



# STUDIES

IN  
THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS

**How Multicultural Are We?**

*Six Stories by*

Claudio M. Burgaleta, Gregory C. Chisholm,  
Eduardo C. Fernandez, Gerdenio M. Manuel,  
J-Glenn Murray, and Hung T. Pham,  
all of the Society of Jesus

compiled and edited by

**WILLIAM A. BARRY, S.J., AND JAMES F. KEENAN, S.J.**

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# THE SEMINAR ON JESUIT SPIRITUALITY

The Seminar is composed of a number of Jesuits appointed from their provinces in the United States.

It concerns itself with topics pertaining to the spiritual doctrine and practice of Jesuits, especially United States Jesuits, and communicates the results to the members of the provinces through its publication, *STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS*. This is done in the spirit of Vatican II's recommendation that religious institutes recapture the original inspiration of their founders and adapt it to the circumstances of modern times. The Seminar welcomes reactions or comments in regard to the material that it publishes.

The Seminar focuses its direct attention on the life and work of the Jesuits of the United States. The issues treated may be common also to Jesuits of other regions, to other priests, religious, and laity, to both men and women. Hence, the journal, while meant especially for American Jesuits, is not exclusively for them. Others who may find it helpful are cordially welcome to make use of it.

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# HOW MULTICULTURAL ARE WE?

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## *Of all things . . .*

It's hard to think of Jesus as a weasel.

Over the course of the Christian centuries, a greater variety of symbolic images than most of us could ever imagine have been employed to represent the person of Jesus Christ. Each of the images is a "metaphor" for some aspect of the Lord. We are familiar with some of them, such as the pelican or the eagle. We might regard the sheep, the deer, and the lark as somewhat apt symbols of one or other aspects of Christ; but could you, for example, have imagined that the wasp, the sea urchin, the crocodile, or the spider would also be among them, not to mention such imaginary or fabulous beasts as the hippogriff, the dragon, the ouroboros (a snake curled in a circle and holding the end of its tail in its mouth), and the amphisbaena (a reptile with two heads, one in the usual place and one at its tail)? And even the lowly weasel was employed as a Christ symbol because, according to legend, it devotedly cared for its offspring and resuscitated them if they happened to die. All of these animals were meant to be positive symbols of Christ and his work; not a one was considered negative, much less blasphemous.

In 1940 *Le Bestiaire du Christ* appeared in Brussels. An enormously erudite and equally interesting and accessible book stretching to a thousand pages and containing more than a thousand woodcuts, it was the lifetime work of Louis Charbonneau-Lassay, a world-class French archaeologist-historian of medieval art and symbolism, and a deeply committed Catholic as well. An English abridgment and translation of almost five hundred pages, *The Bestiary of Christ*, by D. M. Dooling, appeared ten years ago (New York: Penguin/Parabola, 1991). The book is both a testimony to how impoverished our current imaginations can be, and a stimulus to them to present the inexhaustible riches of Christ more vividly to ourselves and others. The original limited edition barely survived in a few copies after a World War II bombing raid.

Compare that to the enormous circulation available to almost anything on the World Wide Web today. It is worth going to the Web sometime to see the many sites devoted to Jesuitica and the links from one to another around the world. While there you might look at the IJS site, <[www.jesuitsources.com](http://www.jesuitsources.com)>. All the Institute's publications are listed there for your delight and temptation.

One of the most productive of such Jesuit publishers around the world was Fr. Xavier Diaz del Rio, S.J., head of the Gujaret Sahitya Prakash, The Light of Gujaret press in India. Fr. Diaz del Rio, who died in September of this year, was a man to whom the Society of Jesus owes a great deal. He had an extraordinary capacity for work; and under his direction GSP published hundreds of books on a great variety of subjects, among them Jesuit spirituality and Jesuit history. Many years ago Fr. George Ganss, the founder of the Institute of Jesuit Sources, entered into a cooperative arrangement with Fr. Diaz del Rio whereby GSP could publish for Asian and African distribution any of the IJS books. Because printing costs are much lower in India than in the United States, Fr. Diaz del Rio could provide Jesuits and other

readers in developing countries with books at an affordable price. A good number of IJS books thus became more easily available to readers with severely limited financial resources. In turn, the IJS put out several works that GSP had originally published.

India has produced many things of importance for the Church, but surely one of the strangest was the Pope's elephant. Yes, you read the phrase correctly. In 1514 the King of Portugal, wishing to impress Pope Leo X, brought an elephant from India and had it marched across southern Europe, through the Alpine passes, and down to Rome. In a city that at the time housed such artists as Michelangelo, Raphael, and Leonardo da Vinci, and a papal court renowned for its pleasure-loving excesses, Hanno, the newly named white elephant, became a star. He took part in processions and festivals, had his portrait painted and sculpted, and became a pet of the Pope. Four years ago the historian Silvio Bedini published *The Pope's Elephant* (New York: Penguin, 1997), a work both serious in scholarship and as one reviewer remarked, "utterly charming and completely loopy." Or as another said, it "combines off-beat charm with historical rigor to such pleasing effect that it would even be suitable bedtime reading for a pontiff wanting to unwind." Indeed it would.

More recently, and more seriously, I have been reading *Karl Rahner and Ignatian Spirituality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) by Philip Endean, S.J., a member of the British Province and of the faculty of Heythrop College in London. A part of the Oxford Theological Monographs series, this book compliments Rahner by offering a serious, wide-ranging, in-depth presentation and critique of what he wrote on this subject, ranging from his earliest extant comments from the 1930s to his final writings on the subject, left unfinished on his desk when he died in 1984. The book "explores the relationship between Karl Rahner's theology and the Ignatian spiritual tradition," and it does so with a rigor that is both daunting and refreshing. Rahner believed that the most significant influence on his work was the *Spiritual Exercises*. As Endean says, "If the *Spiritual Exercises* were to be read with the seriousness they deserved, they implied a thoroughgoing renewal of the whole theological enterprise, fundamental and practical as well as dogmatic. To that renewal Rahner was to devote his whole professional life." Endean speaks very fairly of the weaknesses and the problems in Rahner's conception of Ignatian spirituality and of his accomplishments and influence thereon. This is not a book for the casual reader; it demands concentration, reflection, and theological background. But it is both a tribute to Rahner and to his influence on the understanding and practice of the Exercises; and, in its own right, it is an example of what critical, sympathetic, and exacting scholarship is all about.

Finally, if ever an issue of STUDIES might stimulate correspondence, the present one, "How Multi-Cultural Are We?" should do so. Each of its six stories is enlightening and thought-provoking. On any one of them or on all of them, many of us might well have something to say. So I do encourage your letters to the editor. Keep them coming; we would like to publish them.

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

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## HOW MULTICULTURAL ARE WE?

### SIX STORIES

**I**t is no secret that the ethnic composition of the Society of Jesus in the United States is changing. The names alone of our entering novices tell us that something different is taking place. And the pictures of both the new novices and of those being ordained published in *Company* magazine make the point even more clearly. Not only are these novices older on average than was true forty years ago, but they also come from ethnic backgrounds very little represented in our ranks in those days. These new vocations given to us, we believe, by God pose some interesting issues and challenges not only for their formation (and *formatores*), but also for all of us who want to welcome these new men into our "least Society." This issue of *STUDIES* is published to help all of us deal creatively and compassionately with these issues and challenges.

Of course, it may seem that the Society in the United States was, until fairly recent times, almost exclusively made up of men whose national origin was northern European. The authors of the essays in this issue belie this assumption, since five of the six have been Jesuits for twenty or even thirty years. The impression of older Jesuits that changes in our ethnic

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composition are a recent phenomenon is fed, in part, by the way certain structures in the Society in the United States supported the notion that we have always been almost exclusively Americans of northern-European background. For this reason *STUDIES* wanted to engage, not the experience of the many diverse newcomers, but rather the learned and lived experience of our brothers whose distinctive voices have not always been recognized as such.

Entering the Society is a daunting experience no matter what one's background. After all, the entering novice is not just changing jobs or moving into an unknown school environment, intimidating enough as these experiences would be in their own right; he is expected and is expecting to take on a new identity as a member of a religious order with an almost five-hundred-year history. Taking on a new identity is not a matter of changing one's clothes or one's place of work; it requires an interior change of a profound order. The Society from its very beginnings realized this and has required a long and often arduous period of formation before allowing a man to pronounce his final vows and be called a fully incorporated member. Thus, any entering novice faces formidable challenges. How will he become a fully accepted member of this religious order while yet maintaining his own individuality? The challenges are compounded when the entering novice belongs to an ethnic and cultural group different from that of the province he is entering. Not only does the entering novice face these challenges, however, but all of us do so as well, because we are all involved in becoming the new Society of Jesus in the United States, as God is calling us to do.

This kind of challenge has always been present in the Society. However, the challenge was, for the most part, one-sided, experienced only by those who came from an ethnic and cultural group different from the predominant one in a province. Those of us who belonged to the dominant ethnic group hardly noticed the difficulties faced by the few novices not from that group. But ask, for example, an older Franco-American or Italian-American who entered the predominantly Irish-American provinces of the East Coast what it was like to enter the novitiate forty years or more ago, and you might hear a rich story, not unlike the ones that follow. Not only were these men expected to take on a Jesuit identity, but unconsciously they were also asked to take on the ethos and culture of the predominant group if they wished to survive and have friends.

We have asked the authors whose essays follow to reflect on their spiritual journey as they took on a Jesuit identity, in order to help all of us become more aware and alert to the challenges we face as a group of companions of Jesus who are now, finally, becoming culturally more diverse,

following the pattern set by the wider culture of the United States. In a recent issue of *America*, Judith Bruder quotes from a homily by an African-American Jesuit, James L. Pierce, who made the point that “tolerance and acceptance are good things, but limited. Until,” he said, “one person is willing to accept the other’s experience not just as O.K., but as normative, nothing much can happen.”<sup>1</sup> These essays invite us to take the experiences of our brothers from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds as normative for their identity as Roman Catholics who now seek to take on a Jesuit identity.

We want to emphasize that the men who wrote these essays have generously responded to an invitation from the Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality. The idea for this issue arose in a discussion among the members of the Seminar. The men who were asked were surprised and even apprehensive when they were invited to reflect on their earlier experience as Jesuits in the American context of those days. They have done so with great generosity.

Why these six essays? Clearly we were not aiming at proportionate representation, or even at any specific representation. We did ask for essays from men of another ethnic background; but when these men were not able to respond, we decided to limit this issue of *STUDIES* to these six essays. Our aim, as stated, was not for all-encompassing representation, but for essays from men seasoned in the Society who could reflect on their experience of taking on a Jesuit identity in the context of being from an ethnic background different from the dominant one at that time. Our hope and that of the writers is that their reflections will help all of us become the Society God is inviting us to become as we move into this new century.

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<sup>1</sup> *America*, October 15, 2001, 28.

## “Burgaleta? That Doesn’t Sound Irish to Me.”

by Claudio M. Burgaleta, S.J.

I entered the New York novitiate in 1980 at Syracuse, N.Y., without really knowing the North American Society of Jesus very well. I had not attended a Jesuit high school or college or belonged to a Jesuit parish. This is not to say that I was entirely unacquainted with the Ignatian charism. My family revered the Society for its distinguished reputation in education. But even more, we saw it as embodied in the quasi-mythical Spanish Jesuit of the Antilles Province, Amando Llorente, the spiritual director of a Marian sodality for professional men established in Cuba in the 1930’s, the *Agrupación Católica Universitaria*. I would characterize my spirituality before entering as Ignatian, Marian, devotional, and defined by the *Agrupación*’s anti-Communist and pro-papal sympathies.

Perhaps it should not come as a surprise that with a background such as mine, I was deferred from entering the Society in 1978, and was encouraged to “temper” my style so that I could better fit into the New York Province. From 1978 to 1980 I broadened my horizons by attending Columbia University in New York City. It was there that I was first exposed to what today is sometimes called “advocacy theologies.” These influences offered a very different take on the Catholicism familiar to me since childhood, and served as an introduction to the liberal Catholicism that has characterized most of my life in the Society. When I entered the novitiate, it was with the intuition that I was being called to serve the growing Latino community in the United States as a Jesuit priest, even though during the next twenty years I would have to discern how that invitation to service in imitation of Jesus and Ignatius would evolve.

In a way I had not previously experienced, my years in the novitiate brought to the fore the challenge of being a Hispanic in the U.S. Catholic Church. I encountered some culturally specific issues as a Cuban-American, in addition to those other issues faced by all novices; I am grateful that I could begin to grapple with them aided by Tom Feely, who had spent a number of years working in Puerto Rico and was the *socius* to the novice director at that time.

Let me give some examples of these. Community devotional life in the novitiate principally centered around the liturgy of the hours and the Eucharist. This was very different from the communal devotional life

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suffusing the popular Catholicism that I had been accustomed to at home. The Cuban Catholicism I grew up with emphasized sacramentals as a mediation of the sacred and an expression and support of a family-centered faith. This popular religiosity, as it is sometimes referred to, took the form of displaying and honoring statues and images in the home, as well as of performing communal rituals associated with the saints, such as processions and novenas. And so, in addition to learning Jesuit spirituality in the novitiate just like everyone else, I also had to pick up a middle-class post-Vatican II spirituality that was more interior, less demonstrative.

Another very important part of the novitiate experience, and probably one of the factors that kept me in the Society during those first two years, was finding a family within a family in a core group of brother-novices. Unlike members of other novice classes of around my time, Ed Salmon, Phil Judge, Dean Bechard, Keith Pecklers, Jim Van Dyke, Jim Catalano, and I have somehow managed to support one another from the very beginning and still see one another frequently; on those occasions we still pray and play together. This was and continues to be significant in my Jesuit life, for these men have graced me with a sense of family that enabled me to continue my journey in the Society. In very tangible ways, by eating my picadillo and my family's gifts of guava pastries, for example, and by listening to my rantings and ravings about various and assorted subjects, they provided and continue to provide the matrix of acceptance and respect that with God's grace led me to say yes to first vows in the New York Province.

During those first three years of Jesuit formation, encompassing the novitiate and my first year of philosophy studies at Fordham University, I also had opportunities to minister to Latinos; and while I was assimilating Ignatian spirituality and the New York Jesuit way of proceeding, which places such value on intelligence and a quick and sharp tongue, I also had taken to heart the call of Pedro Arrupe and General Congregations 31 and 32 to live out a faith that does justice. I became convinced of the great treasure of the Ignatian charism as reformulated by Arrupe and these congregations. I saw that they could help me and the Latinos I encountered during the various novitiate experiments draw closer to Jesus and serve the world. Nonetheless, I remained conflicted: How would someone like me fit into the New York Province, even though I was not of Irish descent?

In the late summer of 1983, I departed for Madrid, Spain, to continue my collegiate studies at the Complutense, the great, centuries-old Spanish university; furthermore, during the 1984 academic year I studied at the Spanish Jesuits' Comillas Pontifical University. The more communitarian and restrictive formation that I experienced during these two years in Spain

facilitated a new awareness of my American identity. In the wake of the more regimented formation imparted at Madrid, the Irish-Americans of the New York Province seemed to me to be positively enlightened, and cosmopolitan American individualism seemed absolutely liberating after what I perceived as an excessive group-think approach to community life so characteristic of Spanish Jesuit formation. This insight was worked out, not in isolation, but very much in the community of other Hispanic-American Jesuits studying in Madrid at the time: Eddie Samaniego and Luis Quihuis of California, José Ignacio Badenes of Maryland, and Jesús Riveroll of Belize.

During regency at St. Peter's Prep in Jersey City, I learned that the ministry of the Spirit knows no boundaries. I found myself helping American kids of Irish, Italian, and central-European backgrounds, as well as Latinos. I realized that the gifts that God has given me as counselor and teacher, as well as the gift of my ethnicity, were not just for one group. The summers of regency were also an important time to connect with New York Province initiatives among Latinos. During the summers of 1987 and 1988, I worked with Fr. Joseph Towle, S.J., in an educational and recreational program organized around a public middle school in the Hunts Point section of south Bronx. This experience was most valuable to me, providing me with a sense that, though there were few other Latino Jesuits in the New York Province, nonetheless, there were Jesuits in the province who were committed to serving the Latino community. Subsequent encounters with other Jesuits such as Jeff Chojnacki, Mike Flynn, Damian Halligan, John Hyatt, Jack Podsiadlo, and Alfredo Quevedo have been instrumental in helping me feel that I belonged to a province as a Latino qua Latino who wanted to be involved in Hispanic ministry. The question of which form this Hispanic ministry would take, however, remained an open one. As it has turned out, my involvement with Hispanics has been different from the social-pastoral and middle-school ministries with which these men are still involved.

Theology from 1988 to 1992 was another milestone in the process of negotiating my identity in the Society and my eventual role in serving the Latino community as a Jesuit and a priest. Along with feminism and liberation theology, inculturation was a leitmotif that ran through many of the courses I took at Berkeley. The presence of Allan Figueroa Deck, S.J., on the faculty and the arrangements he made for prominent theologians in this field, for example, Marcello Azevedo, S.J., to visit the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley raised many questions about how being Latino related to theology and being a Jesuit priest. The early 1990s saw the birth of a Latino contextual-theology movement in the United States, and many of the founding figures associated with it either taught at or passed through Berke-

ley to meet with Allan. Theologians such as Roberto Goizueta, now at Boston College, Fr. Orlando Espin of the University of San Diego, and Msgr. Arturo Banuelas of the Tepeyac Institute of the diocese of El Paso stimulated my thinking on what it meant to be Latino in the U.S. Catholic Church.

The presence of other Latino students at JSTB and the Graduate Theological Union was another important part of my Latino theological formation at Berkeley. For the first time in an academic setting, I did not feel that I was the only one asking questions about what it means to be a Latino in the U.S. Church. Hearing questions similar to my own formulated by Eddie Fernandez, S.J., or Veronica Mendez, R.C.D., was a significant experience of *pastoral de conjunto*, or a shared approach to ministry that features prominently in U.S. Hispanic-Latino theology and pastoral ministry. Berkeley not only stimulated the mind, but it fed my Latino soul too.

During my four years at JSTB, I worked at St. Bernard's Parish in Oakland, an Anglo, African-American, Mexican parish led by a Puerto Rican pastor from the Bronx, Fr. Eric Vargas, S.V.D., and assisted by Fr. Jaime Lara of the Brooklyn Diocese who at the time was in residence while completing his doctorate at the GTU. The St. Bernard experience was an unveiling experience in the full Heideggerian sense of that word. It opened up a world of being a Latino, a Jesuit, and a priest-to-be and reconciled a number of conflicts and tensions in my continuing struggle to grow as a Jesuit and find a niche in the Society's apostolic body. Working in Oakland helped me to integrate my talents as a teacher and Jesuit at the service of the Latino community, forming lay leaders of the parish. This initiated me into a dimension of my pastoral activity that occupied me for the next decade in university, parish, province, and diocesan programs of Hispanic-leadership formation from Southern California to Massachusetts and Long Island.

The experience of ministering to Latinos in these various Hispanic pastoral-formation programs also informed my doctoral work at Boston College with John O'Malley, S.J., as I explored the life and theology of one of our genius-scoundrels, José de Acosta, S.J. (1540-1600), who tried to have Claudio Aquaviva removed as general, but was also the intellectual author of the Reductions and one of only two to raise their voices at GC 5 against preventing men of Jewish and Islamic ancestry from entering the Society. My doctoral work was motivated by my sense that U.S. Hispanic-Latino theology would profit from recovering not only the practice of the faith as expressed by popular Catholicism or religiosity but also our Latino theological heritage. Jesuits such as Acosta, Sandoval, Alegre, and Clavijero have made a significant contribution to this little-known theological heritage.



But if ministering to Latinos provided a heuristic and hermeneutical path for making my way through the thicket of doctoral studies, it also brought to the fore a conundrum frequently facing the Latino Jesuit as he functions in the world not only of the academy but also of pastoral work. In a way that seems more intense than other Jesuit priests perceive it, the priest shortage in Latino-Catholic communities in the States compels me to struggle to find a *modus vivendi* between the demands of the often isolated and lonely life of research and writing and the pull of pastoral ministry with its more immediate results and gratifications. During the first years of priestly ministry after doctoral studies, I had to deal with these questions and the tensions they engendered in me; and, as is often the case, the answers took the form of God's surprises coming my way when superiors directed me to try out assignments that I myself would have never requested.

I now find myself teaching at Fordham University, where my work with Latinos has led me along some old but also some new paths. In addition to my teaching, writing, and research on Latin American theology, I work with Hispanic student groups on campus, regularly preside at a televised Spanish Eucharist for the Spanish-speaking communities of Long Island, and have been working with the university chaplain, Fr. Gerald Blaszcak, S.J., and Latino faculty members who were striving to establish a study-abroad program between Fordham and the University of Havana, the first such program designed by any Jesuit university in the world.

I would like to conclude with an anecdote and describe an encounter in June 1981 after my first year of novitiate. While trying to deliver a letter to a Jesuit in Loyola-Faber Hall at Fordham University, I spied two elderly, very Irish-looking Jesuits sitting in rocking chairs on the porch of Loyola Hall, conversing and enjoying a smoke and a post-prandial. I climbed the stairs and introduced myself as Claudio Burgaleta, a novice from Syracuse, and explained my mission to deliver a letter on behalf of Father Bermingham. After a long pause, one of the Fathers addressed me: "Burgaleta? That doesn't sound Irish to me." Combative wag that I am, without missing a beat I responded: "Well, neither is Loyola or Xavier, Father. Would you let me in, please, so I can deliver the letter." After what seemed to me to be an interminable silence, they both laughed, and one of the elderly Jesuits put down his cordial, made his way to the door, and admitted me to the house.

This pericope of my life as a Cuban-American in a predominantly Irish-American New York Province is an apt and illustrative metaphor with which to end this account of what the last twenty-some-odd years of trying to be a Cuban-American in the U.S. Assistancy has involved. Initially it was a bittersweet experience of feeling an outsider, but ultimately it led to a



sense of being accepted for who I am and feeling at home. I write this as I get ready to take my final vows at Fordham on July 31, 2001; and I find myself filled with both gratitude and ironic bemusement—gratitude for the graces received during the last twenty years as I have tried to fashion an identity and find a home in the Society, and ironic bemusement at God's sense of humor: almost twenty years to the date after my encounter with the fathers on the veranda of Loyola Hall, I will be fully incorporated into the Society in the New York Province and at Fordham.

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## On Being Black and Jesuit

by Gregory Chisholm, S.J.

### Every Son Needs a Place to Call Home

I have finally completed my tertianship after twenty-one years in the Society. Just recently I finished the eight-day retreat that traditionally brings to an end the third probation mandated by Fr. Ignatius and our Constitutions for all Jesuits prior to their final vows. The Chicago Province program I attended at Milford in southwestern Ohio is the newest two-summer tertianship in the assistancy, replacing the long-running Wisconsin Province program at Omaha. Bucolic Milford is a long way from my Los Angeles home. Nature and culture create a unique blend there for relaxation. Recent renovations of the plant at the Spirituality Center have only enhanced the level of comfort for visitors. Retreating and reflecting is easy there. Milford, surprisingly, is even a long way from Cincinnati, the city that forms the hub around which southwestern Ohio, southeastern Indiana and northern Kentucky all revolve. The distance from the chapel at Milford to the intersection of East Liberty Street and Vine Street, the center of the recent civil unrest (April 2001) in the predominantly African-American Over the Rhine neighborhood of Cincinnati, is the distance of centuries, the distance of millions of dollars, the distance of academic degrees, the distance of mowed lawns, the distance of many varieties of drugs, the distance of debilitating diseases, the distance of consciousness.

Traveling that distance once weekly during the seven weeks of the first summer of tertianship was quite a journey. Yet I had no alternative. For

twenty-one years there has been a chasm between the world I live in as a Jesuit and the world I live in as a black Catholic. On Sunday, at least, I have to be what seems most authentic to me, what feels most natural to my being. Every Sunday I needed to hear a song of divine praise in the key to which I had become accustomed. Every Sunday, at least, I wanted to hear a prayer to God for salvation from something I knew and feared. If only on Sunday, I had to experience the unabashed excitement and joy of a community of people engaged by a living God. During the week I was happy enough to pray with my fellow tertians. I welcomed the introspection encouraged by the tertian community at prayer. There was certainly no desire on my part to encourage them to undertake a style of communal encounter with one another and with God at worship that over a period of twenty years I had only rarely glimpsed as naturally occurring among Ours. I felt like being neither a Pied Piper nor an innovator in their midst. I was happy enough accommodating myself to the accepted way of worshiping when Jesuits gather at the end of the twentieth century. I simply have come to know what I need to survive and thrive in this Jesuit life. I often need to celebrate God with an immediacy and depth I find at home among people of African descent. I often need to go home to pray.

The way to tertianship began back in 1996 when I received my first invitation to apply from the New England formation assistant. I was teaching engineering at the University of Detroit Mercy at the time and thought I would put the decision aside until I had obtained tenure. What I never admitted to the New England formation assistant or the Detroit provincial was my lack of conviction concerning tertianship. At a relatively superficial level, I excused my doubt by opting for a nine-month tertianship program that I could participate in only when I earned a sabbatical from my university. There was, as I saw it, no positive option for tertianship or final vows. I had simply the mental state of a long-term rider on a train waiting passively for successive stops until the final destination was reached.

### **In the Land of the Fathers**

The dilemma was my own. The Jesuit-formation structure could not be blamed. Formation is what it is and what it has been. The community was not at fault. After several years of regency in Detroit and in residency following my ordination, I had become very fond of the Jesuits at the university. The city of Detroit itself was a welcome change for one who had lived in Boston, London, and Cambridge. I had a comfort there that I had not experienced since leaving Harlem in New York City when I was eighteen years old. The university was happy with my work. I felt supported and encouraged within the School of Engineering. Yet, in spite of all

these, I had lost a sense of mission. In the years following ordination, my sense of how my work at the university promoted justice and served our faith in Jesus Christ became less and less clear. I was quickly losing patience with the gulf that was growing between who I am and whom I served.

On the surface of things, the university bears an important witness to Jesuits in the apostolate of higher education. Where else, except at Detroit, would the majority of students served be people of African descent? The University of Detroit Mercy does what other Jesuit universities, colleges, and secondary schools generally don't do. It is committed to meeting the academic needs of black students while striving for excellence in education. In the School of Engineering, nevertheless, black students were rare. Whether in an introductory class in structural mechanics or an advanced class in acoustics, I might as well have been teaching at more typical Jesuit colleges or universities. Black professors were even more rare than black students. The incongruity of all this was at first humorous, but soon it became disturbing. Here I was, black and Jesuit, serving in the center of the largest overwhelmingly African-American city at its largest predominantly African-American private university, yet teaching engineering science to a largely white suburban student body in the company of white and Asian colleagues.

The Jesuit journey, the awareness of who I am as a companion of Jesus, informs the personal journey, the awareness of who I am as an adult African-American Catholic. Detroit was a turning point on that journey. Going on in me was a transition from being a spectator to an actor in this drama. At Detroit the dilemma of distance brought me to the point where for the first time I participated fully in a discernment regarding my mission. Certainly there have been many opportunities for such discernment in my life: My father discerned that I would be able to write my own ticket with an engineering degree, even though I most enjoyed math and Latin; enlightened politicians in college discerned that I would be an effective head of the student government, even though intercollegiate rowing was what I loved; an illustrious Jesuit with compelling viewpoints discerned that I would be just what a Jesuit university in Detroit needed, even though he knew nothing about me other than my engineering background. What is most significant in this catalog of discernment events is that I willingly capitulated in each of them. From one perspective I have been an obedient son, a loyal student, and a faithful Jesuit. I have by turns been a symbol of achievement or racial harmony or Jesuit foresight. From another perspective I had been on everyone's mission but my own. I was a poster boy for the fathers. Yet what of the people of God in urban-American communities? If I contented myself with pleasing the dads, how would they ever come to know that the

kingdom of God is at hand? The time had come to heal the breach. The time had come to participate in the drama.

### Leaving Home to Find It

When I joined the Jesuits in 1980, a black Catholic friend from high school wondered aloud why I would do something like that. He and I were torn largely from the same cloth. Both of us grew up in the turbulence of the late sixties and early seventies in New York. Both of us were galvanized by the emerging black consciousness and militancy of the time. Both of us chose to obey a call to return our gifts and our wealth to the black community from which we sprang. When he challenged me that day, I responded that the Jesuits and the priesthood would provide a vehicle for fulfilling that mandate to give back. Driven by a fundamental belief in salvation through Jesus Christ, I could offer my talents to the Lord for the building up of his Kingdom in the midst of my own people. The nature of my talents was less important than the use to which they would be put by the Lord in bringing about his salvation. The talents, like engineering or public speaking, were simply a means to serve. The Jesuits were less important than the commitment to offer myself to the Lord's service. The Society of Jesus is simply a means.

There is in that telling encounter with my friend the kernel of a sense of mission that has stayed with me throughout my Jesuit life. The challenge has been to embark on that mission maturely. As a novice I was too willing to excuse the slight of a professed father who encountered me at a jubilee. I was standing with another novice, who was the only other person of color in the novitiate, when the Jesuit approached us and introduced himself. Very quickly he began to bemoan the absence of good Irish boys who formerly entered the Society in such great numbers. Without giving us a chance to respond, he walked away with a look of disgust. The incident would hardly be worth remembering if the sense that not all Jesuits were quite equal did not regularly raise its head. There were in our province men of Irish, Italian, French Canadian, and Polish background. The leadership, however, was largely and traditionally in the hands of the Irish. Other cultural forces withdrew in their presence, with the result that humor and tastes came to be determined largely by the predominant group. Others seemed to exist on the margins of the Society in New England.

Socialization in the province depended somewhat on a scholastic's adaptability to the humor (often ethnic humor), tastes, and expectations of the group. For my own part, I developed another consciousness. I created the consciousness to survive and thrive in the group, but as a guest. I knew

more about them as a culture, after all, than they knew about my culture. In this consciousness I am aware of how to act, how to enjoy the humor, how to envision the world, how to draw from the cultural wellspring in the way the Irish-Americans do. My own cultural consciousness was there as well, sometimes rebelling against the unfairness, sometimes mocking the other, sometimes offering protection and consolation, most times bemoaning my capitulation and always being the place from which I communicated with God. W. E. B. Du Bois, the African-American historian, argued at the beginning of the last century that such a tension within one person could not last for long. A black man so divided must eventually learn to hate one consciousness and love the other, he thought. My first spiritual director said that, faced with this difficulty for too long, I would either run away from the Society of Jesus or I would become continuously rebellious or I would create a fantasy world in which I would live out the rest of my religious life. My arrival in Detroit, first as a regent and then as a new priest, forced me to find a healthier route along a different path.

## **The Ties That Bind**

About 3 percent of the Catholic population in the United States are black. About 1 percent of all Catholic priests are black. There are currently thirteen Americans of African descent who are Jesuits. That is to say, one-third of 1 percent of all Jesuits in the United States Assistency are Americans of African descent. Black Jesuits are a rare group indeed. No matter how the numbers are massaged, black Jesuits remain a very small percentage of any Catholic clerical population. The oldest among black Jesuit priests entered in 1951, and the youngest entered in 1981. Every province except Detroit has at least one African-American member. Two have been novice masters, one has been socius to a provincial, some have been superiors, and two were ordained bishops. Four are in pastoral ministries, three in higher education, two in secondary education, two in specialized apostolates, one works for the province, and one prays for the Society. There is another distinguishing feature of black Jesuits, however, which I have found particularly interesting. Almost half of all black American Jesuits have served the Church for extended periods of time outside traditional Jesuit works. Most of that number have even lived outside a community for some time.

I am loath to generalize the experience of Jesuits of African descent. When we gather, I find a comfortable resonance among the several experiences, however. All are committed to faith in Jesus Christ. Most have a role in some worshiping community distinct from the Jesuit community. Most have, or have had, a proprietary interest in black students or black families

or black communities that derives from their own cultural identity. Most are happy in their lives as Jesuits. Almost all have known the tension of being black and Jesuit in the United States. Almost all have had to discern choices that would offer a measure of peace for their hearts and minds.

When I left Detroit and higher education to work in a Los Angeles parish, several black Jesuits found it hard to understand. One or two thought that I had taken leave of my senses. A few thought I had my senses quite in hand and was simply positioning myself cleverly for episcopal advancement. They found it difficult to accept that I was searching for a place where I could stand solidly as a Jesuit and an adult American Catholic of African descent. I wanted to work in a place where my own consciousness would be an equal partner in discernment rather than an observer in the discernment of others. In the four years I have served Holy Name of Jesus Parish, I have been happier than at any other time in my Jesuit life. I feel both more in command of my senses and more in sympathy with Ignatius's prohibitions against positions of power and honors (ecclesiastical or not) than ever before.

On any Sunday morning I now rise before a sea of faces that are mostly black and somewhat Latino and occasionally white or Asian. Motivated by the Word of God, I preach what I honestly believe is the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. Drawing on the experiences of people just like them, I strive to demonstrate the enduring truth of the Gospel. I sympathize with pain and I challenge intransigence. I criticize idolatry and encourage holiness. In a symbiotic way we meet one another's needs, my congregation and I. We are bound together. The distance between me and those I serve has diminished drastically in the midst of my mission to Holy Name of Jesus Parish in Los Angeles. The dissociation between myself and my Jesuit life has never felt more reconciled. I have found my home again. I have come home.



## Four Reasons Why I, a Mexican-American, Joined the Society of Jesus and Remain a Member

by Eduardo C. Fernandez, S.J.

I can't say why, but I've always liked lists. When I was a kid, midsummer would find me making lists of the types of fireworks I was hoping to be able to buy for the Fourth of July. At the end of the summer vacation, as school time approached, I would not only make my list of needed school supplies but sometimes draw pictures of them. Other lists, such as who had batted on my baseball team or who were the altar servers assigned that week, accompanied me as I entered adolescence. To this day, I carry around a list of to-do's, or *que-haceres*, written on a white index card. So here's another list, one much more profound than what fireworks I'll purchase or how many pencils and pens I think I'll need for school. More like the type of lists we make on retreat, those enumerating graces, gifts, even pious resolutions, this list is an attempt to explain a love affair. Not easy, even for a passionate Latino like me. But it's about falling in a love with a vision, a way of following Jesus, which to this day has not left me in peace, if by "peace" you mean conformity, status quo, "just enough to get by." Okay, enough introductions. Oh, one more point, as they used to say (more or less) in the beginning of the series *Dragnet*: "The names have been omitted to protect the innocent." Those of you still living will recognize yourselves in my anecdotes. To you and to our brothers who have gone home to the Lord, my eternal gratitude. Now on to "the list."

*I met model Jesuits who trusted that God would have his way with me  
if they just sowed a few seeds.*

As a boy growing up on the U.S.-Mexican border in El Paso, Texas, I was fortunate to meet Jesuits full of life and with a great sense of humor. Jesuits of the Mexican Province, some of whom had been born in the United States, staffed our parish in Ysleta, a small mission town founded in 1682. While I was in grammar school, Jesuit High was still in existence, and

occasionally some of its faculty members would take weekend Masses, give us Lenten or vocation talks, or even teach at our parochial school. Besides thinking that they “seemed really smart to me,” I remember how approachable they were. During my high-school years, I worked at the rectory to pay my way through the Christian Brothers’ school, since by then Jesuit High El Paso had closed. Often Mexicans came to the church office to beg. I cannot remember any of them being sent away without having received some kind of help, financial or otherwise. Countless times I poured out my heart to more than one of the Jesuits, knowing that he would listen and offer me some practical advice.

They were also very generous in helping my parents raise eleven children. On more than one occasion, I remember them visiting our home. Because Jesuits had been numerous in the area since the late-nineteenth century, our family was well acquainted with them. At the parish, I met a very zealous Mexican Jesuit who had been a good friend of my great-grandfather, who had come from New Mexico. My dad once told me that he had heard it said that “los jesuitas mueren al pie del cañón.”<sup>2</sup> My sister, at the ripe age of fourteen, was running youth dances and other worthwhile activities, thanks to the confidence the pastor put in her and her youth group. When I was seventeen, this same Jesuit took me to visit the interior of Mexico so that I could get to know my ancestral roots. That trip had a profound effect on me as I realized the monumental culture achieved by my forebears.

When you grow up in an area where most of the manual laborers speak Spanish, you unconsciously wonder if Spanish is a language that characterizes the less educated. Similarly, you wonder if your people are not as “cultured” as those in the U.S. mainstream. It was the Jesuits and the Christian Brothers and their lay collaborators who taught me that along with a William Shakespeare, there had also been a Miguel de Cervantes. Likewise, years later, as I pore over writings about popular Catholicism in west Texas penned by a French Jesuit who baptized both my dad and me, I feel affirmed that, as this wise historian and pastor observed, our Latino spirituality is indeed a very profound one. These men kept insisting that our Hispanic culture is not only a gift for us but also for others.

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<sup>2</sup> This can be loosely translated into English to mean “Jesuits die with their boots on” (or “in the thick of the battle.—ED.).



Amazed by their grasp of languages and the historical anecdotes some loved to recount at table, as well as by their reverence when it came to humbling themselves before God in prayer or conversation, I had no doubt that if I eventually joined the Jesuits, I would get a good education, develop a deep spiritual life, and laugh a lot.

After graduating from high school, I decided to attend Loyola University of the South in New Orleans and major in sociology. There I encountered men of the same caliber: competent, affable, and fun loving. Although I knew better than to come to class unprepared for my sociology-of-religion class, I was quite surprised when the professor, a Jesuit sociologist who had been very active in the civil-rights movement, would say something to this effect, "Mr. Fernandez, since you are the expert in Latin American affairs, tell us something about these growing *comunidades de base*."

"*Comunidades de* what?" I'd think to myself; "why do I have to know about these things when the rest of these slobs can sit there in hopeful anticipation of quarter-beer night in the quad next Friday, but I have to come up with a respectable answer!" Only years later did I realize that my professor knew that because I had been privileged to grow up in a bicultural world, I had a particular sensitivity to issues south of the border, whether I wanted to or not. He knew that my background was an advantage, not a handicap.

There was another wonderful man whom we used to call *abuelo* (grandfather)—though never to his face, of course—who used to invite us to his office to listen to classical music. A musicologist and overall Renaissance man, he awoke in me an appreciation for the fine arts, and also afforded me many opportunities to speak the Spanish I had grown up with in El Paso. When I was a senior at Loyola, he shared with me over a pitcher of beer that at the age of sixty-five he had been accepted for the international apostolate in Paraguay. Overwhelmed by his generosity, I confided to him that I too had decided to volunteer for the apostolate, but that for the time being I would enter the novitiate at Grand Coteau, Louisiana.

*The Society taught me that God had given me gifts  
and helped me develop them.*

Once a New Orleans newspaper quoted a very well-known, charismatic Jesuit as saying something like this: "The Jesuits taught me that I, a river rat

from Algiers [an area across the Mississippi River], had God-given gifts. Furthermore, they taught me how to use them for his greater honor and glory in the service of humanity." One of the questions I was struggling with at the time was whether I, the son of an auto mechanic, could thrive in a Society that seemed extremely comfortable in a white-middle-class world, where I did not feel comfortable. I recalled what a friend had to say when, as an undergraduate, I told him about my decision to join the Jesuits: "Why not join another order? You want to work with the poor, and you know the Jesuits work chiefly with the rich." Those words in that newspaper story came from a man who understood what I was feeling. Yet, the Society had provided the means for him to grow. On numerous occasions after that, brother-Jesuits shared with me their own family histories. I saw that some had come from a working-class background, just as I had, and others from a rural background, just like my grandfather, who was an immigrant from Mexico. One who was particularly proud of his father's being an active member of the boiler's union has a special place in my heart.

Thanks to superiors who understood how important it was that I steep myself in my cultural identity, I had ample opportunities to improve my Spanish, both in the United States and in Mexico, to get a master's degree in Latin-American studies and to travel to those regions, and finally, to work with *comunidades de base* in Mexico during my third year of regency. Maybe now I would be able to answer that Jesuit sociologist's inquiry! It was in Mexico that I discovered that I was not Mexican. I remember feeling very hurt when one of the Jesuits affectionately called me a "gringo"! Me, a gringo! That term referred to the others, not to me. Yet, the more I thought about how he had categorized me, the more I realized that in many ways I was very North American. In fact, because that was where God had arranged for me to be born, I had to embrace that cultural heritage also.

At JSTB for my theology studies, I was graced with exceptional teachers who assured me that my questions regarding identity, culture, and faith were worth pursuing. Around the time when our brother-Jesuits were assassinated at the University of Central America in San Salvador, I volunteered to help with building maintenance and Sunday liturgies at the Oakland Catholic Worker, a refugee home for Central Americans. I remember being quite impressed with the minister from the theologate who, in his initial attempts at Spanish, would preside at the family-style Eucharists held

there. He was the same one who hired most of the maintenance staff who continue today to serve the JSTB.

*By sending me out of the country to do further studies, the Society helped me to expand my horizons significantly.*

When I was in Rome for further studies in the early nineties, I was surprised to hear so often that I did not seem to come from the United States. Someone who grew up on the U.S.–Mexican border in a city that is always drawing the line between them (Mexico) and us (the United States), at first I found this difficult to explain. On occasion, I might even be introduced as someone from Mexico. For this and other reasons, I found myself with another identity crisis. Who was I? The wisdom I had received as a child proved very beneficial. As I had been told, I was both, Mexican and North American. That meant I could draw from the riches of both. In my house, the Collegio Bellarmino, whose residents came from over twenty countries, I could converse with just about everyone in Spanish or English. With a second glass of wine at meals, my Italian (which was really Spanish with a few more vowels added to the ends of words) became amazingly fluent. As I was spending my novitiate experiment in the lower Rio Grande Valley in Texas, I quickly realized that my linguistic and cultural heritage could be a great bridge builder, and that therefore I brought with me some important gifts from my culture. And at times when I felt anxious because of my identity, God seemed to send me people from all over the world who had been forced to navigate even-deeper waters in terms of interculturality. Incidentally, I also realized how hard it is to learn a language (even a language as close to Spanish as Italian is) from scratch. I found myself more tolerant of my poor Jesuit brothers back home who found themselves struggling to learn Spanish.

As an international order, we Jesuits are challenged to cross these linguistic barriers, seeing them as an opportunity to learn the art of dialog. Ideals like inculturation and interreligious dialog can only come about through the painstaking work and humility that result from trying to learn a language. That is true especially when it is not clear how one will use this new language in his ministry, as when U.S. novices are required to learn Spanish. Beyond linguistic humility, my days in Rome and other experiences of living with brothers from different parts of the world taught me that there is always a situation, cultural or otherwise, much more difficult than

mine. Listening to stories of clandestine Spiritual Exercises told by Jesuits from the former Soviet Union or hearing a young Central American Jesuit describe how he and the other scholastics cleaned up the blood after the slaughter of the UCA martyrs left me feeling that my struggles to fit into a North American Society of Jesus were nothing compared to their experiences.

In these situations of living in international communities, whenever I was tempted to prejudge others on the basis of what country they were from, I would ask myself, "What if they determined that you were like this or that simply because you are from the States or of Mexican ancestry?"

*Having been challenged by the Society, I also feel called to humbly suggest some places where I, a member of an ethnic minority, feel that Jesuits need to be challenged.*

Every now and then, in parishes, lay-formation classes, workshops, or retreats, I meet a young Latino, often an immigrant, who seems a great potential Jesuit candidate except for his not being college material now and being too old for some of the educational opportunities that I was given in my early teens. Should I encourage him to consider joining our *minima Compañía de Jesús*? Especially when I have in mind someone I directed through a nineteenth-annotation retreat, someone who eagerly took to Ignatian spirituality and has a gift for working with people, I can't help wondering why we can't or don't make room for a person like that. I see how other religious communities on the West Coast appear to be doing much more than we to welcome such a candidate. For example, there are candidacy houses, ESL (English-as-a-second-language) classes, community colleges, and the like all within a religious community environment. True, many of these candidates eventually leave the religious community, but I see a small group of persons who are not from the dominant white-middle-class culture but are starting to form a critical core. And in any case, some of the ones who leave go on to do good work in various parish and diocesan ministries, as do some of the students we had in our minor seminaries.

By holding too rigidly to what constitutes the ideal candidate, whether in terms of age or education, are we unaware of how members of other cultures view life and thus lose possible candidates? For many persons from cultural backgrounds where family is central, life choices such as those involving marriage or careers are often made at a much earlier age. There-

fore, by the time we evaluate them as college material, they have embraced other vocational options. Put quite simply, in some cultures, because of economic and familial responsibilities some young men are forced to mature sooner than young men in the dominant culture. In the same vein, we must take into account the important role that families often play in the lives of these men. One cannot assume that a vocation decision is theirs alone.

Also, it seems to me that the majority of our apostolates and resources in this country are dedicated to the middle and upper classes, not the poorer sectors of society. While relatively recent projects such as the Nativity schools, Cristo Rey High School in Chicago, the Jesuit Volunteer Corps, community-service programs operating out of our high schools, inner-city parishes, refugee ministries, and the like are models of committed insertion among the poor, we still have a long way to go. I'll never forget a province meeting in which one of the Jesuits in the high-school apostolate declared that he was from a working-class family. He went on to mention other Jesuits in the room who were in the same boat. He concluded, "My concern today is that none of us who had the privilege of a Jesuit education would be able to afford it today."

I end with a call for more compassion among the brethren. That a Jesuit happens to be a member of a particular racial or ethnic minority does not mean that he represents that group or will necessarily be conversant in that culture. For example, many second-, third-, and later-generation Latinos no longer speak Spanish. I am concerned that sometimes we first-generation hyphenated Americans often ask these men to measure up to "what we are supposed to be like if we hold on to our culture." This approach ignores our need to assimilate in many ways to the U.S. culture in order to be able to function in it. This assimilation shouldn't necessarily be seen as a bad thing; after all, all cultures are dynamic. They change by adapting themselves to different times and circumstances.

We have a saying in Spanish, "Dios sabe lo que hace."<sup>3</sup> I consider it extremely providential that God invited me, through the men I have mentioned and the support of my family and parish community, to become part of this least Society of Jesus. At times when it seemed as though fear, lack of self confidence, mediocrity, ethnocentrism, or hopelessness would swallow me, it has been for me a formidable companion, assuring me, in the words

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<sup>3</sup> (God knows what he is doing.)

of Fr. Ignatius, that God will never be outdone in generosity. *Gracias, o Dios, por estos fieles compañeros!*<sup>4</sup>

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## Little Brown Brother

by Gerdenio Manuel, S.J.

Although I'm a California Province Jesuit, I am a native New Yorker: born at St. Luke's Hospital in Manhattan, I attended kindergarten at PS 22 and grade school at St. Michael's in Flushing. Having grown up in the fifties in Whitestone and Flushing in the borough of Queens, I remember New York as a warm and welcoming city. Our neighborhood was mostly Jewish, Italian, and Irish-American. We were the only Pilipinos and the only Asians in the neighborhood, but it didn't seem to matter.<sup>5</sup> Our closest friends were the Fantuzzis across the street, and all the neighborhood families were welcome in one another's homes and apartments. I didn't recognize anything different about myself or my family other than that all of us were noticeably shorter than everyone else.

Being short or small did not hold any of us back. After work my father went to night school to complete the undergraduate and graduate degrees that enabled him to pursue a lifetime career in the Philippine Foreign Service. At St. Michael's, my sister once was the May Queen and I was class president several years running. The Sisters of Saint Joseph, Brentwood, were remarkably even-tempered, fair with praise and the ruler, and especially patient with the newly arrived students from Cuba who had some trouble with English. At compulsory benediction, as we sang the "Tantum ergo" with all the lights out in the church and the smell of incense

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<sup>4</sup> (Thank you, Lord, for these faithful companions!)

<sup>5</sup> Filipino-American activists spell *Filipino* with a *P*, in contrast to the Spanish and American-colonial spelling, which uses an *F* even though the letter *F* did not exist in Philippine native dialects.

everywhere, there was the sense that all of us at St. Michael's belonged to God and perhaps even to one another. It seemed there was nothing more important than being Catholic, no matter who you were or where you were from.

Adolescence and later-life experience would complicate my naive understanding of race, religion, culture, faith, and community. One of my earliest memories of what it meant to be Pilipino was the boast I heard over and over again from middle-school classmates that General MacArthur and the United States "saved" the Philippines, which in their minds clearly established the superiority of the United States and the American people over the Philippines and Pilipino people. This made me in their words a "little brown brother."<sup>6</sup> At home, former U.S. Army doctors—who along with my mother, a Pilipina U.S. Army nurse, were World War II prisoners of war and survivors of the Bataan death march—talked instead about shared suffering, surviving together, serving one another, and the extraordinary acts of kindness and generosity they had experienced. As my mother blushed in silence, they told me stories of her courage and fortitude in their most trying circumstances and of her compassion for the soldiers under her care. They made their visits to our home occasions for remembering and expressing their gratitude. Being small and Pilipino mattered in different ways to different people, and was beginning to matter to me.

Like the Vietnamese who would later also be identified with an unforgettable war, Pilipino-Americans still struggle with the myth and reality of World War II and U.S. colonization. and continue to fight for the veteran rights and benefits that the U.S. government had promised its "little brown brothers and sisters." Within American popular culture and society, we aim to establish our identity as a unique ethnic group with a distinctive cultural history as well as a contemporary set of political concerns.

In my more than thirty years as a Jesuit, I can recall several experiences that helped me understand how Jesuits and others failed to appreciate the extent to which my cultural context and self-understanding determine how I live my life, my ministry, and my priesthood in the Society. Sometimes, there were "innocent" insults rooted in ignorance or mistaken attributions. I have never forgotten a famous interchange following a university

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<sup>6</sup> A term made popular during the U.S. colonial period by William Howard Taft, first governor-general of the Philippines; it is also used in reference to other indigenous peoples.

lecture on missiology by historian Fr. Horatio de La Costa, a former Philippine provincial and at that time one of Fr. Arrupe's general assistants. With some impatience, a priest commented in a thick Irish brogue, "Tell me Father, until the arrival of our Christian missionaries, weren't the Filipinos pagan, after all?" To which Fr. de La Costa patiently replied, "No, Father, they were animists. They worshiped the god of the trees, the god of the rivers, the god of the lakes—they were animists, Father, just like the Irish."

In the years to come, the grace and wit of his reply helped me respond kindly or at least silently when, greeting people at the church doors, I would be met with "Father, welcome to St. Theresa's; it must be Mission Sunday," or, "Thank you, Father; it was a lovely Mass and you speak such beautiful English," or, "We just love the islands!" In the Jesuit dining room at Santa Clara University during my early years as a faculty member, I was walking by one of the tables at lunch when a guest snapped his fingers at me, signaling me to clear the table and bus his dishes. Neither educational achievement, living in a religious community, nor holy orders made me immune from the stereotyping, entitlement, and rudeness that our kitchen and household help—many of whom are Pilipino or Latino in the California Province—sometimes experience from our guests or even from ourselves. After all, not too long ago California law prohibited Pilipinos from marrying whites, and in my college years I can recall a good friend awkwardly informing me that her Sicilian parents preferred that their daughter find another date for the freshman dance.

I would like to believe that we've come a long way from those days, especially in the Society; but sometimes I wonder. When I was California's formation director and for a time also vocation director, many in our province were delighted with the growing diversity of our scholastics. Others would ask, "How many speak English?" or, "Are you sure they are prepared for our course of studies?" or, believe it or not, "Not counting the minorities, how many vocations do we have?" Similarly, when it was time for regency assignments, I would have to engage in prolonged and intense conversation with some administrators to convince them that our scholastics of color were as capable of meeting ordinary teaching and pastoral responsibilities as were their peers. "And what about their accents; what's being done about that?" I've frequently wondered why European accents are considered charming while Asian or Hispanic ones are not.



I have often been questioned about my credentials, experience, and training—right down to where I studied and when I received my degrees. When visiting other communities in the assistancy, I found that some Jesuits were surprised and incredulous that I was California's formation director, a clinical psychologist, and a tenured university professor. More recently, a former high-school Jesuit administrator visiting my community at Santa Clara lamented over dinner that his prep school was admitting "Qwoks, Chins, and Nguyens" while rejecting some students of Irish and Italian "heritage," some of whom were even relatives of Jesuits. More subtly, in group settings I've sometimes observed that Jesuits of color are neglected in conversation, albeit unconsciously, to the extent that some Jesuits even fail to make eye contact with us. Often enough, these experiences within the Society leave me feeling "invisible" and, like people of color in so many different situations, without legitimate claim to position or place, "guests" at the big house and without a voice.

While some experiences in the Society have challenged and even hurt me, I remain grateful and proud to be a Jesuit. I have experienced the profound depth of community life and the transforming power of our ministry. As a Pilipino who highly values and needs companionship, I have always felt the presence and support of the Society in times of personal crisis and pain. When my parents wanted to return home to the Philippines after fifty years of living in the States, and later when they had to be separated because of my father's advancing dementia, Jesuits offered to help me, so that I would not face these challenges alone, even in the Philippines. When my father had to return to California for medical treatment and for a time when he was in need of some assisted living before returning to the Philippines, the rector at Santa Clara University at that time welcomed him into our infirmary and community. And when each of my parents died, a close Jesuit friend traveled with me to the Philippines and helped me bury them and care for my extended family. In these and numerous other instances of faithful and compassionate support, the Society's love has been unwavering and unconditional, beyond what I had ever thought possible.

With the same power and grace, Jesuit life and ministry have given me the opportunity to deepen my love for others and my appreciation for the diversity of our world. The witness of my Jesuit brothers through the years, especially with regard to the preferential option for the poor, has challenged me to travel where I would never have had the courage to venture alone, and to stretch my own cultural and class boundaries to

discover the breadth and range of God's concern for all peoples and nations whether in the barrios of Manila, the campos of Salvador, the favellas of Brazil, or the inner cities of our own country. Ultimately, the challenge of multiculturalism and diversity is not about individuals or even groups simply being at home, but about discovering the world as our common ground and justice and service as our common destiny.

We need to see with more discerning eyes how differences matter and how they don't. A close Jesuit friend who knows me as well as anyone else long believed that my most distinctive traits were simply idiosyncratic. However, after spending time with my family in the Philippines, he concluded, "Oh my God, the whole country is populated with people like you." I have no doubt that most Jesuits in my province identify Pilipinos with *lumpia* and chicken *adobo*, bamboo dances, the blessing of homes and cars, and elaborate folk celebrations and rituals. But few have deep insight into the Pilipino psyche—the paramount importance, for example, of *pakikisama*, *utang na loob*, and *lambing*, to name just a few possible Pilipino character traits that I also embrace as my own. Loosely translated, *pakikisama* is cooperation, *utang na loob* combines loyalty, reciprocity, and gratitude, and *lambing* is the need to express and receive solace, favor, and affirmation from important lifelong relationships. These attributes can combine to form a leadership style or way of working very different from the typical American "alpha male" paradigm that stresses dominance, power, and assertiveness. Positively interpreted, Pilipinos can be viewed as process-oriented, sensitive and compassionate, respectful of and even deferential to authority. We value relationships—especially among friends and co-workers—more than position or place or products; and we lead "from behind" by persuasion, affirmation, and kindness. Viewed negatively, we can seem wishy-washy, maudlin, and sentimental. We can appear to be fawning, cliquish, manipulative, and lacking independence and self-assertion. Positively and negatively, this leadership and working style is clearly different and must be carefully interpreted when one tries to understand how Pilipinos may or may not be expressing their needs, hopes, and dreams. From an assimilationist perspective, I certainly have learned that I may need to put aside my cultural proclivities to be heard and counted. On the other hand, from the perspective of acculturation and rapidly changing demographics, the Society and its various institutions will also need to see the present and future reality through many new eyes and to appreciate the leadership and working styles of different and sometimes recently arrived cultures and communities. If we

are not to remain guests in this house, ask us what we need to be genuinely at home and to become full partners in serving God's people, and hear us in our own voice.

I still believe in what I learned from my Pilipino family and from the Sisters at Saint Michael's—that we all belong to God and to one another. But through my Jesuit life and ministry, I have also come to trust in the God of Pentecost, who created all the ways we have been fed throughout our lifetimes by our families and our cultural heritage. As we discover who we are and tell our life stories to others, they will understand what God has created in us—even what is most different from them and unique to us. As we listen to each other's stories, we will realize that all of us are summoned to the same table, where God feeds us not only with familiar food and spirits but also with the new and untried food and spirits of God's most recent revelation. And here, around the Lord's table, God's grace will make us mindful of those not yet at the table, those who haven't found their places, those whose stories are yet to be heard.

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## Not Unlike Augustine of Hippo

by J-Glenn Murray, S.J.

“A Christian at 33, a priest at 36, a bishop at 41: everyone is familiar with the biographical sketch of Augustine of Hippo, a sinner turned saint.”<sup>7</sup> A Catholic Christian at 10, a presbyter at 29, a bishop not as of this writing at 51, and with some certainty, never: some are familiar with my biographical sketch, surely a sinner and the stuff of no small amusement for select gatherings of “Ours.”

The town of my birth, Philadelphia, unlike Augustine's Tagaste, is a major city and not far from “the shore.” Flirting with the error of the Manichees has thus far not been a temptation, though I have been described

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<sup>7</sup> Leonard Foley, *Saint of the Day: Lives and Lessons for Saints and Feasts of the New Missal* (Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1990), 223.

as the only black Pelagian still afoot. My mother, though very proud of me, has on occasion “wept bitterly” when thinking of me. Yet, it was I who prayed for and preceded her into the heart of the Roman Church that we both cherish. My father, at one time a thoroughgoing atheist, could hardly be described as an “idolater and of violent disposition” (though at times, the true truth being told, there has been a tendency toward both). No one who has ever met me has left me not knowing of my “love of the language” of Shakespeare and Toni Morrison both. And my rage for rhetoric is renowned. Nevertheless, there are no scribes scribbling my “profound mystagogy” and “penetrating homilies” for generations to come. I have not “entered into relations with a woman, irregular though stable” and have no son. Finally and most assuredly, my “prophetic and philosophical legacy” to the Church will only be described as lean, even negligible.

With so many differences between the sainted Augustine and me, when asked for an essay “describing how I achieved and continue to experience a Jesuit identity among many northern-European Americans while maintaining my own cultural roots and genius,” why did I entitle it “Not unlike Augustine of Hippo”? Simple, like every other *black Jesuit* and not unlike Augustine, I have had to negotiate two worlds, two cultures. Not unlike Augustine and perhaps some other Jesuits, I have heard a child’s voice cry, “Tolle lege! Tolle lege!” (Take it up and read it!) and I have. Let me explain.

First a story. Once while I was pacing about a neighborhood in Dallas, Texas, I came upon an elderly black woman at a bus stop. Having been raised a polite child, I stopped and said:

“Good morning.”

“Mornin’, baby.”

“How are you?”

“Honey, let me tell you!”

“So, how are you?”

“Honey, I’m blessed!”

“Awright, now!”

“And you know why I’m blessed?”

“No, but I’m sure you’re going to tell me.”

“I’m blessed because God woke me up this morning. Kept the four corners of my room and my bed from becoming the narrow confines of a greedy grave. Clothed me and a representative few of us on this planet in our right minds.”

And then she just burst into song: "What a mighty God we serve. What a mighty God we serve. Angels bow before him. Heaven and earth adore him. What a mighty God we serve."

I could only stammer, "Amen!"

"No, honey, I need your help. I need some support."

So the two of us, at a bus stop in the Dallas noonday sun, sang, "What a mighty God we serve . . ."

That woman taught me an essential of Christianity: an attitude of gratitude. I have not since forgotten that lesson. What other response could one muster for such wondrous love—a sacrificial love that has won for us our well-being and redemption, life and grace in God, the Father, through Christ Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

My blessings are manifold. I was blessed with a wonderful immediate family. My mother, Lillian Marie, taught me a *joie de vivre* that is still made manifest in my love of entertaining. My father, James Albert, helped me navigate the ways of the Western world and the hermeneutic of suspicion (more on that later). My sister, Jacqueline Denise, schooled me in unconditional love.

Contrary to what screen writers of a certain ilk would have us believe, my experience of religious women, namely, the "Glen Riddle" Franciscans, was nothing short of sublime. While others dreamed of being firefighters and doctors, and mommies and daddies, I longed to be a "Sister" (no more on that). My niece has as her middle name Mercedes, after Sr. Marie Mercedes, O.S.F. (a.k.a. Sr. Susan Dentz, O.S.F.), so great was her influence and love.

It was in the midst of all these childhood blessings that I received the greatest blessing: the sacraments of initiation. Though I did not know it at the time, what I experienced was what is inscribed at the baptistery at Saint John Lateran in Rome:

Here is born in Spirit-soaked fertility a brood destined for another City, begotten by God's blowing and borne upon this torrent by the Church their virgin mother. Reborn in these depths they reach for heaven's realm, the born-but-once unknown by felicity. This spring is life that floods the world, the wounds of Christ its awesome source. Sinner, sink beneath this sacred surf that swallows up age and spits up youth. Sinner, here scour sin away down to innocence, for they know no enmity who are by one font,

one Spirit, one faith made one. Sinner, shudder not at sin's kind and number, for those born here are holy.<sup>8</sup>

In the midst of all these early blessings, I also knew what Augustine knew, what so many other children of Africa have known when confronting a colonizing culture: "double consciousness," namely, "two souls, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals within one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder."<sup>9</sup> It was in the midst of this striving that I first heard, "Tolle lege!"

Though my mother's extended family was "bright, high yellow," they loved their blackness and their Southern roots, despite the allure to do and be otherwise. The sword side of the family was "deeply dark" and reveled unabashedly in that self-same "Negritude." Somewhere in the midst of all this rejoicing, I heard a cry: "Tolle lege!" Hearing, I obeyed. What I took up and read quite conscientiously, however, were the "ways of the white man."

This summons was quite indistinct while growing up in the projects of "North Philly" surrounded by family, friends, and a host of "play sisters, cousins, and aunts." This summons was rather faint at Saint Elizabeth's school where the population was totally "colored." Moving to a predominantly white neighborhood, church, and school beckoned what was sotto voce to a full-throated blare.

Hearing, I obeyed. I became the model *cultured* little *boy*. By the time I had finished grade school and my studies at Saint Joe's Prep (our high school in Philadelphia), I was remarkably proficient in the language of Shakespeare and the sisters Brontë, of Wilde, Frost, Dickinson, Hemingway, and Salinger. I could and did bask in Bach and revel in Ravel. I appreciated pasta, paella, and the artery-hardening sauces of the French before they adopted a cuisine that was nouvelle. I could show gratitude with a "Merci." With Xenophon I could pine, "Thalatta! Thalatta!" and opine with Cicero, "O tempora! O mores!" and no less, "Dum anima est, spes est." I even knew the difference between a Silver Bullet and a Negroni (not bad for an eighteen-year-old who learned both in the year of *The Graduate* and *Mame!*, the year of the deaths of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Francis Kennedy). I had visited Rome! I had picked up, read, meditated on, and appropriated the ways of whites. In a racist and class society, I had taken up my position of accommodation. The only protest was asking God why I was

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<sup>8</sup> Aidan Kavanagh, trans., *The Shape of Baptism: The Rite of Christian Initiation* (New York: Pueblo, 1978), 49.

<sup>9</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Vintage Books/The Library of America, 1990), 8 f.

cursed with being born black. Safe to say, I was self-loathing. Racism is a pernicious reality!

Then, on September 7, 1986, I entered our least Society and the voice that had been so uniform to that point changed its tune, not only in tenor but in timbre. Hearing, I obeyed. I picked up and read—experienced—the Spiritual Exercises. What a sound it echoed in my soul! Indeed the Exercises had soul, “the power to move and to evoke movement, i.e., emotion.”<sup>10</sup>

This word “emotion” is a tricky one. For many children of Africa it is a way of knowing.

This emotive way of knowing is not based primarily on the sense of sight as in the ocular, print-oriented culture of Europe, but on the African oral tradition, which tends to be poetic rather than literal. Whereas the European way might be summarized in Descartes’ “I think, therefore, I am,” the African model might be “I am, I dance the Other, I am.”

. . . [I]n this way of knowing “there is a natural tendency for interpenetration and interplay, creating a concert or orchestration in which the ear sees, the eye hears, and where one both smells and tastes color; wherein all the senses, unmuted, engage in every experience.” This way of knowing does not exclude a discursive dimension. It simply states that emotion is the primary way of knowing among African peoples and their descendants. It attests that objective detachment and analytical explanations are useful, but are not the sole means of communicating faith. And lastly, it asserts that peoples everywhere are not poetic or discursive, but both poetic and discursive.<sup>11</sup>

This is the way of the Spiritual Exercises: “meditations . . . which the retreatant reads, ponders, and prays over in order to be *informed, impressed, moved, and affected by them*” (emphasis added).<sup>12</sup> The goal of this way of knowing is the ability to discern God’s will and the freedom to do it. “Ideally, these exercises become, with practice over time, an habitual *modus operandi*.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Clarence Rivers, *Soulfull Worship* (Washington, D.C.: National Office for Black Catholics, 1974), 14.

<sup>11</sup> Secretariat for Liturgy and the Secretariat for Black Catholics of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Plenty Good Room: The Spirit and Truth of African American Catholic Worship* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1990), nos. 86 f.

<sup>12</sup> James L. Connor, “St. Ignatius’ Spiritual Exercises: Woodstock’s Way of Promoting Justice,” in *Jesuit Saturdays: Sharing the Ignatian Spirit with Lay Colleagues and Friends*, by William J. Byron (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2000), 5.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

The Spiritual Exercises affected me deeply. In them I found safe shelter, harbor, and home. My imagination was piqued, my soul was stirred. I was both excited and incited, though I did not know why. What I did not know then, but know now is that there is a voice in the Exercises clearly resonant in an African-American spirituality that is contemplative, holistic, communitarian, joyful, and emotive.<sup>14</sup>

The aim of the Exercises is to come (a) to understand Christ's mission: what it is for and what it fights *against* ("to know him more clearly"), (b) to admire him ("to love him more dearly"), and (c) to feel drawn to join him in his struggle and to follow on his mission ("to follow him more nearly").<sup>15</sup> This has always been the aim of the Black Church.

Even without my knowing it, Ignatian spirituality was in my soul, because, try as I might have to escape it, the African-American religious worldview was in my soul. Without having to dig deeply, one can see rather easily a connection between Ignatius and those of us who are heir to the black religious experience. Both, he and we, experienced poverty and persecution. Ignatius was constantly in and out of jail and lived under some of the worst conditions imaginable. He and we have been strangers in a strange land. He had to leave Spain because of the harassment of the Inquisition. He and we are incredibly Christocentric. And in the midst of "every danger, toil, and snare," both we and Ignatius found a profound intimacy with and trust in God. The Exercises worked, and I was off to discern God's will, hoping to do it.

Early on I discerned that God's will for me was in the arts, in liturgy, in education, with and among white people. Superiors had discerned and decided that what was to God's greater glory and the help of *my soul* was a very different will. They discerned a cry that directed me to take up and read my blackness. Their cry was *sankofa* (retrieval). It was a battle cry. And the battle was on!

It is not important to recount here the war plans, the battles or victories at Durham and Baltimore, the blood-stained streets of my soul, or even the final Peace Treaty of 1989 negotiated by the gentle James A. Devereux, S.J., and the vigilant (Arch)bishop James Patterson Lyke, O.F.M. (heroes, but that's another essay!). As instructive as it has been for me, the retelling might only serve to numb. Some short incidents, however, might engage the reader.

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<sup>14</sup> *Plenty Good Room*, nos. 78-104.

<sup>15</sup> Connor, "Spiritual Exercises," 5.



The first occurred in the winter of 1973. After a summer of *sankofa* in Chicago under the direction of two compelling black priests, Frs. George Clements and Paul Smith, I returned to collegiate studies with a changed name and a new attitude that could only be described as "Up against the wall, you expletives deleted!" Among other things, I had learned the power of the spirituals, arguably one of the greatest contributions made by people of color to this land. While many even now perceive them simply as palliative, my experience of them was not unlike Cheryl Kirk-Duggan's. She avers that in the spirituals

[t]he singers talked "face to face" with Old Testament heroes and heroines, and their New Testament co-suffering Jesus. Slaves appropriated basic theological ideas to express their religious cosmology and passion for freedom. The spiritual's core message focused on the protest hermeneutic of survival and hope.<sup>16</sup>

In that summer of *sankofa*, I learned that at the height of our enslavement we protested our captivity and sang of freedom not only in that great by and by, but here and now. In those heady days of the abolitionist movement, we sang the hymnody from such great liturgical books as Edwin F. Hatfield's *Freedom's Lyre*. While others at the turn of the century were celebrating a new century, we were concerned about ushering in the Kingdom. We sang the great hymns of Henry Sloane Coffin, Ambrose White Vernon, Mabel Mussey, and Mornay Williams. During the Civil Rights Movement we sat at counters, we marched in the streets, we boycotted, and we continued to sing. We dug deep into our past and brought forth those songs of protest that had galvanized our forebears in days gone by. Even when not on bended knee in church, we sang. We sang the blues and were moved from lament to praise. Though our praising drums were taken away from us, we shouted and clapped and moaned and stomped in rhythm. Underlying all this activity was protest and praise.<sup>17</sup>

Though I was praising God when I returned to Fusz Memorial, the scholasticate in St. Louis at that time, it was my protesting that was heard. I was angry, and superiors who had sent me away to become black were perplexed: "This is not what we meant at all. This is not what we meant at all!"

Unleashing blackness, calling for authentic diversity, is risky business. Those who do so often forget that such a call cannot be contained to

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<sup>16</sup> Cheryl Kirk-Duggan, "African American Spirituals, in *A Troubling in My Soul*, ed. Emilie Townes (Orbis, 1993), 156.

<sup>17</sup> See Jon Michael Spencer, *Protest and Praise: Sacred Music of Black Religion* (Fortress, 1990).

ethnic roots alone. It often engenders other questions of class, gender, and sexual identity. And in the case of the Society, issues of class are the most contentious. You are welcome to be whatever you wish as long as you are of our class (so some would contend).

*His dictis*, I had decided that I could no longer live with white people in a racist and oppressive environment. I informed my father, the atheist and skeptic, who thus informed me: "I don't believe in God, but I don't know anyone who does as much as you. You could no more stop being a Jesuit or becoming a priest than you could stop taking in air. It is who you are. You have to do what we all have done: deal with it! Sure, they're racist, but they are your brothers and I have seen the love that you and they have for one another. They can benefit. You already have!"

The second incident occurred shortly after I was ordained. I had been sent to our parish, Holy Cross, in Durham, N.C. After a meeting at which I was waxing brilliant on all manner of things, "a mother of the church," Dr. Barbara Nixon smiled politely and said: "Child, you have more to learn from us than we have from you. It's time to do a doctorate in blackness. We'll teach you and if you're smart and learn something, perhaps we'll even grant the degree!"

The third and fourth, the final, incidents took place in Baltimore while I was teaching at St. Frances Academy, the oldest black Catholic high school in the Western Hemisphere. After a particularly exasperating class in English, Joanne Williams blurted, "The problem with you, Father, is that you talk like white people and you want us to do the same." I bellowed, "Honey, white people only wish that they could speak as I do."

About a month later I was conducting a workshop on racism. During the question-and-answer period, a man asked me about the Maryland Province and slavery. I responded, and then a black woman remarked, "Don't you find it at least ironic, if not troubling, that you just said, 'Yes, we had slaves?'"

The waters of double consciousness are still being troubled. And not unlike Augustine, I continue to wade, trying with all my might not to be devoured by the Scylla of racism or swallowed up by the Charybdis of righteous anger. To quote many a black grandmother: "It ain't easy!" But I am grateful.

I am most grateful to the Society of Jesus. This happy band, this least society, has been an instrument of my well-being and *sankofa*, beginning with those who taught me at St. Joe's (thank you, Frank Nash, Steve Garrity, Tom Roach, Bill Watters, George Aschenbrenner) up to this present moment, and with the friendships (Jesuit and lay) that have been and are

inexpressibly consoling and no less challenging. Here, I have been able to discern God's will continually and join with others under the banner of Christ to serve God, the Church, and all creation (thank you, Walter Burghardt, for that inclusive insight). Though I have been an ardent critic of the "Jesuit Sedentary Rite," here was unleashed the power of that sacrificial memorial of the death-resurrection of the Lord Jesus that consumes me, animates me, drives me to passionate catechesis and praxis. Here I learned to pray the Prayer of the Church, the Liturgy of the Hours, at dawn and at dusk, "rejoicing with those who rejoice and weeping with those who weep," for there is no "I" without "we."<sup>18</sup> Here I have been permitted to be I, myself, in all my complexity, without censure or odious comparison. Here I have been encouraged mightily to bring to "Ours" and all those we serve the gift of blackness, for I have learned here that "the world is our house," and "there's plenty good room." Here, having learned "to think with the Church," I am grateful to work for Bishop Pilla and the Church in Cleveland by doing worship wisely and well. Here, having been graced by the presence of so many Jesuits—models and exemplars of faith and holiness—I have also been graced by the lives of other black Jesuits with whom a word need not be spoken for complete understanding to be realized. Here, with Jesuits of every color and hue, I have been able to but whisper: "Take, Lord, receive. . . . Done made my vow to the Lord. . . . You can change ma name." Here my sanctified soul has been able to shout: "I've been so busy praising my Jesus, I ain't got time to die. If I don't praise him, the rocks gonna' cry out. I ain't got time to die."

Here, I have survived. Better yet, I thrive. May we all continue to do so to God's greater glory and the help of souls. Let the Church say . . .

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## An Inner Journey

by Hung T. Pham, S.J.

Asians are often surprised when they learn that I am American. Most do not even believe that I live in the United States. However, this is not true for Vietnamese. People in Viet Nam quickly realize that I am not really Vietnamese, though I speak Vietnamese flawlessly and try to behave appropriately. Even my family members, at times, find the way I think and behave very American. Who am I really? Am I Vietnamese or American?

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<sup>18</sup> See the *General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours*, nos. 1–18.

And how has the struggle with ethnic identity affected my formation as a Jesuit? I believe these questions are part of a mysterious calling, a vocation that continues to unfold its meaning in my life journey.

It is providential that after having lived fifteen years in Viet Nam and fifteen years in the United States, I have spent my thirty-first year living and working in neither place. This year with the Jesuit Refugee Service in northern Thailand has provided me a more reality-based perspective for reflecting on who I am and have become. I am honored that the editors of *STUDIES* have invited me to share my journey as a Vietnamese-American Jesuit. It is my hope that through this sharing of my inner journey the readers will grow in an understanding and appreciation of what we Vietnamese-Americans have undergone.

I was born in 1969, the youngest of seven siblings, at the climax of the Viet Nam War. In 1975 the Communists from the North took over the South, ending the long war. My father, who had worked for the pro-American government of South Viet Nam, escaped the country by himself and came to the United States. Ten years later, when I was sixteen, my family was reunited with my father in Denver, Colorado. All I knew and felt then was the pain of leaving my friends behind and not knowing when I would see them again.

My family and I arrived in Denver in the midst of a winter snowstorm in 1985, an experience that was totally strange and foreign to me. And that was how it went during my early years of living in Denver. The first few years in high school were challenging because of the cultural barriers and language difficulties. Even more difficult, however, was the lack of anyone to talk to about my inner struggles to find my way in these new cultural conditions.

God and tennis were my rescuers. During my years in Viet Nam, the Salesians in my parish taught me how to pray and to entrust everything to God's hand. So after school I found myself regularly in a Catholic church near my house, telling God what was going on inside of me and asking for help. I received no answer, but in the utter silence of the dimly lit church I was convinced that God heard and understood what I was going through, and I felt more at peace and consoled leaving the church. Also, thanks to the Salesians, I had learned how to use sports as a way to channel my frustration. Every afternoon I found myself on a tennis court hitting the daylights

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out of tennis balls against a big cement wall, thus enabling my mind to take a break from thinking about the issues preying on it. During the first summer in Denver, I hit that tennis ball so often and so hard that I made the school's varsity tennis team in the following fall season, and three years later, earned a tennis scholarship to attend college.

With my tennis scholarship and a scholarship in mathematics, I was able to attend Regis University and to live in the dorms with other students who were mostly American. It was my first time away from the Vietnamese culture at home, fully immersed in the American way of life. I thought that this move away from home would solve my problem, or at least ease the tension within me. On the contrary, the decision to stay on campus threw me deeper into uncertainty about who I was. On the outside, I tried to act, to think, and to socialize as the other American students did. However, deep inside, I was afraid of losing my Vietnamese identity. I felt upset when people called me American. During the first few years at Regis, I felt like a walking contradiction in my way of thinking, feeling, and acting.

As the tension heightened, I pleaded harder with God. This time, in addition to the stillness I kept encountering in the college chapel, God sent into my life a young Jesuit priest, Fr. Kevin Burke, who became the equivalent of my spiritual director. Kevin spent many long hours tirelessly listening to what I had been going through. He gave me no answers, but simply sat there listening to my pain, assuring me that there was a meaning in this struggle of mine and that God was very much involved in all of it. Also through Kevin I began to learn about the Society of Jesus and its mission of educating students to become men and women for others. All the hard work of the first three years paid off. I blossomed during my senior year at Regis. I excelled in scientific studies and research, winning various national scholarships and recognition, including being selected by *USA Today* as one of the top twenty students in the United States. It was a dream come true. I was proud of being a Vietnamese who found success among other Americans. And I was in love. I had fallen in love with a woman whom I had grown up with in Viet Nam. She had recently immigrated to the United States. She knew who I was and seemed to identify with what I was going through. At the same time, I began falling in love with the Society and its mission. Increasingly there had been a tugging at my heart, something that kept nagging me to give back to the community all that I had received. In the spring of 1993, while I was in Washington, D.C., to receive the award from *USA Today*, my eyes were opened, and my heart was overwhelmed by the numerous gifts God had given to me. I decided to apply to the Society and in the fall entered our novitiate in Denver.

The novitiate marked the beginning of a trustful relationship between the Society of Jesus and me. The province had not had much experience with us Vietnamese. Yet I was impressed by the province's honesty in dealing with me. Both the novice director and the formation assistant admitted frankly that no one really knew what a Vietnamese-American Jesuit would be like, but we would figure it out as I moved along in my formation. These words of assurance took the pressure off, setting me free to discover who I would become. More important, the novitiate staff and my brother-novices assured me that I would not be alone in working it out. Somehow I felt that the novitiate was the right place for me.

Contrary to what I expected, the novitiate forced me to take a closer look at the inner struggle of my identity, the issue that I had buried in the whirlwind of college. Though I felt much loved and supported during the novitiate, most often I was caught in an emotional roller coaster moving back and forth between the excitement of having lived in two cultures and the utter loneliness of feeling lost, belonging to neither. The Spiritual Exercises came at the right time, helping me to put things in better perspective. During the long retreat, I again met the God who had loved and guided me through all the difficult steps of the journey. With God's grace I was able to take an honest look at "who I am" with my gifts and talents, pain and brokenness. In the midst of it all, God continued to call me to greater trust, reassuring me that there was still more awaiting me.

During the First Week of the Exercises, I became a citizen of the United States. Frankly, the decision to become a citizen was more a matter of convenience for the purpose of traveling than the actual realization of what had taken place in who I had become. So, I became American on paper; yet, in my heart and mind, I was convinced that I was still very much Vietnamese.

Toward the end of the novitiate, I thought I had it all figured out. I knew who I was—a Vietnamese who was learning and living in the American Society of Jesus. So, for the long experiment, I asked to go back to Viet Nam to rediscover and strengthen my Vietnamese identity after having been away from that country for ten years. In Viet Nam, instead of rediscovering and strengthening my Vietnamese identity, for the first time I felt American. The simple and honest reality slowly set in, and I hesitantly began to accept it: I had changed. The ways I thought and behaved were no longer authentically Vietnamese. In Viet Nam, I was reminded to conform obediently to tradition and authority, whereas in the United States I had been taught and grown accustomed to raise questions and to discuss everything. Though I tried as much as possible to be Vietnamese, something was lacking. And I was not the only one who recognized this. The Jesuits in Viet Nam shared

their insights and reflections in assisting me through this rather challenging experience. They jokingly and lovingly nicknamed me the “American Boy.” During my time in Viet Nam, instead of only strengthening my Vietnamese identity, I had come to accept and to cherish who I had become—a Vietnamese-American.

While the novitiate was the time when I discovered and affirmed my identity as a Vietnamese-American, scholastic life so far has been a journey of integrating my Vietnamese-American identity into life in the Society of Jesus. As challenging and grace filled as the process of accepting my identity was, the process of living it out within the Jesuit life has been at least as challenging and grace filled. After the novitiate, I was sent to Bellarmine House of Studies in St. Louis for philosophy and theology studies. There again I found much love and support from my superiors and my fellow Jesuit scholastics. However, there remained in me a strange feeling of inferiority with regard to other Jesuits, especially those who are American-born. I constantly felt pressured to do well, to do better than other scholastics. I thought that by doing so I would be recognized and loved by my superiors. When my superiors approved my plans, I felt they were doing me a favor. When they disapproved, I felt that they didn’t like me. I felt and acted as though I were a “second-class” citizen in the Society.

Thanks to my spiritual director, Sr. Marian Cowan, C.S.J., I was able to realize and overcome this dysfunctional feeling and perception. During one of our sessions, I mentioned to her how grateful I was to my superiors. There must have been something abnormal in the way I expressed my feeling of gratitude, because she asked me, “Do you express your gratitude in the same way to your family members?” A relatively simple question it seemed, yet it helped me to get to the core of the problem. In fact, I neither behaved nor thought in the same way in my family. When family members helped me, I was grateful, but I didn’t repeatedly and submissively say, “Thank you.” Also, in my family, I didn’t think in terms of “I” and “they” when talking about family matters and work. It was always “we” and “us.” I am a Jesuit, and the Society of Jesus is now my family. Why should my attitude and the way I express my gratitude be different? With Marian’s realistic perspective and encouragement, I have learned to be as honest with myself and with other Jesuits as I would be in my own family. Together with my new conviction, my way of thinking about the different works of the Society changed. Diverse though they are, they are part of the Society’s one mission being carried out by different individual members, all for the “greater glory of God.”

With this new attitude, I was excited about moving on to regency. At St. Louis University High School (SLUH), I was part of a long and

prestigious Jesuit tradition in secondary education in St. Louis. At St. Thomas Aquinas Parish, I fortunately had the opportunity to live and to accompany other Vietnamese immigrants in celebrating the extraordinary gift of an ordinary parish daily life. With Jesuit Refugee Service, I was privileged to be a part of the Society's efforts of collaborating with other religious, laymen, and laywomen in responding to the needs of the Karenni refugees in northern Thailand. In all these apostolic works, I did not think of myself as a Vietnamese-American, but primarily as a Jesuit who has been sent to labor for the sake of the Kingdom.

My Jesuit identity has been further strengthened and reinforced through the numerous reassuring acts of my Jesuit brothers. Here I would like to recall one of my fondest memories. During the Holy Thursday service a couple of years ago, while I was preparing the choir at St. Thomas Aquinas church, a friend of mine came and told me, "Your brother-Jesuits are here." I wondered who they were, perhaps other Vietnamese-American Jesuits in town. I couldn't believe my eyes when I looked at the congregation. There, seated in one row all in formal black attire, were all of my American brother-Jesuits from the Jesuit community at SLUH. Those who have worked in a high-school apostolate know how precious the short Easter break is. After classes on Holy Thursday, all one would want to do is to rest and relax, then perhaps attend a quiet service at a familiar parish. No one would think of traveling to a different part of town, let alone of attending a long service done totally in a different language. Yet these men did, including the eighty-year-old Bro. Thornton, who usually preferred to attend Holy Week services at home. My eyes filled with tears. By being there these men not only claimed me as their brother, but also claimed my work in the parish as part of the community's and the Society's work. "How appropriate," I thought as we celebrated the Lord's Last Supper together truly as brothers.

As I mature in the Society of Jesus, "who I am" ethnically is no longer an individual matter, since it has been incorporated and integrated into my identity as a Jesuit. Being a Jesuit, I have learned, means going beyond cultural differences and identities, beyond provincial and national territory. As a Jesuit, I am called to be available to be sent wherever there is a greater need. Also, I have learned, the process of becoming a Jesuit is a journey of constantly moving deeper into my desire, searching for that authentic voice that has called and led me into this path of life. And my life as a Vietnamese American reveals a unique history and concrete example of how one seeks to follow God's call in history.

Written in the Karenni Refugee Camp, June 2001



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