SOCIAL ANALYSIS

Linking Faith and Justice

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Chapter 1

Social Analysis: Tool of Pastoral Action

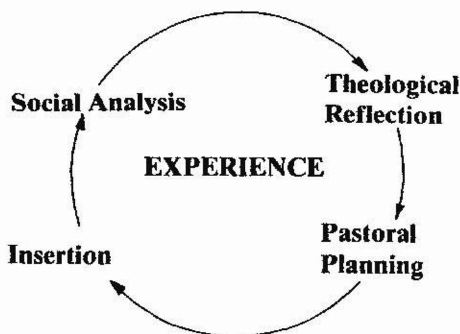
There can be two approaches to social analysis. Let's call one "academic" and the other "pastoral." The academic approach studies a particular social situation in a detached, fairly abstract manner, dissecting its elements for the purpose of understanding. The pastoral approach, on the other hand, looks at the reality from an involved, historically committed stance, discerning the situation for the purpose of action.

This "academic" vs. "pastoral" dichotomy is, of course, overdrawn in order to emphasize the differences. One can be "academic," in the sense of a scholarly pursuit of knowledge, yet at the same time be committed to social action. However, social analysis, as it is treated in this essay, is not simply an exercise in scholarship. Rather, it is analysis in the service of action for justice. It is an integral part of "the faith that does justice."

THE PASTORAL CIRCLE

A social analysis that is genuinely pastoral can be illustrated in what we can call the "pastoral circle." This circle represents the close relationships between four mediations of experience: (1) *insertion*, (2) *social analysis*, (3) *theological reflection*, and (4) *pastoral planning* (see Diagram I, p. 8)

DIAGRAM I
THE PASTORAL CIRCLE



This circle is frequently referred to as the "circle of praxis," because it emphasizes the on-going relationship between reflection and action. (The concept of *praxis* has been developed by Paulo Freire in his classic, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, New York: Herder and Herder, 1970.) It is related to what has been called the "hermeneutic circle," or the method of interpretation that sees new questions continually raised to challenge older theories by the force of new situations. (This method is explored in Juan Luis Segundo's, *The Liberation of Theology*, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1976.)

The first moment in the pastoral circle—and the basis for any pastoral action—is *insertion*. This locates the geography of our pastoral responses in the lived experience of individuals and communities. What people are feeling, what they are undergoing, how they are responding—these are the experiences that constitute primary data. We gain access to these by inserting our approach close to the experiences of ordinary people.

These experiences must be understood in the richness of all their interrelationships. This is the task of *social analysis*, the second moment in the pastoral circle. Social analysis examines causes, probes consequences, delineates linkages, and identifies actors. It helps make sense of experiences by putting them into a broader picture and drawing the connections between them.

The third moment is *theological reflection*, an effort to understand more broadly and deeply the analyzed experience in the light of living faith, scripture, church social teaching, and the resources of tradition. The Word of God brought to bear upon the situation raises new questions, suggests new insights, and opens new responses.

Since the purpose of the pastoral circle is decision and action, the fourth moment in the circle is crucial: *pastoral planning*. In the light of experiences analyzed and reflected upon, what response is called for by individuals and by communities? How should the response be designed in order to be most effective not only in the short term but also in the long term?

A response of action in a particular situation brings about a situation of new experiences. These experiences in turn call for further mediation through insertion, analysis, reflection, and planning. Thus, the pastoral circle continues without final conclusion. It is, in fact, more of a "spiral" than a "circle." Each approach does not simply retrace old steps but breaks new grounds.

Key Questions

Before moving on, it is important to note that each of these moments in the pastoral circle should themselves be subjected to critical examination. When pastoral action on behalf of justice is the goal for which we are striving, then the following questions must be asked:

1. *Insertion*—Where and with whom are we locating ourselves as we begin our process? Whose experience is being considered? Are there groups that are "left out" when experience is discussed? Does the experience of the poor and oppressed have a privileged role to play in the process?

2. *Social Analysis*—Which analytical tradition is being followed? Are there presuppositions in these analyses that need to be tested? Is it possible to use a particular analysis without agreeing with its accompanying ideology?

3. *Theological Reflection*—What methodological assumptions underlie the theological reflection? In what relationship does the

social analysis stand to the theology—e.g., complementary, subordinate, etc.? How closely linked is the theology to the existing social situation?

4. *Pastoral planning*—Who participates in the pastoral planning? What are the implications of the process used to determine appropriate responses? What is the relationship between groups who serve and those who are served?

We hope to elaborate on these questions throughout the study—opening the debate, but not claiming to give final answers.

Beyond Anecdotes

Our discussion of the pastoral circle will be recognized by many who are familiar with the "see/judge/act" trilogy of Canon Joseph Cardijn, the Belgian priest who, prior to World War II, inspired Catholic social action groups such as the Young Christian Workers, Young Christian Students, and, indirectly, the Christian Family Movement. When Cardijn urged social activists to "see," he called upon them to do more than simply *look* at the facts and figures of a particular situation. Beyond these facts and figures lies a framework that provides meaning, a perspective that makes sense of disparate elements. The search for this framework is the task of social analysis.

Effective pastoral planning necessarily involves this movement *from the anecdotal to the analytical*. We must move from issues—e.g., the high cost of housing, job discrimination against nonwhites, the decline of urban services, exclusion of women in decision-making posts, hunger in developing countries, etc.—to explanations of *why* things are the way they are. To stop with anecdotes, to concentrate only on issues, obscures the comprehensive systemic picture. If the picture is obscured, one becomes trapped in immediate, *ad hoc* solutions.

Social problems and issues, although they may appear to be isolated pieces, are actually linked together in a larger system. Consider, for example, the huge woven tapestries that adorn the walls of many religious houses and art museums. These tapestries—intricate mazes of thousands of connected threads—tell elaborate stories of saints, soldiers, and statesmen. If we were to

step behind these old tapestries, we could see that the threads are woven back and forth, linking individual elements of the total picture. If someone were to pull at these threads, the various pieces of the picture would move in a variety of directions throughout the tapestry.

Social analysis attempts to provide a similar sense of the systemic unity of reality. Within the context of social analysis, facts and issues are no longer regarded as isolated problems. Rather, they are perceived as interrelated parts of a whole. Using social analysis, we can respond to that larger picture in a more systematic fashion. By dealing with the whole, rather than with detached parts, we are able to move beyond "issue orientation," or a primarily pragmatic approach, toward a holistic or systemic approach.

Calls for Analysis

The church has increasingly recognized that social analysis is important for effective pastoral planning. In his 1971 social document, "A Call to Action" (*Octogesima adveniens*), Pope Paul VI challenged social activists in a manner that recalls the elements of the pastoral circle:

> It is up to Christian communities to analyze with objectivity the situation which is proper to their own country, to shed on it the light of the Gospel's unalterable words, and to draw principles or reflections, norms of judgment, and directives of action from the social teaching of the Church [No. 4].

This call came into the life of one international religious community and was recorded in the 1975 documents of the 32nd General Congregation of the Society of Jesus. In its Decree Four, "Our Mission Today," the Jesuit mission is described as an integral approach to "the service of faith and the promotion of justice." In that mission, a serious effort must be made to understand the socio-economic and political situation within which evangelization occurs. Hence:

> We cannot be excused from making the most rigorous possible political and social analysis of our situation. This will require the utilization of the various sciences, sacred and profane, and of the various disciplines, speculative and practical, and all of this demands intense and specialized studies. Nothing should excuse us, either, from undertaking a searching discernment into our situation from the pastoral and apostolic point of view. From analysis and discernment will come committed action; from the experience of action will come insight into how to proceed further [No. 44].

The call to analysis is further specified in this document with the help of several questions:

> The process of evaluation and discernment must be brought to bear principally on the following: the identification and analysis of the problems involved in the service of faith and the promotion of justice and the review and renewal of our apostolic commitments. Where do we live? Where do we work? How? With whom? What really is our involvement with, dependence on, or commitment to ideologies and power centers? [No. 74]

In the fall of 1977, representatives of the leadership of women's and men's religious congregations in the United States, Latin America, and Canada, met in Montreal. This Third Inter-American Conference of Religious issued a strong call—especially influenced by the Latin Americans—to commit religious to pastoral planning that incorporated both social analysis and theological reflection. The call was repeated in Cleveland in August 1978, at "CONVERGENCE '78"—the historic joint meeting of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious and the Conference of Major Superiors of Men. In their final statement, the religious superiors pledged:

> Realizing that we lack full understanding of our social, economic, and political life, we commit ourselves to structural analysis and theological reflection.

Since the Cleveland CONVERGENCE meeting, there have been numerous lectures, workshops, and seminars across the country to introduce leadership—lay, religious, and clerical—to the topic of social analysis in relation to pastoral planning.

Some people may fear that "social analysis" is simply another fad, the "in-thing" to do. However, it makes sense that church leadership should move toward a greater emphasis on social analysis in making pastoral decisions. Social analysis is simply an extension of the principle of discernment, moving from the personal realm to the social realm. Just as the insights of psychology (psycho-analysis) have been incorporated into the process of personal discernment, the insights of the social sciences (social analysis) will assist the church in the process of corporate discernment, and ultimately, in the fulfillment of its apostolic mission.

Analysis and Theology

Let us recall once again the pastoral circle discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Social analysis is but *one* moment in that circle. While it is an indispensable step toward effective action on behalf of justice, it must be complemented by theological reflection and pastoral planning. None of these parts can be totally isolated; theology is not restricted to that moment explicitly called "theological reflection." In a wider sense, all the moments of the circle are part of an expanded definition of theology. All are linked and overlap.

Among various schools of social analysis today, there is much controversy concerning the fundamental assumptions of human sciences, their relation to human values, the nature and division of the distinct disciplines, etc. These controversies are the result of differing visions of the meaning, structure, and process of humanity's common life, struggle, and destiny. Thus, we can say that social analysis contains within itself, implicitly or explicitly, a theology of life. The theological process has already begun in what appears to be a secular analysis of society.

In this study, we will concentrate on social analysis, the second moment of the pastoral circle. Yet, we do so in a theological context—that is, one inspired by a faith commitment. For the

present, however, we postpone more extended reflections on the third and fourth moments of the circle, namely, theological reflection and pastoral planning.

WHAT IS ANALYSIS?

Social analysis can be defined as the effort to obtain a more complete picture of a social situation by exploring its *historical and structural relationships*. Social analysis serves as a tool that permits us to grasp the reality with which we are dealing—*"la realidad"* so often referred to in Latin America.

Social analysis explores reality in a variety of dimensions. Sometimes it focuses on isolated *issues*, such as unemployment, inflation, or hunger. At other times, it focuses on the *policies* that address these issues, such as job training, monetary control, or food aid programs. Using social analysis, one might further investigate the broad *structures* of our economic, political, social, and cultural institutions, from whence such issues arise and to which policies are addressed.

Reaching beyond issues, policies, and structures, social analysis ultimately focuses on *systems*. There are many dimensions to these systems as well. We can speak of a social system's *economic* design as a distinct functional region or subsystem. We can analyze the *political* order of a system and its *cultural* foundation. Finally, we can analyze the social system in terms of *levels*—primary groups, local communities, nation-states, and even in terms of the world system.

The social system needs to be analyzed both in terms of time—*historical* analysis—and space—*structural* analysis. Historical analysis is a study of the changes of a social system through time. Structural analysis provides a cross section of a system's framework in a given moment of time. A sense of both the historical and structural dimensions is necessary for a comprehensive analysis.

Finally, we can distinguish the *objective* and *subjective* dimensions of reality in our analysis. The objective dimension includes the various organizations, behavior patterns, and institutions that take on external structural expressions. The subjective dimension includes consciousness, values, and ideologies. These

elements must be analyzed in order to understand the assumptions operative in any given social situation. The questions posed by social analysis unmask the underlying values that shape the perspectives and decisions of those acting within a given situation.

Although social analysis is used to "break down" social reality, that reality is considerably more complex than any picture painted by the analytic process. No social system ever fits a pure or ideal model. Capitalism, for example, exists in many forms, influenced by various cultural, geographic, and national experiences. The goal is not to fit reality into our preconceived analytical boxes, but to let our analysis be shaped by the richness of the reality.

The Limits of Social Analysis

As we begin to use social analysis as a pastoral tool, we need to be aware of its limits. While our cautions are rather obvious, it is helpful to articulate them. (We will return to this theme, the limits of analysis, at the end of the study.)

First, social analysis is not designed to provide an immediate answer to the question, what do we do? That is the task of strategy or planning. Social analysis unfolds the context within which a program for social change can be outlined, but does not provide a blueprint for action.

Social analysis is to social strategy what diagnosis is to treatment. Both analysis and diagnosis are necessary prerequisites to the cure of social and physical ills. However, they cannot themselves provide that cure. After diagnosing a particular health problem, a doctor is able to describe the problem in a clear and complete fashion. However, treatment or therapy is another task. Similarly, very detailed analysis of a particular social situation will not provide programmatic answers. Social analysis offers broad parameters within which specific tactics and strategies can be suggested, but it does not formulate them.

This caution is important. As interest in social analysis increases among lay, religious, professional, and community organizations, there is a danger that the contributions of social analysis will be exaggerated. Regarding social analysis as a complex

panacea, people may assume that the task can be accomplished only by "outside experts"—individuals who are professionally skilled in the tools of social analysis. They might look to these professionals to provide all the answers. However, "experts" are useful only in so far as they expose the wider context of the situation and train local people in the use of analytical tools. Ultimately, it is the local people who must offer specific approaches to social problems and concrete steps toward their resolution. These people are the only ones who have experienced the particular situation; their expertise in designing solutions should always be respected.

Second, social analysis is not an esoteric activity for intellectuals. All of us use the tool every day in a variety of ways. We use it implicitly whenever we relate one specific event or issue to another, whenever we choose one course of action over another. The framework that makes those relationships and choices possible contains an implicit social analysis. More detailed social analysis makes that implicit analysis explicit and more precise.

Third, social analysis is not value-free. This point is extremely important. Social analysis is not a neutral approach, a purely "scientific" and "objective" view of reality. Of course, we should try to be clear, precise, reasoned, and logical. However, in our very choice of topics, in our manner of approach, in our questions, in our openness to the results of our analysis, we reveal our values and our biases. We never enter into an analysis without some prior commitment—implicit or explicit. That commitment colors our work and the work of others engaged in similar processes. For example, a person serving a community organization in a poor neighborhood in East St. Louis will move into social analysis with a different commitment from a person surveying the retail market future for a large department store in downtown St. Louis.

We will return later to the value dimension of social analysis. It is mentioned at the outset only to emphasize that social analysis in the service of pastoral planning requires a distinctive set of values. In the very process of analysis itself, we need to wrestle with the biases of our consciousness, critiquing our deepest assumptions, exploring the new horizons that are opened for us.

Difficulties

If social analysis is so important, why is it so often ignored by people engaged in pastoral planning and action? Or, if not ignored, why does it seem to be so difficult? The answers can be found, in part, in the complexity of our society and its tendency toward change and controversy.

First, society in the United States is growing more and more complex. We have moved a long way from the simple and plain living of our ancestors. Our social system is now a bewildering maze of people, institutions, networks, bureaucracies, and machines. This complexity makes us feel almost powerless—even fatalistic. To attempt to analyze this complexity could make us feel even more confused. We fear that the more we study, the more bewildered we will become. Eventually, we will be unable to act at all. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. referred to this predicament as the "paralysis of analysis."

Second, social analysis is difficult because our society is constantly changing. Yesterday's analysis may not be valid today. Tomorrow's changes may undercut today's assumptions. The particular analysis we choose to help us interpret the new situation will, in turn, shape the remedy we ultimately find. It will determine whether we embark upon a creative, ineffective, or destructive social response. Given our continual state of change, we must constantly adapt our analysis to new situations, remaining open to critical evaluation. Above all, we must avoid dogmatism and the rigidity of fixed ideas.

Third, to enter into social analysis is to enter the realm of the controversial. The existence of controversy will make our task even more difficult. As noted earlier, social analysis is not value-free. We always choose an analysis that is implicitly linked to some ideological tradition. The claim to have no ideology is itself an ideological position! Locating ourselves within some vision of society—whether it be one of the many interpretations of capitalism, socialism, feudalism, tribalism, etc.—we interact with various social and political movements, many of them fiercely antagonistic to each other.

The reluctance to move toward social analysis can be ex-

plained, in part, by this element of controversy. Behind our protests that social analysis is too difficult or irrelevant may be a fear that it is really too "radical." If we were to examine the institutions and processes of our society and of our church, would we not become continual questioners and doubters—driven to "radical" responses?

For these three reasons, then, analysis is a difficult task: it is complex, never ending, and always controversial. Given these obstacles, we might ask ourselves, why bother? Why is it really important? Because of our heritage of pragmatism, these reactions are instinctive for many people in the United States. Oriented toward "practicality" and the immediate attainment of goals, our culture is not conducive to analytical endeavors. Faced with complexities, we want to charge ahead, implementing immediate, albeit *ad hoc*, solutions. The Anglo-American bias rejects the theoretical and the ideal in favor of the practical "workable" solution. We have a tendency to believe that theorizing is a luxury and that laborious analytical explorations are simply a waste of time. "Mission Impossible" was not only a popular television show; it is a mindset that we bring to bear on social challenges. To be asked to step back and look at the larger picture is a cultural challenge to the American tradition.

Our traditional U.S. heritage as a nation of problem solvers has generally served us well. The pragmatic gift has made rich contributions to our history. But, we are entering a fundamentally new era in U.S. history. In this era, pragmatic genius needs to be supplemented by a more thorough-going social analysis.

Opportunities and Limits

We are entering a difficult era. Prior to the 1970s, the United States was a land of continually expanding social opportunities. Today, however, the United States is becoming a land of decreasing opportunities. The predominant cultural theme underlying the expansionist era of our history was the "frontier." The new theme pressing on our consciousness today is the "limit" to our wealth and growth.

While the analysis of this new era varies, that a new era exists is widely accepted as fact. New political groups have emerged to

face the challenge. First, people who claim to be in the political *Center* have stressed the necessity for a "new realism," suggesting that we are leaving an age of bounty and entering into one of austerity. This theme, developed by the so-called "neo-conservative" movement, has influenced some writers to attack what they call the "moralisms" of social liberals who, they claim, do not understand the new structural constraints of our social system. These voices are frank about the limits of the new situation—the need to conserve energy, to get along with less, to lower our expectations—but they are less harsh in their solutions than a second political group, the New Right.

The *New Right* is strategizing to become the leading social force in the new era. It realizes that the solutions of the political Center can no longer meet the challenges of society. "Austerity" is not an appealing theme for people who are losing their jobs! Consequently, the New Right has mounted an attack against "big government," advocating the restoration of a *"laissez-faire"* (unregulated) economy reminiscent of nineteenth-century capitalism. The responses of the New Right, if implemented, would bring about widespread suffering among the voiceless and powerless worldwide. Yet, this group has gained ground in the United States political arena, mainly because ordinary people don't know where to turn.

A third group is beginning to form on the political *Left*. This group suggests that the emerging limits to U.S. society will aggravate social conflict within the nation. The new Left claims that the restructuring of capitalism is compelling much of society to shoulder an unjust burden. This group argues that we must search for a new form of society, one that is not dominated by giant multinational corporations, international financial institutions, or repressive governments.

The setting of limits need not result in the end of opportunity. But the limitations *do* mean that our past assumptions of endless expansion within open and growing frontiers are no longer valid. New opportunities can be discovered, but only within the new limits. In order to discover these opportunities, however, we must deepen our social analysis, stimulate our creative imagination, and broaden our vision. The "new frontier" of today is imagination and social creativity, within the bounds of limits that have

been imposed upon us. Because the old consensus is breaking down throughout society, this task will be extremely important, but also very difficult. The arduousness of the task raises a special challenge for social analysis and constitutes one of the main reasons for its importance at this time. How can we discover a broad and challenging vision that will give new life to the social struggle?

Fragmentation or Solidarity

Without a new vision, social in-fighting over scarce resources (jobs, fuel, food, etc.) will increase. The response to in-fighting can take two forms—further fragmentation or solidarity.

If *fragmentation* predominates, it will mean that the social system will be analyzed in terms of its parts, rather than the whole. It will mean immediate, short-range, piecemeal gains by some, at the expense of permanent, long-range, holistic gains by all. Each group will be concerned only about itself, no matter what the consequences for other groups. Such fragmentation could aggravate our social disintegration and yield a negative-sum game.

Unfortunately our heritage of social pragmatism—one that is not linked to a deeper social analysis—leaves us ill-equipped for the long-range, holistic perspective. If we focus only on the pieces—our piece of the pie or anyone else's—and fail to see the larger picture, we will not be able to work together for a strategy that benefits all. We will be easily confused, readily manipulated. Thus, if short-range pragmatism predominates, the tensions among racial and ethnic groupings will grow. Stress in families, between sexes, and among competing interest groups within the nation and in the international arena will increase. Groups that are being hurt by the new stage of the system could find themselves pitted against each other to the ultimate detriment of all.

If *solidarity* is to predominate, a deeper level of analysis needs to emerge. But such analysis will evolve only if we press beyond the pragmatic approach of the past—without abandoning its innovative qualities. Pragmatism can be sustained, but only within a broader framework of structural and systemic analysis of our common social struggle and the linkages of all issues and causes. To achieve that solidarity in action on behalf of justice is a great challenge to all of us using social analysis as a pastoral tool.

ELEMENTS OF ANALYSIS

In any analysis of our social reality, we explore a number of society's elements. Among them are: (1) the *historical* dimensions of a situation; (2) its *structural* elements; (3) the various *divisions* of society; and (4) the multiple *levels* of the issues involved.

History

Central to any social analysis is the historical question, where are we coming from and where are we going? Taking history seriously is a liberating exercise, since it places current events and challenges into a perspective. History relativizes the immediate and situates us in a larger context by clarifying our past and offering insights into our future. The non-historical approach is basically *status quo*-oriented, since it lifts the present out of context and treats it as an absolute existing in a vacuum.

Some approaches to social analysis can be non-historical. For example, a strictly "comparative" methodology tends to abstract the present from history. One economic system is compared with another—e.g., capitalism vs. socialism—without stressing the point that these systems have reality only in continually evolving, concrete historical situations. They are not immutable abstractions—what sociologists call "ideal types"—but realities immersed in the day-to-day evolution of life. Failure to attend to the historical dimension can make comparisons, at best, inadequate, and at worst, misleading.

When history is taken seriously, we develop a historical consciousness. This historical consciousness regards the passage of time not simply in terms of natural processes such as the seasons of the year or the biological cycles of growth and decay. Rather, time, in this case, marks a series of specific events in which we are consciously involved and which we can consciously influence. Attending to this consciousness frees people from the tyranny of history's "invisible forces" which, in actuality, are little more than the power of other people to determine the course of our lives. Paulo Freire, the great Brazilian educator, speaks of the

dire need for this kind of critical consciousness, because it liberates people from the role of historical *objects*, empowering them to become its *subjects*—i.e., agents of change.

We can distinguish two moments in any kind of historical awareness: (1) a *scientific moment* that carefully analyzes the past, and (2) an *intuitive moment* that probes the future.

The *scientific moment* of historical awareness describes social change according to various stages, identifying the evolution of key structures, actors, concepts, etc., over a given period of time. In Chapter 4, such a historical description is presented in a discussion of the stages of industrial capitalism. However, let us indicate at this point a few examples of the scientific moment of historical awareness.

Take, for example, the immigration of people from Europe to the United States at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. We can see three different stages of immigration—as experienced by the Irish, Italian, Eastern European, and other people who flocked to the U.S. shores.

First, there was a stage of *separation*, when the new immigrants segregated themselves from the frequently hostile environment in the new land. Native languages, foods, and customs were honored and strengthened. Second, there was a stage of *assimilation*, a period in which the first and second generations born in this country sometimes forgot (or never learned) the old languages and often shunned the traditional neighborhoods, foods, and customs. Some of the daughters and sons of immigrants came into the "mainstream" of U.S. social, economic, and political life. We are currently experiencing a third stage of immigration, that of *identification*. Identification does not mean a return to separation or isolation; rather, it signifies a new pride in ethnic roots, a new sense of one's special culture, and a rejection of the homogenization of society.

Another example of the scientific moment of historical awareness can be found in the shifting forms of racism in the United States. The first form of racism concerning blacks in this country occurred in the plantation economy—outside the emerging industrial economy. The kindest name for this type of racism is *paternalism*. The main racial conflict occurred between the white planter class and the black slave population.

With emancipation, black citizens in the United States faced a new form of racism. They were thrown into an industrial economy where white labor competed with black labor, and both were at the mercy of the white entrepreneurial class. The result was a two-tiered or dual labor market—with blacks most frequently at the bottom of the ladder, holding the lowest paying and most menial jobs. This second stage of racism is called *discrimination*.

We are now facing yet another stage of racism. With a shrinking industrial economy, "structural unemployment" is heavily concentrated among non-whites. An urban "permanent underclass" is developing—a class of people who are isolated from the economic mainstream and ignored. This third stage of racism is called *marginalization*.

A second moment in historical consciousness—less rational and precise than the scientific moment—is the *intuitive moment*. Questioning history from this perspective, we might ask, where are we heading today? What will the world be like five or ten years hence if things continue as they are going today? What directions will the United States take in the future, and what will be the consequences for the Third World?

Historical awareness through the intuitive moment is extremely popular today, stimulating the discussion of various historical "scenarios," "projections," and "alternative futures." Its popularity appears to be one consequence of the rapid pace of change we are all experiencing. We look to the future in order to avoid "future shock." However, it is important to remember that our projections into the future tell us something about our understanding of the present and our appreciation of the past. For example, a vision of an improved future implies both judgments on the past and present, as well as the perception of opportunities for progress in the future.

A Christian is careful to note that the Spirit of Jesus is active in history, operating in the concrete events of persons and communities. Hence, a historical consciousness for the Christian also means a commitment to reading the "signs of the times," the indications of Jesus' Spirit acting in history, calling us forward, challenging our present positions. In *Pacem in Terris* (1963), Pope John XXIII reminded us that the great historical move-

ments of our day—specifically the rise of new nations, the struggle of workers, and the emerging role of women—can be read as "signs of the times" with special messages for all.

Structures

Social analysis looks sharply at the structures of our society, at the institutions within which we live our social lives. These social structures—government, law, education, business, labor, church, family, etc.—are realities that need to be understood if our action for justice is to be effective.

Social justice is itself a structural question, not simply a personal matter. For example, I may not personally be a racist, or a male chauvinist. I may treat women and people of other races as equals, in speech, attitudes, and behavior. However, this personal action does not address the deep justice issues of racism or sexism—unemployment, lack of educational opportunities, discriminatory pay, or lack of access to decision-making positions. These are structural questions.

With the aid of social analysis, we can identify the key operative structures in a given situation and move beyond personal considerations toward specific structural changes. Without such an analysis, we may become paralyzed by those questions so often asked in discussions of social justice: "But how can such-and-such a corporation be engaged in unjust practices when Mr. So-and-So is an outstanding Christian and personal benefactor of many good causes?" At issue is not the goodness of the individual person living within a given system. Rather, it is the system itself that is called into question.

The problem of migrant labor is a good illustration of this point. The issue is not whether an individual grower in the Fresno Valley of California is a good or a malevolent person. Rather, the issue is the system of economic relationships between owner and producer and factors such as labor availability, land tenure, access to market, competition, etc., that lead to the exploitation of the unprotected migrant worker.

Similarly, the problems of Appalachian farmers, whose land is being strip-mined, or those of elderly inner-city residents whose apartments are being converted into condominiums, are basically

rooted, not in the personal character of mine-operators or landlords, but in the economic system that encourages the kind of energy industry and real estate business that exists in the United States. Social analysis moves us from persons to structures.

We will look first at the *economic structures* of society—the business and commercial institutions, the industrial and agricultural sectors. The economic structures shape the basic patterns of production, distribution, exchange, and consumption within a society. Today we tend to think of economic structures in terms of *contrasts*—between capitalism and socialism, between "free enterprise" and planned economies, etc. However, these terms have many different meanings. Through analysis we may ask questions about the kind of production (e.g., highly technological—i.e., capital-intensive—or employment generating—i.e., labor-intensive), the paths of distribution (e.g., monopolistic or widely shared), the conditions of exchange (e.g., interest rates for loans), and the patterns of consumption (e.g., conducive to waste or to conservation of scarce resources).

The pursuit of such questions gives us insight into the nature of the classes controlling the economy and the values that determine its operations. The myth that the economy is guided by an "invisible hand" is just that—a myth! (For in-depth economic analyses that expose the myth of "neutral" corporations operating in a "free market" system, see Richard J. Barnet and Ronald E. Müller, *Global Reach: The Power of the Multinational Corporations,* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974; and Charles Lindbloom, *Politics and Markets: The World's Political-Economic Systems,* New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1977. The immensely popular book by E. F. Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered,* New York: Harper & Row, 1973, has demolished the assumption that economics is a value-free science, a technical/mechanical approach to management.)

Second, we look at the *political structures* of society, the institutional concentrations of power within a community. These may be the formal structures of representative government at the federal, state, and local levels. Or, the structures may be less formal—influential groupings of individuals, networks of organizations, interest group lobbies, social classes, trade unions, churches, and coalitions for *ad hoc* purposes. Social analysis of

political structures allows us to determine where and by whom key decisions are made, how much popular participation is involved, and the prospects for the enactment of those decisions.

Finally, we look at the *cultural structures* that serve as the institutional bases for the dreams, myths, and symbols of society. It might seem strange to speak of "institutionalizing" dreams, but, in our highly organized modern society, we do this in a variety of ways. The culture of the United States, for example, is a marvelous mixture of numerous ethnic heritages—those of Native Americans, African slaves, and peasants from Europe, Asia, and Latin America. What are the dominant cultural strains in a society, and what happens to the less-dominant strains? Such efforts as cultural preservation and recovery (e.g., through bilingual schools, etc.) have important consequences for U.S. society. What social-psychological aspects influence the course of events (e.g., national feelings of malaise, or stirred feelings of patriotism, etc.)?

In a social analysis that seriously considers all these structures, *institutional alliances* between various structures must also be examined. For instance, what are the connections between the economic structures operative in a region of the country and the political structures that have evolved? What is the relationship between the economic power of multinational corporations and the political power dominant in some developing countries (i.e., military dictatorships)?

The communications media offers striking examples of such institutional alliances. A newspaper can be extremely influential in the economic, political, and cultural aspects of community life—through its advertising policy, its endorsement of political candidates, and its reporting of the arts. When the owners of that newspaper also control other papers, weekly magazines, and television stations, a tremendous concentration of power occurs. Recall the institutional intricacies portrayed in the film *Network*, which described the cut-throat world of national television and the social and political consequences of those entanglements.

Societal Divisions

Although it may be belaboring the obvious, we want to point out that social analysis enables us to see more clearly the divisions

of society according to *race, sex, age, class, ethnicity, religion, geography,* etc. These divisions exist, whether we like it or not. Sometimes they are more immediately apparent and more directly operative than at other times. However, they are always present and as such, should be key elements in any social analysis. To ignore them is to bypass the total picture of reality.

It is important to recognize these divisions for two reasons. First, the consequences of a particular event in a given social situation—e.g., an economic upheaval such as a recession—do not affect all people in the same way. Second, some divisions in a pluralistic society such as the United States, if played against each other, can be a disruptive force in the process of social change. Consider, for example, the competition between blacks and other poor ethnic minorities for jobs in a shrinking labor market. As long as other minorities are viewed as the cause rather than the victims of the problem, the systemic cause will not be addressed. However, if these same divisions are viewed analytically within a larger social picture, we can take advantage of opportunities for solidarity in the promotion of a common good. An example of such solidarity can be found in the coalitions of consumer and labor groups that focus on energy issues.

We sometimes speak as if all people enjoy—or suffer—social reality in the same fashion. While we know that this is not true, our speech patterns occasionally say something else. For instance, the most commonly reported figure for unemployment—the one to which certain emergency federal legislation is pegged—lumps all the represented groups together. Yet we know—through experience and as a result of other official statistics that provide a further breakdown of the figures—that unemployment is more highly concentrated among non-whites and youth. Again, we know that anti-union attitudes and anti-union legislation such as "right-to-work" laws generally mean lower wages. But we may fail to note that these laws and attitudes are particularly hard on young black female workers in the South. Or, we may speak of the "establishment" or the "influentials" in politics and business, without averting to the fact that they are predominantly white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant males, heavily concentrated in the northeastern section of our country.

Social analysis should make us aware of these divisions, so the intricate dimensions of reality will not be ignored as we shape our

responses. To ignore these divisions in the pluralistic U.S. society is to play into the hands of those who would manipulate whites against non-whites, men against women, old against young, and region against region. Such manipulation preserves a status quo in which a few are dominant over the many.

Are there really "classes" in the traditional sense, here in the United States? A discussion about social divisions must inevitably raise this question. The class issue in modern society is extremely complex. It is especially complicated in the United States because of our history of immigration, mobility, and rapid industrialization. Certainly, we can say that socio-economic status—a combination of income, property, education, employment, etc.—does exist as a determinant to social relationships in this country. A deeper "class analysis," however, enables us to see who makes the major economic and political decisions that affect large segments of the population. A "class analysis" can be made by asking three simple questions:

1. **Who makes the decisions?**
2. **Who benefits from the decisions?**
3. **Who bears the cost of the decisions?**

Consider, for example, a decision to "renew" a particular section of a city. Frequently, such a decision has been made by local government officials—perhaps an elected city council—who do not represent the people living in the area, in conjunction with real estate, construction, and banking interests. Middle and upper-income couples will benefit from the expansion of commercial zones. Lower-income people, frequently non-white and/or elderly, will be displaced to another section of the city, usually without comparable advantages, and almost certainly without improvements. Similarly, at the national level, major economic decisions for the country (e.g., interest rates, money supply, etc.) are made by less than one percent of the population.

Levels of Issues

Finally, it should be noted that issues occur at various levels—the local, regional, national, and international levels. The framework chosen by the social analyst will indicate the level of the

issue; even more important, it will indicate the relationships between levels.

For example, an issue such as the impact of "redlining" on the renewal of a neighborhood has a predominantly local focus. (When a bank refuses to make loans to a particular geographic section of a city because of its "high economic risk"—i.e., its high concentration of racial or ethnic minorities—it draws a "red line" around that particular area on the map.) Or, the issue may have a fundamentally international focus—e.g., the "balance of trade" between the United States and Japan. (The balance of trade indicates whether we are importing more than we are exporting and vice versa.)

Responses to issues will vary according to their particular "levels." However, there are strong interconnections between levels; these relationships need to be recognized if effective responses are to be made. Let us again look at the example of "redlining." A predominantly local issue, redlining may be related to a *significant regional* issue, e.g., the decision of the banking industry to "disinvest" from the decaying northern industrial cities—in favor of making loans to suburban areas or to the growing industrial areas of the South. The "snowbelt/sunbelt" tension—largely the result of the northern industries moving to southern regions of the United States where labor is unorganized and cheaper—impacts directly on neighborhoods in the northern cities. Similarly, energy decisions that may affect whole regions—e.g., the consequences of strip-mining in Appalachia—are tied to international issues such as the price of oil and the relationship of the United States to OPEC nations.

The analysis of issues according to their various levels and interconnections is important because it rectifies the misconception that local issues are in competition with global issues. One of the most significant developments in the U.S. social justice movement in recent years has been the recognition that the dichotomy between domestic and international problems is an inaccurate representation of reality. All of the problems are part of a whole. The relation of the parts to the whole can be understood with the help of a few fundamental questions: Who has power? For whom is it used? Guided by what values? With what vision of the future?

These questions are appropriate—and revealing—at every issue level.

SUMMARY / CONCLUSION

By devoting this chapter to the introduction of social analysis as a tool of pastoral practice, we have opted for an approach that could have confusing consequences. We have chosen to *talk* about social analysis rather than *do* social analysis. Nonetheless, we believe that it is important to describe at the outset what social analysis attempts to do, why it is difficult, and what aspects of reality it explores. The approach we have described locates the task of social analysis within a "pastoral circle" aimed at action on behalf of justice.

In the following chapters we will apply our analysis to a variety of the social challenges facing us today. In the light of what we have said in this introductory chapter, it should be clear that our approach will be:

- ***historical*, i.e., discerning the distinct structural contexts of distinct periods and the different tasks of strategy in each period.**
- ***structural*, i.e., emphasizing the importance of understanding how society is generated and structured and how social institutions interrelate in social space.**
- ***value-laden*, i.e., oriented toward social justice, particularly for the poor.**
- ***non-dogmatic*, i.e., drawing upon a variety of perspectives and "schools" of analysis.**
- ***action oriented*, i.e., promoting responses by individuals and groups to the pressing social problems of today.**