

psychologists are to be believed, communalism has not disappeared completely. Harvey Cox might argue that impersonal relationships contribute to the city person's freedom, but it cannot be denied that larger societies would be unable to operate without communal relationships. In the African situation communalism is not on its way out. Cities are growing, but the expected individualism has been tempered by the creation of a great variety of societies which provide that sense of belonging that is such an important characteristic of smaller societies and that the city is otherwise reluctant to supply.

Methodism's organizational structures may have contributed to a sense of belonging, but its theology has tended to emphasize the individual. This may be one of the factors that has led to the phenomenon whereby its members live the gospel only in certain situations. The reverse is true in the African setting—communalism ensures that religion is lived in every circumstance of life; this is an important problematic, to which African theology is seeking to address itself.

A Liberating *Pastoral* for the Rich

Dow Kirkpatrick

I

The word *pastoral*, as it is pronounced in Spanish, conveys a richness I do not sense in English usage. Perhaps that is because I have heard the word so often in conversations with Latin Americans who are deeply committed to the struggle on behalf of the dispossessed. It does not slip easily off their tongues, but comes out of profound, sacrificial, risk-taking involvement in liberation.

"Pastoral" here is used to define the whole action of the church when it conceives that *faithfulness to the gospel requires solidarity with the oppressed*.

Members of our congregations resent being called rich, and various devices are used to ease this discomfort:

- deny we are rich;
- blame the poor for their own condition;
- give to charity from our surplus, but without attacking the root causes of poverty;
- appeal to the universality of grace ("Isn't salvation for everyone—for the rich, too?").

The answer is yes, but Jesus said it is harder for us—so difficult, in fact, as to border on the impossible (Mark 10:27). The late C. S. Lewis put it graphically in a short poem.

In Spanish, the word *pastoral* (pronounced *pastoral*) is used as a noun and traditionally refers to the care of souls—the shepherding of the flock. Here it refers to the church's commitment to its people in their need. Ed.

SANCTIFICATION AND LIBERATION

All things (e.g. a camel's journey through
A needle's eye) are possible, it's true.
But picture how the camel feels, squeezed out
In one long bloody thread from tail to snout.¹

The first movement toward conversion is repentance, and the first act of repentance is acknowledgment of one's true condition. Our condition is that we are rich. Most of the world is poor. The world system produces victims and beneficiaries; we are beneficiaries. This raises the question, *Is there a liberating "pastoral" for the rich?*

My response arises out of more than thirty-five years of parish ministry in the United States and five years of residence in Latin America, which is the only continent on earth where two facts exist side by side: (a) The majority of the people are oppressed and poor; and (b) The majority are Christian. There I have chosen to live—not with the notion that I can become one of them, but because God is speaking a fresh word today among the poor. My people need to hear that word, and there is no other place—no other way—but to hear it from those in whose midst it is being spoken.

II

A new moment may be given us as we answer this question: How would it affect the shape of our *pastoral*—the care of the souls for which we are responsible—if we believed the gospel now preached to us by the poor? That gospel is offered in five strong affirmations.

We are Pharaoh.

The God of the Bible is known only by doing justice.

In Jesus, God became poor.

"Evangelism" is confronting the atheism of our worship.

Hope for the liberation of the rich is available—as a gift from the poor.

(Notice: Our churches do not seriously believe that any one of these statements is true.)

DOW KIRKPATRICK

We Are Pharaoh

The contradiction between the oppressed and the oppressor—is it fundamental or is it a matter of degree? The rich believe it is a matter of degree. ("What those people need is more of what we've got—hard work, thrift, food, education, health.") Three times, Pharaoh is recorded as calling the Jews lazy because they couldn't keep up production schedules after he had placed an embargo on straw! This attitude is based on the now discredited philosophy of developmentalism, which assumes that the poor can lift themselves, as we think we have done. Its corollary is, "As the rich get richer, the poor will get richer."

"No!" the poor remonstrate. "The contradiction is fundamental. We must be poor so you can be rich. Underdevelopment that ensures cheap raw materials and labor is the essential foundation for the affluence of developed economies." This accusation confuses the people in our churches. There is some resentment, but more perplexity, because of the superficial and limited nature of the faith we have taught them. They are people of goodwill, who have no desire to profit from the poverty of others. They wish for everyone what they themselves enjoy. Within the boundaries of their individual lives, they are generous. This is precisely where we have misled them. We are guilty of preaching a theology of vivisection—of cutting a living whole into sections. We have taught them that it is possible to isolate themselves from their own total reality. They believe there are generous and good choices available to them in this abstracted aloneness.

Would it have made any difference if Jimmy Carter had been Pharaoh? There is no evidence the Pharaoh was not a "good man" with streaks of compassion. But he was the Pharaoh—responsible for an economy that would collapse without slave labor.

The contradiction between the Jews and Pharaoh is fundamental. Regardless of Pharaoh's prayer life, love of family, or benign feelings toward his servants, he is on top—they are on the bottom. If they move, he moves. If they are liberated, he is drowned.

Can Pharaoh be liberated? The record gives the answer—not in terms of an alternative to drowning, but in Moses' radicalization. Moses was a part of Pharaoh, until the day of his anger. The moment he saw an Egyptian beating a slave, was the moment Moses broke with his class—it was his conversion. He ceased being part of Pharaoh and became brother to Jewish slaves. Solidarity resulted in exile. As a refugee, he built a new life—job, wife, family, and wealth. Then he was confronted by the God of the burning bush.

Why do we blot from our preaching God's self-definition, written here in the most significant revelation prior to that of Jesus Christ? "I am the God [who has] heard their outcry against their slave-masters . . . and have come down to rescue them. . . . Come now; I will send you . . . and you shall bring my people . . . out" (Exod. 3:6-11 NEB).

Now [Moses] will suffer the persecution of the totality that is Egypt, because he must somehow shoulder the injustice and enslavement of his people in order to free them.

The slave is the epiphany of God. If a person opens up to the slave . . . he opens up to God; if he shuts out the slave . . . he shuts out God. The person who does not commit himself to the liberation of the slaves in Egypt is an atheist.²

The herdsman met God and answered the call to solidarity with his oppressed brothers. He thus became a shepherd/pastor. The first element of a liberating *pastoral* for the rich is to call the Pharaoh church to the Moses solidarity.

*The God of the Bible
Is Known Only by Doing Justice*

The poor say there is no mystery as to why the rich have revised the biblical message. The Scriptures have no purpose but to reveal God. If we are not taught by the oppressed how to read the Bible, we are in danger of not knowing the one true God. "The time has come," writes Mexican biblical scholar José Porfirio Miranda, "for Christianity to break a long chain of hypocrisy and collusion with the established powers and decide if its message is or is not going to be the same as the Bible's."³ Miranda asserts that "a focal point of the Bible's irreconcilability with Western civilization" is to be found in the biblical way to know God, and he gives his version of the explicit passage in Jeremiah 22:15-16:

Your father ate and drank like you,
but he practiced justice and right;
this is good.
He defended the cause of the poor and the needy;
this is good.
*Is not this what it means to know me? It is
Yahweh who speaks.*

Justice is not a quality, a consequence of being, insists José Míguez Bonino. Nor is it a sign of previous knowledge. He cites Jeremiah also: "Let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practice steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth" (9:24 RSV). Here, according to Míguez,

. . . the basis for the identification between "knowing God" and "practising justice" becomes clear: it is Yahweh's own character. . . . The character of the knowledge is determined by the object: the God of the covenant [who] cannot be known except by becoming totally committed to and involved in his own action.⁴

Referring to Habakkuk 2, Míguez comments on "the 'both-and' formula which we love to use when we don't know how to integrate things which in the Bible are one. The language of the prophets is much bolder: to do justice is to know Yahwah." John's message is no different from that of the prophets, says Míguez. "Neither . . . contemplates the possibility of a theoretical, abstract, contemplative 'knowledge of God.' . . . There is no relation to God outside an active engagement," as classically summarized in the statement, "Everyone who loves is a child of God and knows God, but the unloving know nothing of God" (I John 4:8, NEB).⁵

Why do these seemingly obvious biblical insights elude us? In order to preserve the unjust system that produces rich and poor, a dualism must be read into our message. According to Miranda, however, the only way to affirm the transcendence of God is to break this dualism.

The God who does not allow himself to be objectified, because only in the immediate command of conscience is he God, clearly specifies that he is knowable exclusively in the cry of the poor and the weak who seek justice. To know God directly is impossible, not because of the limitations of human understanding but rather, on the contrary, because Yahweh's total transcendence, his irreducible and unconfused otherness, would thereby disappear. . . . Transcendence [means] a God who is accessible only in the act of justice.⁶

Our rich parishes will ask, "Is not a Marxist reading of Scripture as suspect of bias as a capitalistic exegesis? If our wealth perverts our reading, why are we to believe the eyes of the poor are more clear?" In *The Liberation of Theology*, Juan Luis Segundo offers a methodology to avoid this error. The "hermeneutic circle" is the continuing revision of our interpretation of the Bible, dictated by the continuing transformation of our viewpoint on reality that is made necessary by the Scriptures themselves.

Firstly there is our way of experiencing reality, which leads us to ideological suspicion. *Secondly* there is the application of our ideological suspicion to the whole ideological superstructure in general and to theology in particular. *Thirdly* there comes a new way of experiencing theological reality that leads us to exegetical suspicion, that is, to the suspicion that the prevailing interpretation of the Bible has not taken important pieces of data into account. *Fourthly* we have our new hermeneutic, that is, our new way of interpreting the fountainhead of our faith (i.e., Scripture) with the new elements at our disposal.⁷

I suggest this process more appropriately should be called the hermeneutic *spiral*, because the dialectic between social reality and the Bible means that, each time around, more insight is opened up, both into the Scriptures and into social reality. Beatriz Melano Couch depicts this process.

The hermeneutics of the theology of liberation is done in a dialectic relationship between reality as it is described by modern social sciences and then reflection on the Scriptures, going back and forth from the "reading" of reality to the "reading" of the Scriptures and vice versa. . . . It is a reflection which is being born of the way we experience reality in Latin America; this reflection points out the contradictions of our own society, the contradictions within our own selves, between the church and the gospel, between the Bible and academic theology. I would insist that these reflections have to spring from suffering; by this I mean from the immersion in conflict and in struggle to survive as free human beings.⁸

In this hermeneutic spiral the poor and oppressed possess a view of reality closer to that of the Bible than do the rich oppressors.

The second element of a liberating *pastoral* for the rich consists, therefore, of reading Scripture from the perspective of poverty and slavery. "Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God" (Luke 6:20 RSV).

In Jesus, God Became Poor

The third word from the poor is most offensive of all. Scripture is unambiguous in its attitude toward the rich and the poor. The Magnificat declares: "The hungry he has satisfied with good things / the rich sent empty away" (Luke 1:53 NEB). (Not the *wicked* rich—simply "the rich.") Christ announced his ministry as in continuity with Isaiah 61: "He has sent me to announce good news to the poor" (Luke 4:18 NEB). (No news for the rich?) The incarnational passage in Philippians offers a life-style for Christ's followers: He "made himself nothing, assuming the nature of a slave" (2:7 NEB). The radical nature of kenosis, the emptying act of birth in a manger, is made explicit by Paul in II Corinthians: "He was rich, yet for your sake he became poor" (8:9 NEB). Enrique Dussel asks,

What did God do? He sent his Son into the system of sin; although of divine origin, Jesus took on the form of a slave. He became in a certain way the son of a despised race, a despised class, and a despised nation. Jesus, then, became oppressed; but he gave a consciousness, an awareness of liberation. He revealed this to the people and was condemned for having revealed it.⁹

Christology from a Latin American perspective is being enacted most significantly by Leonardo Boff, a Brazilian Franciscan, and Jon Sobrino. Sobrino, as a member of the Jesuits, who are targets of government violence in El Salvador, knows the threat of the political nature of the death of Christ. In a conversation, he said, "God is love, but love is an abstraction. When he expresses his love he does it with partiality. He has to take a concrete standpoint. That standpoint is poverty." In *Christology at the Crossroads*, Sobrino explains why God in Jesus inserted himself into humanity by identifying with a specific class, the poor.

First, the poor are the people who understand the meaning of the kingdom best, even though their knowledge and understanding comes by way of contrariety.

Second, Jesus reinforces his experience of the necessity for justice through his contact with the poor.

Third, Jesus' service to the totality is concretized directly in his service to the poor.

Fourth, in his own personal life he experiences poverty. . . .

Fifth, Jesus undergoes the experience of class-identity, and specifically the consequences of his fellowship with the group known as the poor. The power wielded by the other major group in society is directed against him.

It would be anachronistic to look to Jesus for an analysis of classes such as we find in the work of present-day sociology. Yet his general attitude makes it clear that in trying to understand justice Jesus adopts a stance that is rooted in the poor and is meant to benefit them. . . . In that sense the first principle for concretizing moral values is nothing else but the first principle of Christology itself: i.e., incarnation. One must deliberately adopt some partial stance in order to comprehend the totality. To look for some stand that will give us the totality directly is to do the very opposite of incarnation [profound disincarnation].¹⁰

The third requirement of a liberating *pastoral* for the rich, then, is to become poor in the sense that God in Christ entered into solidarity with the protest from, and for, the poor.

*"Evangelism" Is
Confronting the Atheism of Our Worship*

A liberating pastoral will be a *transformational* evangelism rather than the *neonostalgic* evangelism currently so popular in the churches of the rich. The contradictions between authentic and inauthentic evangelism may be described in five areas.

1. *Conversion.* Neonostalgic evangelism makes no demand for conversion. It is a call to persons to join churches or groups that are most compatible with their accustomed life-style and value-system. The design is to keep church life—like pornography—at a level acceptable to prevailing community standards. Authentic evangelism will demand conversion—a radical break with one's class—and commitment to the new creation.

2. *Numerical Growth.* Neonostalgic evangelism defines itself as numerical growth. Orlando Costas, director of the Institute of In-Depth Evangelism in San Jose, Costa Rica, gives a critical analysis of evangelism conceived of as church growth in terms of numbers alone. He broadens the definition of church growth to four areas: numerical, organic, contextual and incarnational. Neonostalgic evangelism (my term), he says,

- focuses only on numerical growth to the sacrifice of the others;
- is based on a shallow hermeneutic;
- makes the locus of theology the church instead of Christ;
- truncates the witness to a portion only of the human, which is possible because of an ambiguous concept of man and sin;
- suffers from an anthropological-functionalistic syndrome, which sees change and stability only in terms of strategy, rather than ethics.¹¹

In a forthcoming essay, Costas includes a case study of Chilean Protestantism, which is largely pentecostal and has found a congeniality with the junta in their shared anticommunism.

First of all, *numerical* and *organic* growth in themselves do not necessarily mean that a church is indeed growing. It may be . . . simply getting fat. The Chilean example illustrates the problem of "ecclesial obesity," an excessive fatness which may preclude (or at least cloud) the presence of the kingdom.¹²

3. *Christendom.* The Latin American Bishops' Conference in Medellin (1968), in their report on "Pastoral Care of the Masses," observed,

To date the pastoral attitude has been one of preservation of the faith through the administration of the sacraments. . . . This type of pastoral care was suited to an age in which the social structures coincided with the religious ones, the structures that communicate values (family, school, etc.) were permeated by Christian principles, and the faith was transmitted, one might say, by the very inertia of tradition.¹³

Neonostalgic evangelism is the effort to maintain a "Christendom" relationship with society. This is being attempted at a time when Christendom has broken up, never to be reconstituted.

Transformational evangelism focuses instead on church growth as contextual and incarnational. In a commencement address at Fuller Theological Seminary, Costas said that, too often, evangelism "has been so amoral, so uncontextual [that] it represents the politics of the kingdom of darkness. Nothing pleases the devil more than congregations that are alienated from their historical context, from the cause of justice and from the humiliating situation of the downtrodden."¹⁴ Authentic evangelism denounces any god who alienates the church from its context, thus paralyzing its incarnational mission.

4. *Human Rights.* José Comblin of Chile asserted, "If the United States would end its commitment to the doctrine of National Security, this entire system of military repression [in Latin America] would collapse."¹⁵ In an article in *Servir*, Pablo Richard sees the task of giving a theological answer to the doctrine of national security as the "central nucleus of evangelism." The mission of the church is the defense of human rights and the criticism of the model of development imposed in the name of national security.

It treats of a central problem: the destruction of people as people. According to this theology, the destruction of people implies the destruction of the church, because without people there is no church. . . . The church, representative of the people, confronts the state and this confronting is evangelizing.¹⁶

5. *Atheism*. All the characteristics of a transformational evangelism are integrated into this: The task of evangelism is to confront the atheism of our worship—a lesson from Cuba.

"The Confession of Faith of the Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Cuba—1977" declares,

The Church teaches that the "atheism" of the ideology sustained by the Socialist Revolution, makes more clearly evident the atheism of the "believers" who are not capable of "discerning the signs of the times" in the midst of the new society being constructed, in which the radical transformations of the unjust structures make possible the creation of a more integrally reconstructed human being.

In scripture, atheism is not viewed as the denial of God's existence, but as worship of the wrong god. The prohibition of idols is the confrontation of atheism in worship. In our churches there is a widespread assumption that capitalism is theistic and Marxism is atheistic, but Sergio Arce, rector of the Evangelical Seminary in Matanzas, Cuba, claims that atheism is a product of Western culture, rather than a specific Marxian phenomenon.¹⁷ "The first task of evangelism," he said in a conversation, "is to confront Christians who are not atheists of the head, but are atheists of the heart. Marx was an atheist of the head, but not of the heart."

The fourth element of a liberating *pastoral* for the rich, therefore, and the central evangelistic task, is the confrontation of the atheism of our worship.

*Hope for the Liberation of the Rich Is Available—
As a Gift from the Poor*

Dussel points to the source of our hope. "The process of liberation itself is the only thing which will make it possible for the oppressor to undergo a real conversion. Hence only the underdeveloped nations of the world can enable the affluent nations to discover a new, more human model of human life."¹⁸ Paulo Freire made the same point in a letter to Hugo Assmann, "I get the impression that the Third World could become a source of inspiration for theological renewal. . . . The developed countries are prevented from exercising any prophetic role by their nature as societies whose future lies in the maintenance of their present affluence."¹⁹

Behind the truth of all this is the promise and call of Jesus: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom." Are we left out because we are rich? Only if we refuse to become poor. The ambiguity of these two words is avoided by biblical clarity.

Material poverty is the lack of economic goods necessary for human life worthy of the name. The Bible consistently regards material poverty as degrading, subhuman, against the will and purpose of God and to be vigorously struggled against. More importantly, it is rooted in sin, the injustice of oppression. No one is called by Jesus to this.

Spiritual poverty is not to "spiritualize" material poverty—a device of colonizers. It is to be poor in spirit—to be those poor who are blessed "because the Kingdom of God has begun," as Gustavo Gutiérrez says. "From the time of Zephaniah (seventh century B.C.), those who waited the liberating work of the Messiah were called 'poor.' . . . They are blessed because the coming of the Kingdom will put an end to their poverty by creating a world of brotherhood."²⁰ To be poor in spirit is to have no other sustenance for hope

but God. It is to have a joyful life of expectancy because God is destroying the causes of material poverty.

The materially poor have the advantage of being further removed than the rich from the deceitful temptation of wealth's promise. Being human, the poor may be subverted into believing that material riches will liberate them. The call to spiritual poverty delivers both—the materially rich and the materially poor—from the temptation to expect that material wealth will produce hope.

Jesus invites the materially rich to salvation through becoming poor in spirit. It is a conversion more radical than divesting ourselves of our money. We are to surrender dependence on everything except this God who has entered history to bring total justice. Such conversion may mean giving up most or all of one's material wealth, or it may not. If the surrender is made, it must in no sense be charity. The giving must signal the uprooting of injustice. And whatever is retained must give the same signal.

The materially poor are liberated by becoming poor in spirit; by recognizing, rejoicing, and participating in the work of God to eliminate the roots of injustice that made them materially poor. The materially rich are liberated by becoming poor in spirit by recognizing, rejoicing, and participating in the work of God to eliminate the roots of injustice that made them materially rich. This is the style of life Gutiérrez calls "poverty as solidarity and protest." Its authenticity can always be tested by the pattern of the incarnation of God as the human poor, in Jesus.

The fifth requirement of the liberating *pastoral* for the rich, therefore, is to become poor in the sense that qualifies us for the benefits of the beatitudes.

III

The cover design for the series *Latin American Philosophy and Liberation* reproduces an Aztec drawing from a wall

of the Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City.²¹ Human figures, male and female, carry totems symbolizing their roles in the community. The most interesting feature is the trail of bare footprints winding through the entire logo. They mark the Aztec pilgrimage to freedom. The people of God always move with uncertain, sometimes erratic, but eschatological steps—toward hope born from a future that invades the present.

Hugo Assmann—a Brazilian, who in faithfulness has been forced from his home country and also from Uruguay, Bolivia, and Chile, and who now lives in Costa Rica (*Theology for a Nomad Church* is a most appropriate title for his book)—tells us what it ultimately means to put our feet in this way.

Once set on this path the Latin American theologian is still going to find himself alone, almost devoid of links with the Christian reference-points of the past. . . . He is a conscious "apostate" from the idealisms of the past and those that are arising again today. Like any apostate rebelling iconoclastically against the idols of the past, he finds it difficult . . . to make his brothers understand that he is not just an iconoclast but an opener of new horizons on the use of the name of God.²²

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Chapter 11. Dow Kirkpatrick

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5. *Ibid.*, pp. 35-38. Cf. Miranda's study of John, *Being and the Messiah* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1977).
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18. Dussel, *History and Theology of Liberation*, p. 146.
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20. Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, pp. 296-302.
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