thus, the parable opens with the common experience of an absentee landlord whose leaving sets up the common theme of a test and an accounting. Yet the tenants almost immediately challenge the master's honor by beating the first servant and sending him away empty-handed. The initial provocation becomes intensified to the extreme as the master sends many other servants, precipitating even more violence, including a series not only of beatings but even of murders. Anyone listening to this would think that this master is indeed a fool; but then comes the utterly incomprehensible: the only one left to send is his son, whom he sends to them seemingly convinced, against all evidence to the contrary, that "they will respect my son" (v. 6)! But the master miscalculates and loses not only his vineyard and his honor but even his son. The parable ends (v. 8) in tragedy. It also ends with an unsolved puzzle: Why did the tenants believe the inheritance could be theirs?

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<sup>30</sup> Scott, *Hear Then*, 247.

In my view, Jesus has pushed to its ultimate consequences the desperate situation of peasants oppressed by absentee landlords. The actions of the tenants reflect the frustration of a peasantry cheated out of their ancestral lands and willing to do anything, even commit murder, to regain them. Yet the surprising and unexpected element in the parable is not the action of the tenants but that of the absentee landlord. Scott sees the tragic ending as challenging predictability (the heirs representing the good who will triumph in the end). The kingdom fails and the audience is left in the precarious position of doubt about the inheritance. While the parable does end on a note of tragic ambiguity, it seems to me that the poignancy of its ending—what immediately arrests the attention—does not lie in the question of inheritance but in the attitude and action of the landlord. Here is another rich and powerful man who risks everything, even the life of his son, to respond nonviolently to the extreme violence of the tenants. His is the way of peace and reconciliation, not force and oppression. His decision to send his son flies in the face of all hardheaded “realism.” And indeed, as the story concludes, he was tragically mistaken. The risks are real and tragedy often ensues; but suppose he had done what verse 9 suggests: “He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others.” Mark, of course, is referring to God’s vengeance, not ours (see Romans 12:14–21). But, staying within the story as talking about human possibilities of action, suppose the landlord had sent his armed mercenaries to destroy the wicked tenants. What would have happened then? History is replete with violent responses that have only served to increase the violence. Jesus challenges our knee-jerk tendency to resist evil with evil, violence with violence (see Matthew 5:38–42); and he does so with a parable that is stark and uncompromising in portraying the real risks and probable consequences of such a stance. No wonder the early Church proclaimed its deeper meaning as expressing Jesus’ own way to the cross. In my view, the original parable offers an alternative strategy for the rich and powerful (as have the parables already considered), a strategy that seems foolish and incomprehensible

in the eyes of conventional wisdom, but one that signals the arrival of the kingdom according to Jesus.

○ 5. *From Jerusalem to Jericho (Luke 10:30b–35)*

<sup>30b</sup>A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. <sup>31</sup>Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup>So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup>But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. <sup>34</sup>He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. <sup>35</sup>The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, "Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend."

What happens when we move beyond family, village, and city, even beyond patron/client relations, to the very boundaries of our self-contained world, that is to say, to the world of Samaritans and Gentiles? In Jesus' day there was a profound animosity between Jews and Samaritans. A rabbinic proverb says, "He that eats the bread of the Samaritans is like to one what [*sic*] eats the flesh of swine."<sup>31</sup> Yet, by the time of Luke's use of the parable, Samaritans were seen in a more positive light by the early Christian communities (see Luke 9:55; 17:15–16, 19; 24:47; Acts 1:8), and so a Samaritan could be used as an example of ethical action. The context of the lawyer's question and answer (vv. 25–28) is secondary, as the parallels have the same scene without the parable. Hence, verse 29 becomes transitional to the telling of the parable, and the application in verses 36f distracts from the origi-

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<sup>31</sup> Cited by Scott, *Hear Then*, 197, from *m. Sheb.* 8.10 in Herbert Danby, trans., *The Mishnah* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1933), 49. He also cites another rabbinic text excusing from the death penalty an Israelite who murders a Samaritan, from *b. San.* 57 in I. Epstein, ed., *The Babylonian Talmud* (London: Soncino, 1961) 12:388.

nating context of animosity between Jews and Samaritans and loses the metaphoric impact of the parable. Again, it is not a question of the validity of Luke's use of the parable in a different context, but simply of what it might mean in the originating context of Jesus' ministry.

The story opens with the picture of an anonymous man left without any means of identifying his social class or village, though he would presumably be Jewish unless otherwise identified in the story. He is also quite possibly close to death and so may need the ministrations of a priest as a neglected corpse, namely, as one who has no one to bury him.<sup>32</sup> In any event, when the priest and Levite come along, although nothing is said about their motivations, they act exactly as the rural peasant class would expect of the temple aristocracy. They distance themselves as far as possible (passing by on the opposite side) and manifest no concern or interest in the desperate situation of the dying man. The expectation of the listeners, according to the accustomed triad of priest, Levite, Israelite, would be that now a good layman (an Israelite) would come along and be the hero of the story.

But when Jesus says, "But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with **compassion**" (v. 33; compassion, note, rather than pity, as the RSV has it), the question of audience identity becomes acute. Are the listeners to identify with the victim (an Israelite) or with the unexpected and indeed unwanted hero? And then Jesus goes on to describe the compassion of the Samaritan (compare with the father in Luke 15:20) in terms of an extraordinary and unheard-of generosity whose sole aim is to overcome as effectively as possible the suffering of the victim. Who acts like this? He cleans and binds his wounds, takes him to an inn and cares for him, pays his

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<sup>32</sup> Scott, *Hear Then*, 195–97, discusses the rabbinic interpretation of the conflict between caring for a neglected corpse and incurring defilement. A high priest (and so presumably a priest or Levite) may contact uncleanness in this case and would be expected to do so.

expenses and promises to pay any further expenses that he may incur! End of parable.

The story certainly subverts the common expectation of Israelite as hero who overcomes prejudice or xenophobia by helping outcasts and foreigners. In this story the Israelite cannot be the hero because the Samaritan has taken that role. "As parable the story subverts the effort to order reality into the known hierarchy of priest, Levite, and Israelite. Utterly rejected is any notion that the kingdom can be marked off as religious: the map no longer has boundaries. The kingdom does not separate insiders and outsiders on the basis of religious categories."<sup>33</sup> I agree with this analysis, but would emphasize the point more strongly. Jesus challenges the presuppositions and prejudices of his contemporaries with regard to the setting of boundaries that exclude outcasts and foreigners. In the tradition of the book of Jonah, he calls his hearers to recognize the activity of God outside Israel. The question that this parable poses for Jesus' listeners is this: Can we imagine a Samaritan acting in this way, a Samaritan as a man of profound compassion who cares for an injured Israelite with unheard-of generosity? If so, how can we exclude Samaritans from God's kingdom? or from our lives? The parable strikes a chord of universal relevance. It exposes our human tendency to categorize people and to exclude them on the basis of such categories (race, creed, sex, nationality, class, and so on). Jesus does this in a very concrete and specific way by telling the story of one particular Samaritan. Not all Samaritans would necessarily act this way, but the fact that this one acts in such a compassionate manner breaks the category. By telling such a seemingly simple story, Jesus seeks to destroy "the dividing wall of hostility" (Eph. 2:14-16) and to build a renewed community in Israel—one that is as inclusive, compassionate, and caring as the God who first brought them out of Egypt.

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 201f.

## VI. Conclusion: "The Kingdom of God Is in Your Midst"

"Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God is coming, he answered them and said: 'The kingdom of God is not coming with observation, nor will they say: behold here, or there. For behold the kingdom of God is in your midst'" (Luke 17:20f, my own translation). Commentators have argued whether Jesus understood the kingdom as still to come or as having already arrived or as in process of coming to be. But his concern, it seems to me, centers much more around "where" than "when." The question is, Where do we experience the kingdom of God? In his response to the Pharisees, he rejects both the more esoteric apocalyptic expectation of signs to be observed and the more popular nationalistic expectation of a warrior-hero from the house of David. Both look for some kind of future divine intervention from outside. Jesus, on the other hand, directs the attention to human life as it is actually being experienced "in your midst." It is not by looking away from our daily lives, but by looking more deeply into them, into all that constitutes us as human beings in relationship, that we will discover the God of Jesus alive, active, present.

Through his parabolic teaching, Jesus called for a revolution in social consciousness that touched the ordinary, lived experiences of human relationships—parent and child, brother and sister, patron and client, master and servant—on all the interlocking levels of social life: familial, religious, political, economic. The purport of this essay has been to ask the simple question, What do Jesus' parables talk about? He talked about the problems and experiences of real people. A sociological approach to Jesus' ministry should not impose an abstract analytical scheme from modern society, but rather ask what are the social conditions behind Jesus' words and deeds; for example, poverty, indebtedness, hunger, patriarchal structures, sickness (demon possession); the gap between the ruling classes, including their military, sacerdotal, and scribal "retainers," and the ruled, that is, the common people; the traditional agrarian situation of villages and



towns vis-à-vis the cities; the burden of taxation (estimated at thirty-five percent of income through the combined weight of Roman and temple taxes); and so on.<sup>34</sup> The parables are notable in this. The ones selected for this essay talk about a family situation revolving around the competitiveness of two brothers, business transactions in which the temptation to cheat is great, laborers who are desperate for employment and yet cannot rise above their own competitiveness, tenants ground down by exorbitant rents, and a highway robbery by local bandits. To see Jesus' parables primarily as allegories that immediately refer to and image God is to ignore the fact that God must be imaged in us, specifically, in our compassionate love for the poor, the marginated, the outcast, the excluded ones in our midst.

"Historically speaking, Jesus sought to transform his social world by creating an alternative community structured around compassion."<sup>35</sup> When Jesus said, "Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God" (Luke 6:20), he was not saying that it is a good thing to be poor. Neither was he saying that the poor are somehow more virtuous than the rich. He knew well enough that there are good people and evil people among poor and rich alike. What he was saying is that God wants to change the situation of the poor. The arrival of the kingdom of God signals a radical transformation of mind and heart (Mark 1:15), a new way of seeing and hearing that is inclusive of wayward sons, unjust managers, poverty-stricken day laborers, desperate tenants who even resort to murder, hated and excluded Samaritans, despised prostitutes, greedy tax collectors—in a word, "sinners," whatever their class, race, or sex. The "politics of compassion" does not and cannot ignore the suffering of the "other," the one who is not like

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<sup>34</sup> This is the viewpoint of Richard A. Horsely, *Sociology and the Jesus Movement* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), who offers a stringent critique of Gerd Theissen's analysis of the "Jesus movement" in terms of structural functionalism and develops an alternative social reconstruction in terms of the concrete patterns of social life in ancient Palestine.

<sup>35</sup> Borg, *Jesus*, 142.

us or does not belong to us. Thus these parables are at the same time a profound call and challenge to patriarchal fathers, rich businessmen, employers who possess the earth's resources, absentee landlords who demand rents—indeed, to anyone, Jew, Samaritan, Gentile, who excludes others on the basis of race, class, sex, or anything else. Jesus in his parables directs the attention of mind and heart to the concrete realities of everyday life, especially to the inequities created by human divisiveness and hard-heartedness. He did not tell people what to do; if they truly entered into the parabolic world created by Jesus' poetic imagination, however, they would know what to do, for compassion moves the heart not just to sentiments of pity but to transformative action.

And we Jesuits? When we meditate upon the kingdom of God in the *Spiritual Exercises*, what do we see? what do we hear? The intention of this essay has been to offer an alternative way of seeing, an alternative way of hearing—what I would characterize as Jesus' way, or at least as close as we can get to his way through literary and historical reconstruction. To some this may seem too speculative or hypothetical. But, while such an approach is limited by the nature of our sources and the validity of our methods, it seems too facile to go to the other extreme and simply rule it out of court. The intended effect is that of Jesus' parables themselves: to move us out of our "comfort zone," out of our assumptions and perhaps prejudices regarding the integral connection between faith and justice. We need to think parabolically, to imagine new possibilities that challenge the way things are, to affirm the central importance of social transformation for the arrival of the kingdom. This, it seems to me, is the privileged way for us today to know Jesus more intimately, to love him more ardently, and to follow him more faithfully. To hear the voice of Jesus in the parables is to know that justice must be done. In the spirit of his parabolic approach, one should not overstate or seek to predetermine the outcome. Justice begins in the transformation of the human mind and heart and reaches fulfillment in the social

transformation of the world through the work of human hands.<sup>36</sup> The God of Jesus, the parabolic God who surprises us and shocks our imaginations, calls us to imagine new possibilities and to create with him a world more human, a world more just.

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<sup>36</sup> On pages 3 and 4 of the address cited in note 1 above, Father Kolvenbach emphasizes the value orientation of Jesuit education as anchored in mind, heart, and hand.

Cándido de Dalmases, S.J.

## Francis Borgia

*Grandee of Spain, Jesuit, Saint. Translated by Cornelius Michael Buckley, S.J., from the Spanish El Padre Francisco de Borja (Madrid: B.A.C., 1983). First U.S. edition, 1991. 251 pp. + x, genealogy, glossary of names. No. 11 in the series.*

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## SOURCES

### Jerónimo Nadal, S.J.

#### *The Chronicle: The Beginning of His Vocation*

*Jerónimo (Jerome) Nadal was one of the most important and influential early Jesuits. Nadal was born on the island of Majorca in 1507, met (and mistrusted) Ignatius in Paris in 1535, came to Rome ten years later, and there joined the Society in 1545. Less than three years later, Nadal was sent by Ignatius to Messina to be rector of the first Jesuit college for laity. Within seven years of his entrance, he was the man chosen and sent by Ignatius to explain the newly written Constitutions to the Jesuit communities of the young and rapidly growing Society in Italy, Spain, Portugal, Germany, and Austria. At various times he was a provincial, assistant, and vicar general of the Society. He died at Rome in 1580.*

*A new biography of Nadal will be published this year by the Loyola University Press. Also within the year the Institute of Jesuit Sources hopes to publish a selection of his writings in English translation. These autobiographical notes, translated by Martin E. Palmer, S.J., of the Institute of Jesuit Sources, give vivid testimony to Nadal's character. They are taken from the Monumenta Historica Societatis Iesu, Epistolæ Nadal I, 14-25. The first pages of this document appeared in the May 1992 issue of Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits.*

*Rome: July 1545*

(36) Sailing alone to Barcelona on July 2, 1545, I awaited traveling companions until September. I arrived in Rome on October 10, the day when they celebrated the anniversary of Paul III's coronation.

(37) I immediately looked up Jerome Doménech. He took me to Father Ignatius, who was returning from St. Martha's Convent. Doménech told Ignatius that it was on his account that I had come. I didn't like this, and showed it.

Ignatius showed slight emotion; he merely bade me welcome.

(38) This good Father Doménech immediately got Antonio Ri6n and some people from St. Martha's, and came with me to my inn to pick up a mule and a little bag I had left there. Then he took me to Philip Cassini's house to get me shut up in the Exercises before my first glimpse of the Roman sun. In his simplicity and goodness Father Doménech had already completely marked me down and made me a "Theatine."

(39) We were right at the door of the house when I was accosted by two men from the household of James a Pou, an Auditor of the Rota and a Majorcan. Seeing me in the city, they had reported to the Auditor, who had sent them to bring me without fail to his house. Although I had not obtained a letter of recommendation from the Auditor's relatives in the Montañans family, they themselves had written asking him to look after me, with the result that the Auditor felt he would be derelict in his duty if he let me lodge anyplace but in his house. So the two men insisted strongly, striving to impress me with the Auditor's name and importance. I easily gave in, telling Doménech I could not slight the Auditor's wishes or the kindness and honor he was offering me. I said I would come later to see Ignatius—himself and Ignatius—to express my thanks. And so the fish got off the hook that time.

(40) I went with the Majorcans to the Auditor's. He received me most graciously and affectionately. Though I was still not very high in the world, he fixed me up in a tapestried room and treated me with such extraordinary honor that I could not possibly have desired more. As a boy in Majorca he had been educated by Moripo; he and my father had been classmates.

(41) I stayed at the Auditor's house for thirty days—days of complete distraction and dissipation of mind. Although at home I

had hardly gone a day without celebrating Mass, during those thirty days I never thought of celebrating even once. I wandered all over the city, curiously investigating the monuments of Roman antiquity. At the same time I made visits to Father Ignatius, where the Spirit of God kept pulling me, though the devil did all he could to keep me from associating with him. Fathers Laínez and Doménech kept hard at it trying to get me into the Exercises, but I paid them no attention. Ignatius occasionally invited me to dinner, conversing with me in his restrained and gentle way.

(42) Although Ignatius had never openly spoken about the subject of my changing my state of life, I one day accosted him after dinner, first asking him to have the other Fathers leave. I said, "These Fathers keep stuffing me with lots of talk about the Exercises" (I believe that is the language I used); "I know what they are after: they want me to change my state of life and join you men. Now in this regard there are a lot of things I want you to hear from me," I said, "which indicate that I am not suited for your way of life." Then, without reserve, I told him practically the whole sorry story of my life, except for my sins. He listened carefully and, if I remember rightly, with a smile. He then answered quietly, "It's all right; there will be something for you to do in the Society if God calls you

into it." As a result, I subsequently began talking seriously about the Exercises. There was trouble finding a room where I could retire to make them. Peter Sentini had been given the job of finding one by Father Ignatius, who was concerned about my fits of depression and had ordered that I be found a comfortable room with a pleasant garden. I could no longer brook delay; doubtless Father Ignatius had prayed hard for me, and I was extremely discontented with the life I was living at the time. So I told Sentini I would be happy with a room next to the Catechumens', but he said no.

(43) Once my retiring to make the Exercises had been settled on, I was worried about the Auditor and the other Majorcans in his household. I thought it best to tell the latter I was going on a pilgrimage of devotion. To the Auditor I revealed that I wanted to retire for twenty-five or thirty days to try some meditations that Father Ignatius and his companions were accustomed to give. I said my reason for coming to Rome had been twofold: to advance both my spiritual life and my education; and since the Council at Trent had not yet opened, it seemed a good idea, before it opened and I left to go there, for me to improve my mind beforehand with spiritual meditations and pursuits; I would be away not more than twenty-five or thirty days. The honest Auditor offered none of the opposition I

had so greatly feared. For my director I was assigned Father Doménech, a longtime expert at giving the Exercises. I began my retreat on November 5, 1545.

(44) My frame of mind was good, though I was bothered by weak health and depression. At the beginning I was all keyed up to have something extraordinary happen to me—some vision or revelation or sign. The First Week had good effect and I made my general confession to Father Ignatius.

(45) After the confession he said that it was God's wish that, just as we had made bad use of our human powers in acting against his will and without his grace, so, after recovering his grace through the sacrament of penance, we should make use of our powers to amend our lives.

(46) I experienced greater fruit in the Second Week—remarkably so in the two meditations on the Temporal King and the Standards, and to a great extent in the mysteries of Christ's life.

(47) However, upon coming to the election I was so agitated and dissipated that I began to go to pieces mentally and physically: my mind was in darkness and my will barren and balky; my body was racked by headaches, stomach pains, and fever. I had written out plenty of reasons for both sides of the election, but could find no way of coming to a decision. Things were so stalled that Doménech

seemed to lose heart altogether; and on my seventeenth day in the Exercises, he said that since I had spent several days on the election without getting anywhere, I should move on. I said I wanted to make one last try that night.

(48) As I did so, a special grace of God came to my help. I took up my pen and wrote as I was moved by Christ's Spirit, with extraordinary consolation: "So far I have examined both courses as best I could, and see that the reasons against are so insubstantial that there is no need to refute them one by one. Even more: the very obstacles seem rather to be confirmations. But what moves me most is my not finding any opposing arguments that would move me at all, just sheer repugnance, which is a great and convincing sign that this is God's will; consequent upon this repugnance there are those feelings—a perverse will, the world, prestige, a kind of lack of faith by thinking too much of difficulties—which cannot receive the Kingdom of God and are opposed to the Spirit. And so, despite whatever hosts of difficulties—even beyond those I have experienced or the devil can instill—may come, assail, obstruct, oppose, or terrify, nevertheless:

(49) "In the name of the Most Holy Trinity—Father, Jesus Christ, and Holy Spirit—I determine and resolve to follow the evangelical counsels with vows in the Society of Jesus. I am ready to do every-

thing pertaining to that Society, even should they want me to take the vows immediately. With great fear and trembling before our God and Lord Jesus Christ and through the sovereign mercy he has exercised towards me, I make this vow with my whole soul, my whole will, and my whole strength. Glory be. Amen. Rome, the year of our Lord 1545, on the twenty-third of November, at half past twelve, on my eighteenth day in the Exercises."

(50) There followed incredible spiritual consolation as well as physical relief, so that—[*Text breaks off here.*]

1545

(51) I entered the Exercises on November the fifth.

(52) On the twenty-third, I made a vow to enter the Society.

(53) On the same day I vowed that, if the Society did not accept me, I would still take the three vows of religion.

(54) On December the third I made a further vow renouncing the freedom to take vows elsewhere unless the Society should absolutely refuse to accept me under any conditions and for any service, even the humblest.

(55) On November the twenty-seventh, after I had been in the Exercises for twenty-two days, when I was examined by Father Doménech, I promised him at one and the same time that I would dispose both of my benefices and



of the rest of my patrimony whenever the superior should tell me.

(56) On the twenty-ninth, I was received into the house for the Society.

(57) On the same day, Father Ignatius told me that in two days I should begin serving as the cook's helper and also assisting the gardener. He also told me that every day I should read and meditate a single chapter of Gerson [*The Imitation of Christ*], though I should also read other chapters if need or weakness should require it. He heaped the highest praise on the little book and told me that whenever I opened it, even at random, I would find something that fitted my need at the moment. He said this had been his own experience.

(58) On two days I was both invited to Father Ignatius's table and sat with him in the refectory.

(59) I confirmed the vows I had made so far.

(60) On December the nineteenth I made a further vow that, if the Society should refuse to accept me under any circumstances for any ministry, even the humblest, I would not take the three vows anyplace but where the Society should advise me.

(61) On St. Stephen's Day, the minister, Father Christopher Mendoza, told me to leave the kitchen and serve in the refectory. I had served in the kitchen for twenty-six days.

(62) Continuous consolation, even though with poor health. Daily more confirmed in my vocation. But special consolation over my vows.

(63) The judgment on Postell, from which I was freed by Father Ignatius when he told me his story.

(64) Exultation when Father Doménech gave me a piece of the wood of the cross.

(65) I was given a broom of stubby twigs to sweep the kitchen with, so that I had a hard time sweeping. This tried me.

(66) Father Ignatius ordered me to dig in the garden in a fleece-lined coat, and he walked by with Dr. Torres.

(67) Consolation in the refectory over God's feeding me.

(68) Extraordinary hunger. When I brought a scruple about this to Father Ignatius, he asked me why I ate. I answered that it was so that I might live to do penance for my sins and serve God. Smiling calmly, he said, "Mercy me, then eat." At this, I was freed from my scruple.

*January 14, 1546*

(69) Oppressed by the thought that I did not have the vows of religion and was not a religious, since my previous vows had only been vows to take the vows of religion, I had recourse to the procedures for election from the Exercises, along with prayers and holy Masses. This led me +

definite wish to make the three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. However, I wanted to submit the matter to Father Ignatius. He answered that it was all right. "But listen," he said; "you already have before God the merit of desiring to take these vows. But now I want you to obtain the additional merit of not taking these vows because I do not think you should."

I acquiesced, but after I left the thought came to me, "To whom are you making these vows, Ignatius or God? Go ahead and make them; it is God's will." This thought led me to decide to take the vows without Ignatius's knowing. In this state, it occurred to me that taking the vows would entail no difficulty for me, so I decided not to take them at that moment but to wait until a time when it would be hard for me. This in fact happened in a striking way one night when I was reading the *Te Deum* at lauds. As soon as I became aware of it, I broke off my prayers and addressed myself to making the vows as follows:

(70) "To the glory of the most holy and undivided Trinity, through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, with the greatest fear and trembling, I, Jerónimo Nadal, vow to almighty God poverty, chastity, and obedience in the hands of the superior of the Society of Jesus. And so I shall, with God's grace, keep these vows in accord with his will and command,

and shall pronounce them solemnly whenever he sees fit. You, God, we praise; you we confess as Lord; praise be to you, glory be to you, thanksgiving be to you through Jesus Christ for ever and ever. Amen."

By the vow of poverty I understood the kind scholastics are accustomed to make. I had not gotten any advice on this kind of vow formula; no definite formula had as yet been put out. There ensued amazing consolation, etc.

(71) Later I told Father Ignatius about this and he approved. From this it was easy to conclude that he had actually wanted me to make the vows but not at his behest.

(72) I learned from Father Doménech that before hearing my confession during the Exercises Father Ignatius had said of me, "This one will give us a hard time. He is full of melancholy—you can tell by his eyes. It is to be feared that unless God calls him he may turn totally melancholic and lose his mind. At present he wants to serve God and cannot do it." But, he went on, Father now said that he had good hopes for me and that I should thank God for the gifts bestowed on me and pray for perseverance and steadfastness, "even though," he said, "he will have trials in the future, perhaps even worse ones; but God will help him, the perturbations will lessen, consolations will increase, and he will get a taste of paradise in this life."

(73) I visited the seven churches with Ferrão, and he could not get a word out of me for the whole trip.

(74) I had another visit with Masters Laínez and Salmerón as they were about to leave for Trent, and was remarkably edified by their charity and freedom.

(75) I was scandalized in the kitchen that out of our poverty dinner and supper were being taken to [Isabel] Roser.

(76) Father Ignatius told me not to go see Auditor a Pou until I had served several days in the kitchen and garden.

(77) And so I went to see him later. I told him the whole story, and he took it quite badly. Finally, when I realized that he feared losing face with his fellow Majorcans for not having been able to prevent my change, I made an agreement with him that I would write home: if they did not oppose my decision, then there would be no reason for him to take it badly.

(78) And so he remained my [friend] ever after, for I myself wrote to Sacrist Montañans recounting my vocation, my consolations, and my perseverance, and asking that everyone take it in good part. I told him that if he gave me any difficulty I would never write to them or to Majorca again. Actually, I hardly ever did write, following the example of Father Ignatius, who told me he had never written home, and had refused to help secure a very hon-

orable marriage for his only niece, though a word from him would have sufficed, especially since the duke of Nájera had asked him.

(79) It weighed on my mind that I possessed three ecclesiastical benefices in addition to my paternal inheritance as eldest son.

(80) I took the matter to Father Ignatius and asked him to tell me what to do. I told him I wanted to distribute everything I had to the poor. He seemed to want to put the matter off, and so I told him frankly that I wanted to be freed of these encumbrances but could not do so without his consent and command; if I came to any harm through holding on to them, he would bear the blame. This deeply moved the good Father, and he told me to do whatever Doctors Gaspar de Doctis and Madrid advised me. They said that I should appoint persons back home to distribute my goods to the poor, with consideration for my sister and any poor relations of mine. They sent a hundred gold pieces to me, assigned another portion to my sister, etc.

(81) Delivered from this concern, I felt much freer. My mental state was stable and good because of my consolations, but my health continued poor.

(82) Father Ignatius began treating me with great kindness and familiarity, quite frequently inviting me to his table, often coming to my room, and frequently taking me for walks. I take it

that he did this because he understood my fragility of spirit and need for such indulgence.

(83) He forbade me to fast. When I grew uneasy and said that some in the house might take offense, he answered that I should tell him right out if anyone took offense and he would immediately expel the man from the Society.

(84) He obtained from the supreme pontiff's vicar Archinto an order for me not to fast during Lent. During Lent he would invite me to have some of the food that had been prepared for himself. In his artless charity, the more I told him the food was not good for me, the more he would press me to have some, "because it tasted so good to him."

(85) I was never given any penances. When we half complained about this to him, he said, "You will do penances, don't worry." Later I was given a slight one, that of eating at little table—which, however, I felt somewhat.

(86) More or less four months after my coming to the Society, Father Ignatius decided to make me minister. I performed the office sincerely, so far as I understood it, but with too much harshness, so that I displeased the brethren.

(87) Moreover, it was through me that Father Ignatius assigned penances, not wanting it known that they came from him; and I faithfully kept the secret.

(88) Fray Antonio, the hermit with whom I had lived on familiar terms back home in Majorca, came to Rome. Father Ignatius seemed to me to be apprehensive about him. When the hermit was going to receive some relics from the wife of Juan de Vega, Father Ignatius told me to approach her in my own name and warn him not to give easy credence to a stranger—as if he wished in this way to detach me from Antonio. I felt somewhat disturbed, and immediately tried to defend the man. Nevertheless, I submitted and said I would do what he told me. He answered, "That is what you should have said in the first place." I did as commanded, and my friendship with the hermit was never held against me.

(89) The hermit formed an exalted idea of Father Ignatius's sanctity. Nevertheless, Father Ignatius did not much like him, and when I asked about this he replied, "He will not last three more years in the form of life that he has undertaken." I hear that this proved the case, and that the hermit is now living a much looser life.

(90) The Franciscan, Fray Tejada, also came to Rome, in an attempt to obtain through the influence of the Duke of Gandía (our present Father General) what he had not succeeded in obtaining from his own order: he was extremely anxious to be ordained to the priesthood.

(91) Father Francis thought very highly of him because of his outstanding reputation for devotion and his remarkable practice of contemplation. He exercised a great influence over Father Andrés de Oviedo and others among our men in Gandía, to the point where through this monk's advice or example they were spending many hours in prayer and, in order to be freer for this, eating nothing but a

cheap bread soup called *gazpacho*. Father Francis, then duke of Gandía, wrote letters to Father Ignatius recommending this man and his cause with such solicitude and urgency that nothing higher could have been said in his recommendation.

(92) I took a disliking to this monk for circumventing the will of his own superiors and using the influence of outsiders. [Text ends here, incomplete.]



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## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Editor:

With a good deal of diffidence, I want to make two comments about Charles Shelton's study "Toward Healthy Jesuit Community Living," which appeared in the September 1992 issue of *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*. I stress the diffidence with which I write, because I am of another religious order; besides, what do I know about Jesuits except to love and revere them?

However, for what they are worth, here are my comments:

1. Friendship. Besides the general community dialogue, which Father Shelton and I agree is of utmost importance, I think our communities should accord friendship a place that is respected, understood, and encouraged. First of all, this is because, given our differences of temperament, formation, education, culture, and spirituality, we cannot possibly be equally open and vulnerable to all members of the community. We can be courteous, kind, compassionate with all, but we need a few friends besides. The old fear of "particular friendships" made that gift a difficult one to give or accept in the "old" community life. And obviously I do not envision lesbian or gay practices. But in my long experience of religious life, we do need friends. If we do not find them in the community, we find them elsewhere. We need to be able to "talk our own language" with some who understand it. Per-

haps our spiritual director understands our talk about the nights and bright darkneses of our prayer. What a grace that is! But what about our political opinions (a taboo topic in many communities), our agonized outbursts about the injustices of our society, our frustrations with our beloved Mother Church? I personally need not only my community but other wise spiritual counselors and friends as well who share my intellectual, spiritual, and other specialties.

2. Prayer. Jesuit prayer is understood as an essential ingredient in life. Sacred Heart prayer is such in my community. We say with a good deal of truth that we are primarily women of prayer. That has different meanings for each of us, as it must have for Jesuits. My comment in the context of Shelton's article is that personal prayer as deeply contemplative as possible is essential for healthy community life. I missed in the article more emphasis laid on personal prayer. Perhaps I learned very young not to expect too much from community, even from myself, but infinitely more from the God who is always ready to fill and refill me, to affirm my efforts at discernment, and to encourage my growing vulnerability which allows entrance to him and to community and to others.

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