

# EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY

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# Editorial

## *God and Mammon?*

Ensuing from the theme of the last issue of ERT, viz. how to do theology in a given context, the theme of this issue concentrates—one way or the other—on the context of Mammon! All the seven articles and most of the book reviews demonstrate specific attempts to do theology in the context of wealth.

The three parts of the theme—Prosperity, Property and Poverty—are dealt with in seven articles, and every author/authoress writes out of an appropriate background: those who write on prosperity are from the prosperous countries, and vice versa. Since there are literally thousands of books on the theology of poverty, the emphasis in this issue is rather on prosperity and property. Perhaps we are getting used to the sight of misery in our newspapers and on television?

One way, prosperity and poverty are the opposites. One means super-abundance of wealth while the other means the lack of it. Yet globally, with sociological, political and ideological factors coming into play the opposition is not that simple. If the biblical camel-through-needle-eye imagery seems to make the rich the cursed of the earth, Yonggi Cho's message, 'I do not preach airied things like salvation but the Gospel of Success' seems to bless them. In theologizing about wealth, it is revealing to note that each writer also relates his/her paper to one concrete area: D. T. Williams to Positive Thinking; Jon Bonk to Missions; Gilbreath to Capitalism; Barbara Gingerich to ecclesiology; Eisa Tamez to the Kingdom of God, Chandrakant Shourie to Power, and Viv Grigg to Urban Poverty.

Obviously the Christian conscience cannot tip the balance either in favour of prosperity or poverty. For, Paul says '... I have learned to be content whatever the circumstance is. I know what it is to be in need and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want' ([Phil. 4:11-12](#)). Apparently both the prosperity and poverty advocates can find biblical support for their opinions, that prosperity is the evidence of God's blessings or that poverty is due primarily to exploitation. Yet Paul's words are nearer home: a disciple of Christ must be immune both to prosperity heights and the poverty depths. The crucial question of course is not how much property I own or lack, but rather my attitude to it. What role does Mammon play in my calculations, of family life, business, ministry and even theology? Is not this the thrust of what Paul said in [I Timothy 6:10](#), that not money but the love of money breeds all kinds of evils?

If it is true that in the next one generation the global Church will [p. 196](#) primarily be occupied with the question of poverty and prosperity, is it an exaggeration to say that evangelical theology gains ground to the extent it develops a workable yet biblically sound attitude to Mammon in practical life situations?

*Editor* [p. 197](#)

# Prosperity Teaching and Positive Thinking

D. T. Williams

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*If not a moral problem, Prosperity teaching is at least a theological problem. If the liberationists major on social salvation, prosperity teachers major on material salvation. The author convincingly traces the origin of prosperity teaching in Norman Vincent Peale's Positive Thinking as well as a kind of Pentecostalism which has such a bent. Obviously, the prosperity syndrome need not be confined exclusively to the developed countries.*

Editor

When the teaching on prosperity first appeared in Southern Africa, it was in groups outwardly very similar to Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, such that the particular doctrinal emphasis on material prosperity could well be thought of as an extension of their characteristic teaching on the Holy Spirit. However, although it is true that many of these churches are now teaching an emphasis on prosperity, my contention is that the source of the doctrine is not simply an extension of the classic Pentecostal doctrines, but is to be found in a combination of these with a group of ideas, known as 'positive thinking', imported from elsewhere, particularly the USA. The prosperity teachings are '... notably different from the charismatic renewal ... of which they form a part, and from their Pentecostal and evangelical roots' (Morran & Schlemmer 1984:11).<sup>1</sup>

## PROSPERITY TEACHING

In order to demonstrate a source for these ideas it is necessary briefly to define what these ideas are.

*Material prosperity* is the right of a Christian. There is a strong sense of the ability of God and His relationship to the believer, such that if God p. 198 is in control of all, the believer has access to it. He can and should live as a 'King's kid' (Cho 1979:10). Hence it is believed that a believer can, and should, be rich in a material sense.

*Positive confession.* The main means of achieving prosperity is by 'confession' of the answer to the need, not by referring to the need itself which is negative confession (Capps 1982:255). Success is therefore claimed on the basis of texts such as [Mark 11:24](#), [Philippians 4:19](#) (Copeland 1974:29). If this is done, results are assured. However doubt, which is a negative form of confession, will prevent the desired results (Copeland 1974:19, cf. [James 1:7](#)).

*Bible usage.* The Bible is thus used in a fundamentalist way, in which texts are extracted from the context, both written and historical, and applied to the current situation.

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<sup>1</sup> Pentecostalism cannot be seen as the only source of these ideas because of the definite differences in various areas. For example, classic Pentecostalism tends to be spiritually rather than materially minded (Morran & Schlemmer 1984:31), it knows nothing of 'positive confession', and although it has a strong emphasis on tithing, the reason for this is not for personal gain but for Christian work.

Although the whole Bible is referred to as inspired, it is noticeable that comparatively few texts are used.

*Faith.* The key to receiving prosperity is the exercise of faith. However, faith is looked upon not so much as trust but as a positive action (Hagin 1978:13). If something material is claimed, then the person must act as if he has already received it, or his faith is not real, and consequently he will not receive (Copeland 1974:80, but cf. 1974:105). Faith can therefore be viewed as an instrument to influence God, with the consequent loss of Divine sovereignty to the human will.

*Other techniques.* In addition to positive confession, other ways of achieving prosperity are used. These are agreeing with another, on the basis of [Matthew 18:19](#), where both claim together (Copeland 1974:96), and the ideas of 'seed faith'. This latter, taken from [Mark 10:30](#), and relating to the practice of tithing, teaches that God will repay any gift to him at the rate of one hundred-fold, possibly over a period of time (Copeland 1974:66f). As in the case of positive confession, doubt as to the efficacy of the technique (taken however as mistrust of God) will stop the return.

*Underlying theology.* Apart from the direct approach to Biblical texts, there is an implied theology which is used to support the claims made. This is rooted in a view of the atonement as a substitutionary sacrifice (Capps 1976:43, 153), although other views of the atonement, particularly the 'Christus Victor' of Aulen, could well be similarly used. The substitutionary theory indicates that on the cross Jesus suffered for our sins, thus substituting his life for our punishment. Prosperity p. 199 teaching extends this idea to the material realm, arguing that if Jesus took on himself our sins, then he also took on himself material needs as well (McCauley 1984:14). Then just as spiritual salvation is claimed as a result of faith, so prosperity, or material salvation, may likewise be claimed (Copeland 1974:51).<sup>2</sup>

*Health.* Although not directly a part of the complex of ideas, teaching on health is always associated with it. Health can therefore be claimed as a Christian right (Capps 1976:42), by a faith which will treat symptoms as spurious once healing has been claimed, or as a device of the devil to cause doubt and non-receipt. The basis of the claim is again in the theory of the atonement, with perhaps a bit more substance, in so far as [Matthew 8:17](#) applies [Isaiah 53:4](#) to the healing miracles of Jesus.

## POSITIVE THINKING

It was Norman Vincent Peale, more than any other, who popularized this technique, and it is on his writings that I wish to concentrate. Naturally he has also been influenced by earlier teachings.<sup>3</sup> The ideas of Christian Science come immediately to mind here, but there are significant differences. I mention just two. Firstly Peale, and prosperity teaching thereafter, can hardly be considered to treat matter as not really existent. Secondly, and this is perhaps more significant, whereas Christian Science denies the reality of evil, Peale (1960:9) does not refuse to recognise the negative, but rather refuses to dwell upon it, and the prosperity teachers deny its existence only after the claim of health or prosperity has been made. A more likely possibility is the influence of existentialist ideas on Schuller (Voskuil 1983:151), but he insists that any influence is indirect, more likely due to the

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<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of this aspect of the prosperity message, see Onken 1980.

<sup>3</sup> Voskuil 1983:115f refers to his immediate predecessors.

'spirit of the age'. I am not holding Peale totally responsible for the excesses of the teaching today. There have, after all, been many similarities in the past. Verryn (1983:10) sees similarities with the Sadducees.<sup>4</sup> Swaggert (1980) also connects the prosperity teaching with Gnosticism. Here Voskuil (1983:118) sees a similarity between Quimby (Christian P. 200 Science) and neo-Platonism.<sup>5</sup> With both the Sadducees and the Gnostics, however, there is no historical link with the prosperity teachers. Indeed Swaggert (1980:5) doubts whether any of the present day prosperity teachers know anything about Gnosticism. It would seem rather that the very evident human desire for material success is bound to manifest itself in various ways from time to time. Peale was no scholar (Timmerman 1985), and neither are prosperity teachers. Perhaps the closest definite indication of dependence is seen in that both Peale and the prosperity teachers have been successfully propagating their doctrines in the same geographical area (the Western world, especially the USA) and therefore with respect to the same culture and problems.<sup>6</sup> Similar to Schuller, Carnegie (1955:42) sees self-esteem as one of the most powerful human motivations. More specifically, one link, probably not the only one, can be seen in the clear dependence of Robert Schuller on Peale (Voskuil 1983:17), and then the influence by Schuller on Cho, seen in a foreword (Cho 1979), who openly propagates prosperity teaching. Such links are however tenuous. I want therefore to consider the aspects of prosperity teaching in turn and note similarities in the writings of Peale.

*The Prosperity Teaching of Peale can be summarised as follows:*

*Material success* is a right. An important facet of Peale, taken from his liberal background, is the idea of the love of God, coupled with a belief that Christians are God's sons. Thus Peale believes that he can affirm his health because 'I am a child of God' (1960:215). Of course the entire thrust of his books concerns success and how to achieve it. Generally however he sees this as a result of the positive attitude to life which is his prime objective, rather than as an end in itself which is the stand of the prosperity teachers. However, in American culture, p. 201 the two are really inseparable. Peale thus gives many examples of how positive thinking has resulted in material success and goes so far as to say explicitly: 'There was a time when I acquiesced in the silly idea that there is no relationship between faith and prosperity ...' (1953:229).

Usually a disciple is more extreme than the person he follows, and this idea is more explicit in Schuller. His biographer refers to his system as 'success through positive thinking' (Voskuil 1983:3), and in his own writings he has no doubt that the acquisition

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<sup>4</sup> An example is their literalistic interpretation of the Scripture. More importantly, Verryn notes that they did not challenge the existing order of society, but worked with it for their own prosperity. Thus they reflected the assumptions of the time. This is clearly true of Peale, and Voskuil (1983:156) says the same of Schuller, Peale's 'disciple'.

<sup>5</sup> The major point that Swaggert makes is the syncretism of Gnosticism, and it certainly seems evident that the prosperity teaching is an amalgam of Christianity with the prevalent Western materialism. He notes a couple of other points of similarity such as the raising of man to autonomy, near divinity, and the power of the 'word'. One of his major points, however, of a supposed dualism in the prosperity teaching between body and spirit, as occurs in Gnosticism, is, I believe, untenable, as one of the pillars of their theological position is that spiritual change should have material results. Moreover prosperity teaching does not lead in itself to either asceticism or antinomianism as the Gnostic dualism did, although the emphasis on individual revelation and authentication has led to the latter from time to time. Peale however tends to be dualistic ('The body is but a temporary tool of the real person, who is spirit' (1960:259)) as his spiritualist experiences also show (Timmerman 1985).

<sup>6</sup> ... a self-help religious tradition has flourished in America ... [and] identified success as a product of character' (Voskuil 1983:116).

of wealth is correct and something to thank God for (Schuller 1982:116). In fact he even claims to have removed this question from being an issue for a Christian, which it admittedly has been for centuries, seeing the solution in the idea that sacrifice is necessary for success (1982:28). In this he is anticipating the ideas of 'seed faith'.

*Positive confession.* The basic standpoint of positive thinking is the affirmation and concentration of the positive aspect of any situation and the rejection of any negative aspects. Thus Peale says: 'I discovered that if you expect the best you will get the best' (1953:112), or 'big thoughts get big results' (1960:36), and solves big problems by praying big prayers (1953:7). His belief is that the power of the mind will act upon the situation and itself be effective. Although he attributes the power of change to God,<sup>7</sup> reference to mind conditioning is much more common although he quotes [Romans 12:2](#) as a justification for this (1960:32f). Thus he advises, 'Repeat the affirmation daily' (1957:20), 'Speak to your muscles every day and to your nerves' (1953:102) (the speaking should be aloud!). Schuller advises likewise (Voskuil 1983:85), as do other protagonists of the technique. Thus Hill & Stone (1961:200) report the effects of having a group of salesmen chant in unison 'I feel wealthy, I feel happy, I feel terrific', and advise (1961:69) the writing down 'with emotion' [sic] twice daily a statement of desire for money. Carnegie (1955:85) advises, 'Act as if you were already happy, and that will tend to make you happy.' Thus Peale refers to the '... amazing untapped power you have within you ...' (1957:27), and secular positive thinkers talk of the mystic powers of the mind (Hill & Stone 1961:67). It is a short step to clairvoyance and telepathy (cf. Hill & Stone 1967:78, Peale 1960:250f), and not surprisingly, Peale's autobiography refers to spiritualism, and visits from his dead parents (Timmerman 1985).

Peale is equally sure that negative thoughts are counter productive. p. 202 He writes, 'Positive thinking will not work unless you believe it will work' (1960:28), and, 'They water it down with timid little doubts' (1960:28). Likewise Schuller says a negative emotion must never be verbalized (Voskuil 1983:80).

In contrast to secular users of positive thought, and the prosperity teachers, Peale does not believe that anything can be achieved, irrespective of the will of God. He feels one only receives what will be good. He writes, '... on a faith basis your desire will only be for that which you can ask in God's name' (1957:4). In a similar way, Peale believes that guilt, due to wrong action, will restrict the power of thought (1960:25). Of course the prosperity teachers are in harmony with this, but believe that prosperity is always the will of God (e.g. Capps 1976:33, 153).

*Bible usage.* This is one of the biggest areas of difference from the prosperity teachers. Peale is not a fundamentalist, so does not regard Bible texts as effective in themselves, but as valuable for conditioning the mind. He can advise opening the Bible at random to read (1960:190). Thus [Philippians 4:13](#), which is taken by prosperity teachers as a proof text, is used by Peale as an inspiring text, to be frequently repeated. Schuller (e.g. 1982:119) does the same. A similar treatment is given to [Mark 11:24](#) (1960:155) which is one of the key texts of Hagin (e.g. 1978:6) and other prosperity teachers. Even secular positive thinkers use the Bible (and other inspiring works) in the same way e.g. Hill & Stone (1961:20, 301).

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<sup>7</sup> E.g. 'Always act as if it were impossible to fail and God will see you through' (1960:15, quoting an acquaintance with approval).

A similar aspect is the fact that Peale and Schuller did not emphasize their denomination (cf. Voskuil 1983:15). Peale sees the value of any faith as inspirational,<sup>8</sup> and notes the acclaim of positive thought by those of all religions, 'Catholics, Protestants and Jews' (1960:6). It could well be argued, as in the case of Schuller also, that there is actually little connection between their technique and Christianity (cf. 1953:160, 1957:7). It is worth noting here that most of the churches which propagate prosperity claim to be 'interdenominational'.

*Faith.* The title of one of Kenneth Hagin's booklets is 'Have faith in faith', which adequately reflects the attitude of the prosperity teachers, that results come as a result of faith. This is echoed by a similar statement of Peale, 'Don't be afraid to trust faith' (1957:1). Of course p. 203 both Peale and the prosperity teachers see the actual power as coming from God, although Peale often refers directly to the power of the mind (e.g. 1957:27), and this is even more so in other advocates of positive thought who even make references to the mind's 'mystic powers' (e.g. Hill & Stone 1961:67).<sup>9</sup> Thus he frequently urges the imagining of the desired result, because this in itself is effective.<sup>10</sup>

Nevertheless Peale is generally seen as attributing the ultimate choice to God.<sup>11</sup> This is less extreme than the prosperity teachers, who rather, on the basis of texts such as [Mark 11:24](#) and [Philippians 4:19](#) see any claim to riches as in God's will (e.g. Cho 1980:30). However Peale thinks rather of influencing God to help. He speaks of an agreement with God,<sup>12</sup> a belief echoed in the prosperity teachers (e.g. Copeland 1974:38f). This however is not far removed from his usual statement of the power of the mind. God helps the power of the mind,<sup>13</sup> because a believer is a child of God with access to his power, and even changes the mind ([Romans 12:2](#), Peale 1960:32f). Likewise the mind enables God to act,<sup>14</sup> although one suspects that the belief in God expressed here is functioning as inspiration rather than using the power of God itself.

*Techniques.* Clearly the main technique advocated by Peale is a form of mind conditioning, and this is naturally more clearly the case in secular advocates of positive thought. So Hill & Stone (1961:19) say that 'PMA (Positive Mental Attitude)' attracts wealth, success, happiness and health, whereas 'NMA (Negative Mental Attitude)' removes them. The more characteristic techniques of the prosperity teachers are however not present. Thus there is a suggestion of the agreement idea (1953:58, 1957:239), but more particularly the ideas of 'seed faith', although not explicit, are certainly present in the form that it is p.

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<sup>8</sup> E.g. '... I have found that the sweetness of death is intensified in all men by a childlike faith in their religion ... what men cling to is the same throughout the world (1960:250).

<sup>9</sup> Peale also suggests this in places (e.g. 1960:244f). He writes, 'Attitudes are more important than facts' (1953:14, quoting a 'famous psychiatrist, Dr. Karl Menninger'), a statement with clear similarities to the position of the prosperity teachers, and 'your belief will help create the fact' (1957:27, quoting William James).

<sup>10</sup> E.g. 'The minute you can see them in your mind, you already have them' (1953:225).

<sup>11</sup> E.g. '... hold a mental picture ... put the wish in God's hands ... If it is His will He will grant it' (1957:5).

<sup>12</sup> E.g. 'God and I struck up a partnership' (1953:113, quoting a successful businessman).

<sup>13</sup> E.g. 'Develop a tremendous faith in God and that will give you a humble yet soundly realistic faith in yourself' (1953:7).

<sup>14</sup> E.g. 'affirm "God is helping me"' (1953:15), 'believe that you now receive power from him' (1953:18).

204 profitable to the giver to give.<sup>15</sup> This of course is a standard secular technique, so Dale Carnegie (1955:41f) advocates boosting the other person's self-esteem in order to gain contracts from him.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, Peale sees the benefits as coming from far more than psychology. He quotes [Malachi 3:10](#) (1960:111), and speaks of the miraculous provision of God (1960:115). Naturally however the full doctrines of tithing and particularly the hundred fold return ([Mark 10:30](#)) are not to be found as these are more distinctly biblical.

*Underlying theology.* There is no connection made with the atonement in any of the writings of the positive thinkers. Peale bases his belief in success, where it is simply due to the power of the mind, on the love of God.<sup>17</sup> Further than this he does not go. Schuller however goes further and tries to systematize a theology. Like Peale he says that 'God's plan calls for us to succeed' (Schuller 1982:120). He attempts to build his theology on the concept of self-esteem, and prosperity and success will enhance a person's self-esteem. There are perhaps a few hints of doubt about this idea. He says that society as a whole will benefit from an individual's success (Schuller 1982:12),<sup>18</sup> and urges self-denial (1982:70) as only the self-esteemed can really give (1982:116).<sup>19</sup> Perhaps most significantly, however, Schuller justified the building of the ostentatious 'Crystal Cathedral' rather than supporting the poor, by the need to evangelized in a culturally relevant way, by a low cost per kilogram, but especially by individual revelation (Voskuil 1983:32). It is this last point which finds many echoes in the prosperity teachers who frequently claim such personal revelation (e.g. Copeland 1974:72, Hagin 1978:19).

*Health.* Unlike the followers of prosperity teaching who have often eschewed medical attention, and suffered as a result, believing that a p.205 claim of healing was effective (cf. Farah 1980:1f etc.), Peale advocates a combination of God and the doctor (1953:185, 206). There is no claiming, or laying on of hands (cf. 1953:199f), except in the application of positive thought to the illness. He thus advocates an attitude of 'I am going to be better today' rather than 'I am not going to be ill today' which tends to be negative (1960:215). His belief is in the power of the mind over the body, so sees a cause of ill-health in ill will, or links disease with wrong doing (1957:243). Similarly he treats the mind in order to treat the body, seeing a spiritual factor as a large element even in organic disability (1960:211). He believes that the mind influences the glands of the body (1960:213), and says that mental infection must be removed in order to have a healthy body (1960:206).

However healing is not prominent in his writings. Positive thought is effective for psychosomatic complaints and for headache (1960:27) but for other matters the doctor's advice is advocated.

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<sup>15</sup> Thus 'sharing ... stimulates and maintains success' (1960:45), 'learn to give ... the payoff will be more than worth it' (1960:104).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. also Schuller's basic approach to theology which is 'self-esteem' (Schuller 1982), and Hill & Stone (1961:152) argue 'the more you give of that which is good and desirable, the more you will get'.

<sup>17</sup> E.g. 'I am the rich child of a loving Father, all the Father has is mine ... claim ... health and wealth' (1960:117 quoting principles given in a class for businessmen based on Charles Fillmore's book 'Prosperity'), 'Vibrant life is surely God's intent' (1957:vii). (Similarly Hill & Stone (1961:20) assert that it is *never* God's will to be poor.)

<sup>18</sup> An echo of Adam Smith's 'invisible hand'?

<sup>19</sup> Similarly McCauley (1984:15), on the basis of [2 Corinthians 9:8](#), claims that God prospers his church (Rhema) so that it can be a blessing to others as well. Cf. also Copeland (1974:57).



## PENTECOSTALISM AND PROSPERITY TEACHING

It can be seen that a large number of aspects of the prosperity teaching are to be found in Peale, but by no means all, and those which are there are often carried further by the prosperity teachers. It is necessary to seek a second root to combine with the ideas of Peale in order to clarify the origins of the teaching.

The Charismatic and Pentecostal churches fill the gaps in Peale almost exactly.<sup>20</sup> Notably, although Pentecostalism has formed new denominations, the Charismatic movement is across denominations and the prosperity churches are 'interdenominational'.<sup>21</sup>

*Material success.* Here the Charismatic emphasis was originally more other worldly in that it saw the gifts of the Spirit as causing, and as a result of, a close relationship with God. Nevertheless those gifts find application in this world, particularly the gift of healing. It is probable p. 206 that a large measure of the success seen in such churches is also due to the fact that they fulfill many of the adherents' personal needs, particularly on the emotional level. The move from this to material benefits is not great.<sup>22</sup>

*Positive confession.* This is absent from charismatic theology except in relation to the claiming of Bible promises which is however a secondary feature to proper positive confession.

*Bible usage.* This major gap in Peale is filled totally by the classic Pentecostal teaching, and to a large extent by the modern Charismatic movement. The difference in these is due to the fact that classic Pentecostalism was almost totally fundamentalist (Hollenweger 1972:29–1f, Bond 1974:15) whereas the Charismatic movement is not, although it finds most fertile ground in churches and individuals which are Bible based in their theology.<sup>23</sup> So although Peale treats Bible texts as merely inspiring, a fundamentalist takes them as an immediate promise of God to him; he treats texts such as [Mark 11:24](#), [John 15:7](#) and [Philippians 4:19](#) as immediately applicable to him, with all the authority of God behind them, such that they are promises to be claimed.

*Faith.* The fundamentalist is easily driven to the position of the prosperity teachers on faith. Treating the Bible as totally inspired by God, he is urged to trust any particular verse as the direct word of God to him. This is not, however, a distinctive of the Pentecostal

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<sup>20</sup> This is not just a link with evangelical Christianity as in Schuller (Voskuil 1983:128), but specifically with the emphasis of the Pentecostals on emotional worship and the work of the Spirit. Fundamentalism, in itself, is not so centered upon miracles.

<sup>21</sup> The obvious difference between Peale's services and those of the Pentecostals is that whereas the latter have exuberance in worship, Peale believed in quietness (1957:165, 225); for him the church building is filled with mysterious powers (1957:206), which can be attuned to. However, it is arguable that both Charismatic worship or quiet contemplation can have the same aim of putting the mind into the correct mode to exert power.

<sup>22</sup> It is then noticeable that although the Pentecostal churches achieved great success, at least numerically, compared to traditional churches, the churches preaching prosperity experienced phenomenal growth. For example the Rhema Church in the Johannesburg area grew from about 15 at its establishment in 1979 to over 4000 by 1983 (cf. also Farah 1980:115, Cho 1983:33). There are however signs that a decline may have set in.

<sup>23</sup> Bond (1974:17) notes the doctrinal laxity of the neo-Pentecostals, who emphasize experience rather than doctrine. This of course renders them susceptible to extra ideas such as that of prosperity.

movement as such, although being Arminian in theology, they do tend to emphasize the need of a response of faith (Bloch-Hoell 1964:124).

*Techniques.* Here again the gap in Peale is adequately filled due to the fundamentalist emphasis. Obviously the texts referring to agreeing in prayer (e.g. [Matthew 18:19](#)) are taken as literally applicable, but also the advice on giving which in Peale is not very specific is greatly enhanced. Here the teaching on tithing which is a feature of the p. 207 Pentecostal churches (Bloch-Hoell 1964:152), but in their case for the support of the church, is linked with Peale's 'giving to get' resulting in the prosperity approach.<sup>24</sup> The relevance of the Pentecostals to this is that such folk do have a background of tithing, some of which does go to other Christians, and would then be interpreted as part of the return. Moreover, they are accustomed to 'direct revelation, and so are likely to believe that God specifically tells to give a gift, sometimes very generous, to another. These factors, without any necessary supernatural intervention, would alone lead to a form of vindication of the doctrine.

*Underlying theology.* Here also the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements fill a gap in Peale. Their doctrine of the atonement has been that of a substitutionary sacrifice (Bloch-Hoell 1964:149), although I suspect that in recent years the ideas of victory appropriated in the cross and resurrection has been more to the fore. In addition the practice of healing has found theological justification in this view of the atonement ([Matthew 8:17=Isaiah 53:4](#)) (Bloch-Hoell 1964:148, Hollenweger 1972:368); although the extension of the atonement to the needs caused by poverty is new, it is a relatively small extrapolation. I suspect that in early Pentecostalism, healing was regarded as a miracle, and the theological justification was not thought out. Once it was, then the extension to poverty followed rapidly.

A significant extra factor is the clear Christian anthropology. Whereas Peale tended to be dualistic in the Greek sense, separating body and spirit, the Pentecostals emphasize the unity of man, so that spirit and body interrelate closely, so that religion affects the whole man.<sup>25</sup> Similarly Schuller (1982:167), although not Charismatic, roots his ideas in Judaeo-Christian incentives.

It is worth suggesting also here that the Charismatic emphasis on 'gifts' has also contributed to a materialistic view of religion, emphasizing what is acquired, although of course these gifts are spiritual (e.g. [1 Corinthians 12-14](#)).

*Healing.* Again this is clearly an important part of life of Pentecostal groups, being almost as important as glossolalia in the early movement p. 208 (Bloch-Hoell 1964-147), and naturally comes over to the prosperity emphasis. Oral Roberts preached health, riches and well-being (Hollenweger 1972-363), but it is noteworthy that a professor at his university denies the prosperity emphasis (Farah 1980).

## CONCLUSION

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<sup>24</sup> For the early Pentecostals tithing was often required. It was seen as the key to prosperity (Hollenweger 1972:399), as it is in the prosperity teachers (e.g. Copeland 1974:106). This is definitely stated in the 'seed faith' doctrine, which again is a result of a fundamentalist approach to [Mark 10:30](#).

<sup>25</sup> In contrast to the Greek idea of the evil nature of the material, which predominated in the Church for centuries, this teaching, perhaps unknowingly, is more Hebraic in seeing good in material things (Fuller & Rice 1966:112).

As seen from the outlines above, neither the classic Pentecostal doctrine nor the ideas of positive thinking match up to the developed prosperity ideas. Nevertheless it can be seen that each supplies the lack in the other. Clearly further historical research would need to be done to verify further the validity of the conclusion, but from a theological point of view a synthesis of ideas would seem to be fairly well established.

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## Affluence—The Achilles Heel

Jon Bonk

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*The following thought-provoking article reached our office several months ago. In this the author describes the influence of the affluence particularly on Western missions making observations from church history and common sense as well as the theology of incarnation. It is an honest analysis of some of the root causes of the so-called Mission-Church tensions, albeit with two limitations: first, primarily it is aimed at the Western missions whereas in recent years the modern Two-Thirds World missionaries have grown to an unbelievable total of 15,000 to whom this analysis does not apply. Second, given the changing policies of missionary organizations as well as foreign exchange rates, the figures need to be taken with a pinch of salt—though the conclusions still hold good.*

Editor

### GLOBAL DISPARITY

Since the industrial revolution less than two centuries ago, the material and economic gulf separating the industrialized 'North' from the agrarian 'South' has grown to astonishing proportions, and most evidence suggests that the chasm will continue to widen.

This is neither the time nor the place to speculate on the *reasons* for this growing disparity between the 'haves' and the 'have nots'.<sup>1</sup> What is of interest is the historical anomaly which has appeared. For the greater part of the *modern* missionary movement, most Christian missionary endeavour has been undertaken by the 'rich' to the 'poor'. This is historically anomalous, since there is little if any precedent for it in the first 1700 years of Christian history, and certainly none in the earlier record of church missionary activity as recorded in the New Testament and patristic sources.

The earliest Christian missionaries operated in a world that was not as sharply polarized economically and materially as is true of its modern counterpart. The first

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<sup>1</sup> C. Piero Gheddo, *Why Is The Third World Poor?* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1973); William Byron (ed.), *The Causes of World Hunger* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982); and P. T. Bauer, *Equality, The Third World and Economic Delusion* (London: Methuen, 1981). These three books provide a representatively diverse and stimulating analysis of the reasons for this phenomenon.

missionary force was almost entirely p. 210 constituted of natives of an obscure, impoverished, foreign-dominated and occupied country which was little more than a back-eddy of the vast imperialist Roman empire. In this century, on the other hand, it has become more common for Christians to think in terms of mission *from* the political, military, and economically powerful centres *to* those dominated. Our institutional structures so reflect this model of operation that the sending of missionaries by the poorer churches to the rich North is implicitly assumed to be logistically impossible. The money is simply not there.

For example, 1982 figures published by the International Red Cross indicate the estimated GNP of Ethiopia and Zaire to be \$120 and \$210 respectively. While GNP is obviously a crude and to some degree deceptive measure of relative affluence, few would deny that Western missionaries sent to such third world countries are usually very wealthy by local standards. A missionary family of four proceeding to Ethiopia with a reputable and representative IFMA member agency is required to raise approximately \$23,000 in annual support, while a similar family commissioned by a well known EFMA denomination to serve in Zaire may expect to be supported by about the same amount.<sup>2</sup>

The social dynamics likely to characterize the relations between two families which such widely disparate incomes can best be imagined by putting oneself into the position of the Ethiopian family of four with an annual income of \$480, or into the position of the Zairian family whose annual income totals \$840. In the case of the former, the missionary family's income is 67 times greater; in the case of the latter, the differential is 38 times!

What genre of relationships is the missionary family likely to develop with the Ethiopian or with the Zairian family? Perhaps the best way to answer this question is to turn the tables on ourselves: What sort of relationship does the average missionary family develop with a family whose earning power is 67 times (\$2,144,000 per year!) or 38 times (\$1,216,000 per year!) its own? Or put another way, what sort of relationship would church members expect to develop with a pastor with an annual income 30 to 70 times the congregational average?

Whatever one might imagine, it would be exceedingly difficult for genuinely fraternal relationships to develop in such circumstances. At best, in the case of the missionary, such wealthy families might come to be regarded as potential benefactors or supporters! At worst, rich families might be regarded with suspicion and envy. Similarly, it is—humanly p. 211 speaking—nearly impossible for the 'rich' western missionary family to associate with the poor Ethiopian or Zairian family in any genuinely fraternal and understanding way. To the missionary family belongs the privilege, power, and position that go with wealth. Conversely, it will be hard for the poor family to understand or appreciate the motives of the missionary family, in his eyes privileged beyond imagination as evidenced by clothing, transportation, holidays, special schools, technology, and other amenities that are the lot of the rich.

## HISTORICAL PRECEDENCE

Rich missionaries are not a uniquely twentieth century phenomenon. The first London Missionary Society missionaries to central Africa must have presented to native observers a mind-boggling spectacle of material plenitude. Financed initially by a 5,000 pound sterling gift from millionaire Robert Arthington, the first party of six missionaries set out on July 25th, 1877 to transport 28,500 pounds of supplies 830 miles from the Zanzibar

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<sup>2</sup> I am deliberately refraining from citing the names of the agency and denomination involved, since they are by no means atypical.

coast to Lake Tanganyika. The journey, which was to have been accomplished in six months by means of ox wagons at a cost of £5,106 sterling, in fact took longer and cost more. The oxen which were to have pulled the wagons having died, missionaries found it necessary to employ no fewer than 868 native carriers to transport their goods. It took them almost a year to reach their destination. By 1882 the enterprise had cost the mission a staggering £22,000 sterling. By 1885 over £40,000 sterling had been expended upon this effort in central Africa, with no appreciable results.

Although missionary lifestyles may have seemed modest by European standards, to Africans they represented spectacular, scarcely believable ostentation and affluence. David Picton Jones, a key missionary during this period, began to suspect that missionary affluence might be the primary obstruction in the process of making the gospel comprehensible to the people. He discovered that whilst LMS efforts remained barren, his Muslim employees from Zanzibar were winning converts. Writing to the foreign secretary, Jones observed:

... it is a remarkable fact that the Zanzibar men have had far more influence over the natives than we have ever had—in many little things they imitate them, they follow their customs, adopt their ideas, imitate their dress, sing their songs, and ... speak their ... language. I can only account for this by the fact that the [Muslims] live amongst them, in a [p. 212](#) simple manner like themselves, intermarry with them, and to some extent partake of their notions. Our life, on the other hand ... is far above them, and we are surrounded by things entirely beyond their reach. The consequence is, that they despair of trying to follow us—indeed they *cannot* follow us ... I have found by experience that they are exceedingly ready to imitate anything within their power, especially the young, and I feel sure in my own mind, if we were to bring ourselves nearer their own level—as near to it as our health and character as Christians would allow—we would gradually raise them up to a higher standard, and to a more civilized life. As it is they have nothing to lay hold of, they despair of ever becoming like us, they regard us as being of another (if not a higher) order, and they believe that our religion, however well adapted to us, is to them altogether unsuitable. When I talk to them of ... [God] ... and tell them that He is good and merciful, that we always endeavour to do His will, and that we are His children, they will answer coolly, pointing to the wonderful things in and about our house—You are his children *indeed* ...<sup>3</sup>

Even in cases where missionary labour was rewarded with fruit, relationships between western missionaries and native Christians all too often were not what they should have been. This was due in part to the social and economic disparity separating them. Rev. V. S. Azariah of India, addressing delegates to the World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh in 1910, spoke of the problem of co-operation between foreign and native workers. Whereas, he said, missionaries were well known for their condescending love, kind feelings, hard work, and self denial in their relationships with non-western Christians, in only a few exceptional cases were they known for their close, intimate, friendships with their native brethren: ‘... missionaries, except for a few of the very best seem ... to fail very largely in getting rid of an air of patronage and condescension and in

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<sup>3</sup> The letter was written by David Picton Jones (Uguha) to Ralph Wardlaw Thompson (London) on December 2, 1884, and may be found in the Council For World Mission Archives (incoming Letters, 5/5/C) at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. The early details of this mission to Central Africa are outlined on pages 649–670 of volume I of *The History of the London Missionary Society 1795–1895* by Richard Lovett (London: Henry Frowde, 1899). For more detail, see my dissertation, ‘All things to all men? Protestant Missionary identification in Theory and Practice, 1860–1910, with special reference to the London Missionary Society in Central Africa and Central China’. (Ph. D. Dissertation, University of Aberdeen, 1982).

establishing a genuinely brotherly ... relation as between equals ...'<sup>4</sup> Azariah concluded his address with the now famous challenge: 'You have p. 213 given your goods to feed the poor. You have given your bodies to be burned. We also ask for *love*. GIVE US FRIENDS'.<sup>5</sup>

## COMMON SENSE

The human experience everywhere shows that economic disparity and social distance breed envy and suspicion. People tend to establish friendships with their 'own kind' economically and socially. This rule is by no means abrogated when a missionary travels from North America to Africa or elsewhere. Thus it comes as no surprise that western missionaries tend to develop their closest friendships and fraternal social ties with fellow missionaries or with other members of the foreign community. Holidays are spent in the company of fellow westerners; recreation and leisure time likewise find many missionaries seeking out the company of their own peers; missionary children are educated in exclusive schools. Now of course there are practical, common-sense reasons for all of this—but that such social behaviour is both evidence of and gives rise to alienation cannot be gainsaid. Even the use of complicated expensive technology in 'getting the job done' heightens the social and material differences between missionary and non-missionary, tending not only to keep western missionaries at a distance from those whom they seek to influence,<sup>7</sup> but often obliterating or at least obscuring the spiritual nature of the western missionary's Concerns.<sup>8</sup>

## THE INCARNATION

Since the church is Christ's body—here on earth to carry out the wishes P. 214 of its Head—it is both instructive and necessary for missionaries from the west to reflect on some of the implications of the incarnation. In the first place, the incarnation teaches us that *the medium is the message*, to a large degree. This immediately suggests that some means are necessarily inappropriate in missionary endeavour even if they 'work'. The 'war-time lifestye' advocated by Ralph Winter and practised by many western missionaries is to some degree disturbing in its tacit insinuation that the end and the means, the message and medium, can be separated. The temptation of Christ teaches that in accomplishing kingdom objectives, even those readily available means which would

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<sup>4</sup> The entire address is found in volume IX, *World Missionary Conference, 1910 ... the History and Records Of The Conference ...* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson, and Ferrier, 1910), pages 306–315.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, page 309.

<sup>7</sup> Doris Haley, 'Ralph and Roberta Winter: A Wartime Life-Style', *Family Life Today*, (March 1983), page 29–33. The ever visionary Ralph Winter here advocates a very simple personal life-style combined with the use of every resource possible, including expensive technology, in evangelizing the world. Is it possible that this is simply a variety of the three temptations faced by Christ, speeding the kingdom building process by means of powerful and sensational but essentially worldly means? Christ rejected short cuts then; what he makes of our uncritical use of expensive technology today is a matter for speculation. What is certain is that this technology, while enabling the western missionary to establish physical proximity with poor people, ensures the maintenance of a vast social and economic distance between him and the people before whom he attempts to live out and preach the incarnation.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Jacob Loewen, *Culture and Human Values: Christian Intervention in Anthropological Perspective* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1975), pages xi–xii of Introduction. He cites an instance where a group of teachers from a South American tribe perceived *money* to be 'the axle of the missionaries' way of life', and now that they were Christians, the axle in their life as well!

have made his work easier, which would have accomplished the task faster, and which would have made his message more palatable, were not permissible. The whole life and ministry of Christ teaches us that God's messenger does *not* have the right to utilize *all* the means potentially available to him in accomplishing God's purposes on earth.

When the Word was made flesh, genuine identification occurred, not the empty posturing of a salesman Or a politician out to make a quick sale or get a vote. The Word was made flesh in the scandalous guise of an illegitimate child, with no social distinction whatsoever. The Word grew up poor, lived surrounded by the poor, and died poor. Yet all means were at His disposal. He was the omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent God, yet he willingly became a helpless, dependent infant, needing to learn obedience and grow in wisdom, with humble beginnings which saw him occupying only a few square feet in the bottom of a manger. The Sustainer of the universe, the Owner of the cattle on a thousand hills, had nowhere to lay His head; the Everlasting Father was dead at 33; the Holy God was executed for not being religious enough! Emmanuel! God with us! *The medium was the message!* Now we know that God *really* cares, *really* understands, *really* knows our predicament ([Hebrews 4:15-16](#)). Surely the incarnation teaches us something about God's mission strategy! This is the model all Christians—*especially* missionaries—are to adopt ([Philippians 2:3-8](#)).

In this day when western mission agendas seem largely preoccupied with talk of techniques and technology, and when mission theory appears frequently to regard man as more sociological than theological, we need men like Paul, like Roberto de Nobili, like Hudson Taylor, like James Gilmore, and like Bruce Olson who, divesting themselves of their natural affluence, security, and position, attempt to become more truly 'all things to all men'. Were this to be done today, the financial cost of mission would be considerably less. Of course, the human and personal cost would be much more. But the lives of [p. 215](#) western missionaries would be more in harmony with the Christ they preach, for where a man's treasure is, there is his heart also. One of the most hard-to-scale barriers to human communication and fraternity would be breached. Not domination, but true service, would be more possible and more likely.

Eleven years ago, *Mission-Focus* carried an article entitled 'The Shape of Mission Strategy' by David A. Shank.<sup>9</sup> It suggested that the term 'strategy', as a military term, carried with it built-in notions of conquest, imposition, imperialism, planning, structuring, and all that goes along with an army fighting a war. Mr. Shank proposed then that it was time for Western missions to think, instead, in terms of a 'cross strategy'. The strategy of the cross involves self-denial, servanthood and identification. This strategy renounces privilege and embraces servanthood. Accordingly, the missionary adopting the cross-strategy wouldn't call others up to his material-social level; he would step down to theirs; he wouldn't have others serving him, but as a servant he would allow others to dispose of him. He would be more vulnerable, and his agenda for action would be determined by the One he serves. He would be at risk. He would not only *seem* to want to identify, he *really would* identify.

Docetism was a heresy which argued that Jesus only *appeared* to be a man, but that he was really only God all the time. Can it be that as modern missionaries, doing mission out of affluence, much of what we have called missionary sacrifice has been at heart Docetic—with missionaries merely playing at identification? Perhaps it is not possible for missionaries from the West to do more than they are doing. Perhaps we are so enmeshed in and dependent upon the expensive clutter of our material technologies and sociological strategies that we can't propagate our faith apart from it. I hope not.

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<sup>9</sup> David Shank, 'The Shape of Mission Strategy,' *Mission-Focus* Volume I, number 3 (January 1973).

## WHAT CAN BE DONE?

There is obviously no simple solution to the Pandora's box of western missionary affluence. Lifestyle habits and expectations are not only deeply rooted culturally and psychologically, but institutionalized in the sending agencies and in on-the-field structures of *modus operandi*. Nevertheless, a start—however modest and inadequate—must be made somewhere by someone.

Perhaps the best place to begin is at home—in our training [p. 216](#) institutions and in the lives of those of us who are involved in the preparation of missionaries. Teachers of missionaries would do well to model simplicity and contentedness themselves in their personal life styles and ambitions. Physical facilities likewise should, ideally, be kept from ostentation. Better to err on the side of frugality! There is something slightly incongruous in the spectacle of soldiers preparing 'to endure hardness' in a soft and luxurious milieu, in the midst of bounty and ease.

Furthermore, mission studies curricula should devote more attention to the communications, interpersonal and cultural problems attendant upon a situation where the 'rich' function as apostles. Here at Winnipeg Bible College and Theological Seminary we have begun modestly with two courses: 'Rich Man, Poor Man—And the Bible: An Agenda for Rich Missionaries in an Age of Hunger' surveys and applies scriptural teaching regarding the stewardship of money and possessions, with special reference to the historically unprecedented material disparity which distinguishes people of the 'North' and 'South', and the concomitant ramifications for Christian missionaries from the 'North'. Another course, entitled 'Missionary Identification', discusses the practical significance and logical consequences of an incarnational model of missionary service. Mission strategy courses likewise, while not dealing specifically with the issue, at least take cognizance of the implications such disparity might have in implementing a strategy.

Thirdly, one can read. The Bible itself is the most radical textbook in this regard, but books, such as those by Miriam Adeney (*God's Foreign Policy*), Ron Sider (*Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*), John White (*The Golden Cow*), Richard Foster (*Freedom of Simplicity*), and Jim Wallis (*The Call to Conversion*) can jog the conscience and spur us to practical obedience in this matter. Reading the biographies of missionaries such as Roberto de Nobili, Hudson Taylor, James Gilmour, and Bruce Olson can inspire us in the knowledge that others have trod this path before us, and while the path today may be largely overgrown with weeds, it is still faintly visible and can—though with great difficulty—be followed. Even more academic books can help. Daniel Johnson Fleming, late Professor of Missions at Union Theological Seminary (New York) produced a series of books which grapple realistically and sympathetically with the problem. The most helpful of these, in my opinion, are his *Ventures in Simpler Living* (IMC, 1933) and *Living as Comrades: A Study of Factors Making for Community* (Agricultural Missions, 1950).

Finally, this issue should be confronted head on at student conferences such as Urbana, as well as at congresses and consultations [p. 217](#) on evangelism and missions. Perhaps consultations should be arranged dealing specifically with the issue and all of its complex subsidiary challenges.

What will come of all of this? Will the affluent western church divest itself of its vast wealth and properties? Will mission societies incorporate a vow of voluntary poverty into their candidating procedures? One can hardly imagine it. Discipleship in the area of material goods has never been widely popular, but there have always been some disciples who cling lightly to their possessions, and who not only *claim to* seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, but *obviously* do so! As colleagues—fellow disciples in the great task assigned to the church—we can at least follow the advice of the writer of the



letter to the Hebrews: ‘... Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds ...’ ([Hebrews 10:23–27](#)). I welcome dialogue on the subject!

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# Martin Luther and John Calvin on Property

W. J. S. Gilbreath

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*In this well documented historical research, Gilbreath compares the attitudes of both the Reformers to economics in general but property in particular. The discovery that both the Reformers' views were consistent with their respective theological frameworks is reassuring. The similarity between them concerning property comes as a pleasant surprise and has important consequences. We regret that footnotes though valuable had to be omitted in favour of brevity and readability.*

Editor

The Reformation took place at a time of rapid economic growth and change. Not until the twelfth century did money come into common usage in the cities of Europe; by the fifteenth century it had spread to rural areas as well. This move away from a barter economy made credit possible, and this in turn stimulated increases in production, international trade, and foreign investment. The importation of the newly-discovered riches of the New World contributed to chronic inflation throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This led to popular outcries against price-gouging merchants, unscrupulous property-owners, and opportunistic usurers.

It is arguable that those developments facilitated the sale of Papal indulgences and thus contributed to the proximate cause of the Reformation—Martin Luther’s Ninety-five Theses. Certainly, the Reformers were troubled by the hardships that economic changes were inflicting on their parishioners, and attempted to apply Christian ethical principles to contemporary problems.

Martin Luther was not reluctant to express his very strong opinions on property and economic activity. The characteristic vehemence of his writings on trade and commerce has led some to conclude that he did not understand economic matters. For example, R. H. Tawney thought it ‘idle to scan them [Luther’s writings] for a coherent and consistent doctrine’ of social morality. It may be true that Luther did not fully comprehend the economic revolution of his time, but his views on economic affairs were, in my opinion, quite coherent and unified by the principle of faith in God. In fact, as we shall see later, [p. 219](#) Luther’s analysis of financial contracts of his day displayed considerable business insight, perhaps even sophistication.

John Calvin's views on property were substantially the same as Luther's but, unlike Luther, Calvin was admittedly reticent regarding economic questions. It is a measure of Calvin's reserve on these subjects that there is nothing in his work to compare with the several tracts in which Luther discussed business and/or economics. Certainly, neither man wrote a great deal in this area: it has been estimated that, of Luther's 40,000 folio pages, 100 treat economic affairs, compared to about 50 pages of Calvin's comparable total output. Nevertheless, it is clear that Calvin looked upon economic individualism with no more favour than Luther, which is to say none at all. In my opinion, it is extremely ironic that almost all modern historians view Calvin as a progenitor, albeit a very distant one, of *laissez-faire* capitalism.

It is the purpose of this essay to examine the beliefs that Martin Luther and John Calvin held regarding property ownership, the use of property, and economic activity. We shall see that, although both Reformers affirmed the legitimacy and propriety of individual ownership, they firmly believed that property-owners had an obligation to use their material things to promote the common good by sharing with others.

## **MARTIN LUTHER**

### **Individual Property Ownership**

Luther found in the creation account the first of several biblical affirmations of the legitimacy of individual property holdings. He believed that personal ownership of property was ordained by God before the Fall. Marriage, the first human institution established by God, necessarily implies individual property because parents cannot raise children properly if the parents do not own anything. Indeed, any one who has an office, or station, in society cannot fulfill his duties without property. 'The world could not endure if we were all to be beggars and have nothing.' Luther saw another basis for personal property in the Decalogue—God's prohibition of theft assumes that property is owned by individuals. Luther also held that the biblical norm of love for neighbour presupposes personal property because, if we are to give to our neighbour, we must possess something to give. Even Jesus' exhortation to 'sell what you have ...' indicated to Luther that our Lord recognized the legitimacy of individually-owned property. For we must first own something before we can sell it. [p. 220](#)

### **Limitations on Property Rights**

Although the institution of individual property is decreed by God, the rights of property ownership are not absolute. The fundamental limitation is given by the norm of love, which includes the injunction to share goods with those who have less. Luther believed that God gave man possessions for the purpose of helping those in need, and that hoarding of goods is a violation of their very nature because it renders them useless. In Luther's opinion, anything left over after providing for one's own life and that of his household belongs to his neighbours.

The Seventh Commandment (Eighth according to Reformed counting) imposes specific limits on the use of property. According to Luther, this commandment forbids not only theft and robbery, but also 'every kind of sharp practice which men perpetrate against each other in matters of worldly goods', including greed, usury, and fraud of all kinds. The commandment also prohibits the avaricious practice of charging whatever the market will bear. Some people attempt to justify their property holdings under the guise of provision for the natural needs of the body but, to Luther, this is often no more than a cover for the greedy accumulation of unlimited wealth. Those with faith in God will not

rely on material goods for their sustenance; rather, they will demonstrate their faith by freely placing their money at the disposal of neighbours.

Luther also discovered limitations on the use of property in the Sermon on the Mount, which he regarded as applicable to all Christians, not just those few who desire to be perfect. The Sermon on the Mount presents three methods of using worldly goods righteously. The first and greatest way is for the Christian to allow others to deprive him of his property by means of theft and fraud; second, to give freely of possessions to anyone who needs or asks, including enemies; third, to lend freely without charging interest, especially to the poor. Luther regarded **any** charge attached to a loan an usury and contrary to the gospel ([Luke 6:35](#)), natural law ([Mt 7:12](#)), and the command to love one's neighbour as oneself. The Christian should be willing to risk his money by lending without expecting to be repaid, thus taking the chance that the loan will turn out to be a gift.

### **Property and the Stations of Society**

The several God-given stations in society have different functions and, therefore, different property requirements. It was proper, in Luther's view, for government officials to possess more material goods than **p. 221** other members of society. For government is necessary to preserve order in the world, and it needs money to carry out its legitimate functions. '[A] lord or prince should not and cannot be poor, because for his office and station he must have all sorts of goods like these [money, property, honour, power, land, and servants].'

### **Economic Activity**

Luther strongly believed that all able-bodied men should work and moreover, that some economic activities were more godly than others. He held agriculture in the highest esteem because it involved hard physical labour. His attitude to trade and commerce was, on balance, negative; while he recognized the necessity of buying and selling basic commodities, he questioned the integrity and usefulness of most commercial activity. Luther condemned essentially all financiers as greedy and unproductive parasites who lived handsomely without working. Only those who cannot work—widows and orphans—should make their living by lending for personal gain.

Luther fully expounded his views on economic activity in his 1524 treatise, *Trade and Usury*. In his experience, merchants were almost entirely guided by the principle of 'I may sell my wares as dear as I can or will'. Luther denounced this as greed and covetousness, and advocated the alternative pricing principle of 'I may sell my wares as dear as I ought, or as is right and fair'. A fair price would take into account the cost of a merchant's goods, as well as his risk, labour, and trouble. Recognizing that it is not always possible to make an accurate calculation of these things, Luther advised merchants not to trouble their consciences over small amounts of unintended extra profit.

In *Trade and Usury*, Luther discussed the three Christian ways of handling goods, mentioned above, and added a fourth: buying and selling, but for cash or barter only. A true Christian merchant would neither lend nor borrow, nor sell on credit, nor be involved in buying or selling insurance.

Luther was vehemently opposed to the property insurance industry because it was 'a presumptuous encroachment upon the work of God', 'a fruit of unbelief', and contrary to Scripture. Christians should neither provide surety for the property of others nor seek it for themselves; rather, they should trust in God for protection of belongings and provision in case of loss. Luther viewed the desire to avoid or eliminate economic risk as proof of an excessive attachment to material property and possessions. It was also futile because 'God wills [that all temporal goods] should be subject to risk and uncertainty'. **p. 222**

The second half of *Trade and Usury* was devoted to a criticism of usury, and of the *Zinskauf* in particular. *Zinskauf* was a common financial transaction of Luther's day, which the medieval theologians exempted from the ban on usury. Luther, however, was firmly convinced that it was usury; even if it was not usury, it was oppressive and unjust and therefore contrary to the Golden Rule (i.e., natural law) and the norm of Christian love.

Luther's objection to the *Zinskauf* was based upon the same principle as his objection to insurance. The creditor in the *Zinskauf* contract attempts to obtain an income that is fixed and assured under all economic conditions, at the expense of the debtor who must make the fixed payment even before basic necessities are procured. To Luther, the creditor's motivation evidences a greedy and covetous devotion to the things of this world. There is only one situation in which *Zinskauf* can be defended: the creditor

should have the same risk and uncertainty with respect to his *zinss* [payment] as he has with respect to his other property. For as regards his other property the *zinss* buyer is subject to the power of God—death, illness, flood, fire, wind, hail, lightning, wolves, wild beasts, and the manifold losses inflicted by men.

Luther pointed out that this situation comes about when the *zinss* is linked to the earnings of a contractually-specified piece of property. If this condition were met, he was prepared to allow interest rates of up to 6 per cent, although '[t]he smaller the percentage the more godly and Christian the contract.'

Luther proposed a superior alternative to *Zinskauf*—a variable tithe. Luther's model was the Old Testament tithe, which called for the Israelites to pay one-tenth of their annual income to the priests. He also adduced Joseph's decision to charge the Egyptians one-fifth of their annual production in the plentiful years before the famine ([Gen. 41:34; 47:24, 26](#)). Following these precedents, Luther proposed that the rate of the payment should vary with economic conditions—the better the conditions the higher the rate, and vice-versa. This would eliminate the oppressive inflexibility of the *Zinskauf*, with the result that 'all would depend on the grace and blessing of God'.

### **Government Restrictions on Property Rights and Economic Activity**

In his 1520 *Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate*, Luther enjoined the rulers of Germany to enact restrictions on property rights and economic activity. He advocated sumptuary laws against luxurious [p. 223](#) and expensive clothing and other goods, controls on spice imports into Germany, and severe restrictions on *Zinskauf* contracts. Luther was concerned because expenditures on foreign clothing and spices and *Zinskauf* payments were impoverishing upper-class Germans. He referred to the merchants of imported silk and velvet as 'domestic robbers' (as opposed to the 'foreign robber'—the Pope). On the whole, said Luther, Germany would be much better off if agriculture were increased and commerce decreased.

## **JOHN CALVIN**

### **Individual Property Ownership**

Calvin was apparently so convinced of the legitimacy and propriety of personal ownership of property that he felt little need to support it with systematic argument. He 'accepted without question' that individual property 'was a fruit of the divine Providence and necessary for the public order'.

In Calvin's view, God, the ultimate owner of the earth and everything in it, distributes possessions and material goods to individuals according to his sovereign and benevolent

will. Thus, Calvin condemned violations of the commandment against theft as offences against the providence of God. Also, the public order that God desires for human society requires individual property 'since it is necessary to keep peace among men that the ownership of property should be distinct and personal among them'.

Only once did Calvin explicitly argue the legitimacy of individual property ownership—in his treatise *Against the Libertines*. The Libertines were a religious sect who apparently practised a variety of primitive communism and justified their practice by appealing to the example of the early Christian community in the Book of Acts. In his vehement denunciation of the Libertines, Calvin adduced many examples of Christians in Acts (and elsewhere in the New Testament) who maintained personal ownership of their houses and money. He vigorously supported the proposition that individuals are permitted to own property even in the Church, the community of the redeemed.

### **Limitations on Property Rights**

Contrary to modern popular belief, Calvin did not teach ascetism in the use of things of this world. In fact, he considered those who taught extreme austerity 'dangerous' because 'they would feel consciences [p. 224](#) more tightly than does the Word of the Lord'. Moreover, Calvin's appreciation of beauty as valuable for its own sake shows that his view of material goods was not merely utilitarian. His approach to the material things was exemplified by his summary advice on Christian freedom with respect to temporal goods: '[W]e should use God's gifts for the purpose for which he gave them, with no scruple of conscience, no trouble of mind'.

However, we are not to abuse our Christian freedom by squandering money on superfluous luxury. Calvin called for frugality and moderation in consumption so that we would have something left over to give to others. He regarded the extravagance of the rich as a sin against the poor.

In his discussion of the Eighth Commandment in his commentary on the Pentateuch, Calvin gave an indication as to what he considered 'necessary' by way of material goods. In connection with the taking of pledges on loans ([Deut 24:6, 10-13](#)), he said that a creditor should not take as pledge anything

which he knows to be necessary for the poor ... For it is not just that he [a poor person] should be stripped, so as to suffer from cold, or to be deprived of other aids, the use of which he could not forego without loss or inconvenience.

This is further evidence that Calvin was not an ascetic. He considered a good necessary if it could not be given up 'without loss or inconvenience'.

Stewardship was an integral element of Calvin's property ethics. In Calvin's view, God bestows temporal goods for the purpose of enabling those who have an abundance to use their possessions to help others, and thus promote human fellowship. Indeed, the reason that God distributes property unequally among men is so that there will be a continuous circulation of goods from those who have more to those who have less. God gives the rich a special duty and responsibility along with their wealth: he expects money to be used to serve the poor. Calvin often referred to the rich as 'stewards of God' and 'ministers of the poor'. His realistic concern for stewardship is shown in this passage:

[T]hose who have riches, whether inherited or won by their own industry and labour, are to remember that what is left over is meant not for intemperance or luxury but for relieving the needs of the brethren ... I acknowledge indeed that we are not bound to such an equality as would make it wrong for the rich to live more elegantly than the poor; but there must be such an equality that nobody starves and nobody hoards his abundance at another's expense. [p. 225](#)

Calvin thought that great wealth was dangerous, and that self-restraint should therefore be exercised in accumulating property. He realized that people have a natural desire to avoid poverty, but he also observed that his desire is sometimes perverted into a mad striving after wealth. He cautioned that excessive labour motivated by greed can become a ‘disease of the mind’. Those who are obsessed with wealth and pray the Lord’s prayer are hypocrites, in Calvin’s opinion, because they ‘ask him what they do not wish to receive, indeed, what they utterly abominate—namely, mere daily bread ...’

### **Property and the Stations in Society**

There is nothing in Calvin’s writings that specifically relates property requirements to social station or vocation, but there are indications that he held a view similar to Luther’s. Calvin believed that God assigns a calling to each person for the good of the individual and society as well, and he counselled his audience to keep their callings in mind ‘in all life’s actions’.

### **Economic Activity**

Calvin believed that the overriding consideration in one’s choice of occupation should be to select the job which provides the greatest service to other people. He had a more favourable view than Luther concerning trade and commerce, but the two Reformers shared a high opinion of agriculture as a way of life. They also agreed that no Christian should earn a living solely by lending money.

Calvin saw God, not man’s work, as the source of all wealth, and therefore did not think that labour *per se* was meritorious. Employers and employees alike receive their remuneration from God, so it is theft when an employer defrauds his hired workers, or when he allows market forces to reduce the wages of his workers below subsistence level. Calvin advocated measures to protect workers, including judicial arbitration and labour contracts, agreed upon through collective bargaining if necessary.

Unlike Luther, Calvin never questioned whether it is possible for a Christian to be a merchant. His advice to traders was more or less the same as his advice to other workers: Be honest and follow the Golden Rule. ‘[I]n buying and selling we should not employ fraud, deceitful tricks, or lies, but we should go briskly about our business with honesty, in the same way that we require it of others.’

Calvin believed that human economic inter-dependence produced by exchange of goods is a reflection of God’s providence. Accordingly, [p. 226](#) he was incensed at cheaters in the marketplace: they are not only thieves, but also offenders against God’s providential care for the human race. ‘[I]f the laws of buying and selling are corrupted, human society is in a manner dissolved; ...’ Monopolization, hoarding, and speculation are similarly offences against God and the economic solidarity of mankind.

Calvin, like Luther, considered any payment attached to a loan to be usury. However, Calvin apparently did not share Luther’s conviction that the desire to obtain a guaranteed future payment was antithetical to trust in God. For Calvin believed that a usurious loan was permissible if no one were oppressed or injured by it.

The Old Testament prohibition on usury was, according to Calvin, part of ancient Israel’s political constitution and therefore not binding on Christians. He also wrote that [Luke 6:35](#) does not apply to usury. He argued that, considering this verse in its context, Christ’s teaching in this passage goes far beyond loan agreements: Christ is telling us that we should lend and give generously to all our neighbours, including enemies.

That does not mean that Calvin accepted money-lending as a profession. He insisted that usurers must always become robbers and thieves, and that no just government should tolerate their presence. Lending money at interest may, under certain conditions,

be acceptable as an occasional method of earning a little extra money, but it is never acceptable as a sole means of support.

Calvin's fullest statement on usury is a short but well-known letter of 1545 to Claude de Sachin. Sachin wrote, on behalf of another unknown party, to his personal friend Calvin requesting an opinion on the legitimacy of charging usury on a loan. Calvin stated his great reluctance to express an opinion because he knew that many businessmen would take undue advantage of any relaxation, however minor, in restrictions on usury. Nevertheless, trusting his friend's discretion, he proceeded. 'In the first place', said Calvin, 'by no testimony of the Scriptures is usury wholly condemned'. [Luke 6:35](#) has, in his opinion, been misapplied, while the Old Testament laws on usury were political and therefore no longer pertinent. Moreover, God placed the Jews in a situation where it was easy for them to engage in business without usury. However, Calvin thought that the changed circumstances of his day meant that usury was no longer forbidden as long as the rules of charity and justice were followed.

Calvin then demolished the argument of Aristotle and the scholastic theologians that money should not earn interest because it is barren. Calvin's conclusion was 'that usury must be judged, not [p.227](#) by any particular passage of Scripture, but simply by the rules of equity'.

However, that was not the end of the letter. Calvin went on to apply the rules of equity to usury; he formulated seven specific exceptions to the general taking of usury. It was wrong to take interest from the poor. It was wrong to demand excessive security from the poor, or otherwise to neglect them. The rules of equity that must be followed were described by the Golden Rule. A loan was wrong if the borrower's gain from the loan, net of interest payments, was less than that of the lender. (This obviously implied that interest cannot be charged on consumption loans, but only on investment loans.) The fact that a business practice was common did not make it right—we must always be guided by the Word of God. Transactions must redound to the common good, as well as the good of the individuals directly involved. It was wrong to charge a higher interest rate than the maximum permitted by the civil authorities.

### **Government Restrictions on Property Rights and Economic Activity**

Calvin's awareness that sin had permeated all aspects of human life, including economic activity, convinced him that society could not achieve economic harmony without government intervention. As a result, he supported many government measures to regulate the marketplace, for example, price controls on basic commodities, wage controls, sumptuary laws on luxurious dress, regulation of working hours, and interest rate ceilings. The fundamental test that Calvin applied to any government regulation was: Does it promote the common good?

## **CONCLUSION**

Many questions arise in considering the applicability of Luther's and Calvin's property ethics to modern economic society. For example, competition is taken for granted in today's market-place. To what extent (if any) can competitive behaviour be reconciled with the Reformers' views on economic motivation?

Also, Luther and Calvin apparently said very little about saving; they certainly did not encourage it. Today, however, personal and corporate savings are considered essential aspects of economic activity because of their role in financing capital investment and therewith economic growth and job creation. With this in mind, would it be possible to incorporate saving into the system of property ethics described by Luther and Calvin? We

can also consider how their [p. 228](#) views might be applied to other features of the modern Western economy, for example, the banking system and the housing mortgage industry.

Although their emphases differed, Luther and Calvin were in agreement on the foundations of property ethics. Both Reformers were profoundly committed to the Golden Rule and love for neighbour as the fundamental principles of all human relationships, including economic ones. Calvin had a generally more positive view than Luther of economic affairs. In particular, Calvin believed that property relationships could be redeemed to play a significant role in promoting human solidarity and community.

Both men strongly opposed communistic arrangements of ownership because common property vitiates the moral responsibility of the individual. They opposed as well the unrestrained operation of the free market as unjust and unchristian. Calvin's belief that the economic interdependence caused by trade is part of God's design for promoting social harmony is an interesting foreshadow of Adam Smith's invisible hand. It is, however, certain that neither Calvin nor Luther believed that the invisible hand by itself could produce economic and social justice.

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## Property and the Gospel

Barbara Nelson Gingerich

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*Unlike the last article, this article compares the theology of property in the Reformation (John Calvin) with that of an Anabaptist tradition (Hutterites). It is rather an extended article with detailed footnotes (here also footnotes have been omitted for similar reasons), but also has precise theological analysis and new insights to compensate. Calvin shaped his views toward an ethic applicable to an entire society while the Hutterite brethren cared only about justifying their views for the Christian community that share goods in common. One's ecclesiology as a key to one's theology of property is the fresh insight here.*

Editor

Scholars have debated for years about the economic impacts of sixteenth-century religious movements. In his landmark study of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Max Weber argued that John Calvin's understandings of predestination, Sanctification and vocation contributed to the creation of a social climate in which modern capitalism could develop and flourish, gaining ascendancy over a traditional economic system. Karl Kautsky has studied the Hutterites on the radical left wing of the Reformation and claimed them as forerunners of modern socialism. The debates surrounding Weber's and Kautsky's theories are sufficient to establish the fruitfulness of studying Calvin's works and Hutterite documents with attention to economic considerations.

But such a study need not be undertaken solely from the standpoint of later socioeconomic developments, to try to establish causal connections or historical



origins—à la Weber or Kautsky. It may also be instructive to look at the place of views on money and property in Calvin's larger theological and ethical framework and in the writings of representative Hutterite leaders of the mid-sixteenth century: Peter Riedemann, Peter Walpot, Claus Felbinger, Leonhard Dax, Jakob Hutter. Comparison of Calvin's and the Hutterites' views on sin, salvation, Scripture and the social order—as these relate to economic matters—reveals not only specific differences but also a general divergence in assumptions about or orientation toward reality. [p. 230](#)

## SIN

Calvin understood Adam's failure, and consequently the whole of the human predicament, as a problem of unbelief and disobedience. God's Word had brought a world out of chaos into ordered existence. In that order humanity had a place. But Adam also had a will: he 'was denied the tree of the knowledge of good and evil to test his obedience and prove that he was willingly under God's command'. As a result of his act of rebellion, 'he consigned his race to ruin' and 'perverted the whole order of nature in heaven and on earth'.

In the context of this general view of sin as disobedience resulting in disorder and corruption, Calvin frequently referred to sin specifically as 'inordinate desiring'. As a result of the depravity of nature, all human faculties are 'so vitiated and corrupted' that in all our actions 'persistent disorder and intemperance threaten'. God created people with well-ordered inclinations, but because of the fall 'these inclinations cannot be separated from ... lack of restraint'. In short, human desires 'are evil ... not in that they are natural, but because they are inordinate'. Thus, for example, in Calvin's view sin is not connected with property *per se* but with immoderate, inordinate desire for or attachment to it and with failure to recognize God's providence in it.

In common with Calvin the Hutterites held that Adam's sin was primarily a matter of disobedience. But they departed from Calvin's emphasis on the resulting corruption of the entire race, stressing instead the inheritance of physical death and inclination toward evil. And the accent in Hutterite treatments of sin is not so much on 'original sin' or death or generalized sinful tendencies; sin is usually intimately connected with one's behaviour with regard to this world's goods. Jakob Hutter pointed to greed as the root of all evil. Peter Riedemann echoed and elaborated: 'All sin hath its source and origin in wrong taking, that man taketh what he should not and what is not his and leaveth what he ought to take, loveth what he ought to hate and hateth what he ought to love'. These words refer not to absence of moderation, as in Calvin, but instead condemn all private possession as wrong in and of itself. An old Hutterite codex provides this graphic description of the evils of private ownership: 'Man suffocates in *Eigenthum* [possession/ownership]'; his situation is analogous to 'leaving a child with a knife, to its harm and ruin'. 'As the beetle has its home in horse manure ... so covetousness has its home, its work, its being in *Eigenthum*.'

It is precisely this sense of sin as rooted in self-interested private possession that Hutterite sources connect with notions of order. God [p. 231](#) created a natural order in which people held everything in common. Riedemann wrote that 'God from the beginning ordained naught private for man, but all things to be common'. In wrongly taking everything short of sun, air and light to themselves, people stepped out of God's order.

## THE LIFE OF FAITH

The way out of this state of disorder and alienation from God, for both Calvin and the Hutterites, was preeminently a matter of grace. Riedemann insisted that 'we in our own strength are able to do neither what is small nor what is great, without the working of God in us'; 'true and well-founded faith ... is not of men but a gift of God'. Likewise for Calvin, 'the human will does not obtain grace by freedom, but obtains freedom by grace'.

### **Justification and Sanctification**

Calvin used the Pauline categories of justification and sanctification to describe the transformation that God in Christ effects in the life of the elect person. Justification is a matter of forgiveness of sin. Sin makes all people enemies of God. Since the corruption of human nature is so great that our works can never atone for sin or merit our reconciliation with God, we are restored to communion only because God imputes to us 'the righteousness which Jesus Christ has gained through His obedience unto death'. Therefore, one who 'grasps the righteousness of Christ through faith ... appears in God's sight not as a sinner but as a righteous man'.

But this grace in Calvin's view is not limited to Christ's accomplishing something external to us on our behalf. It also works powerfully in the life of the justified person, regenerating and sanctifying: 'The Lord freely justifies his own in order that he may at the same time restore them to true righteousness by sanctification of his Spirit'. Calvin understood sanctification not as a vague state of sinlessness but as an active life of obedience. As sin is primarily a matter of disobedience, so Christ 'has been given to us for sanctification in order that he may bring us ... into obedience to God's righteousness'. Likewise, regeneration is not an absolute once-and-for-all event but a process of subjugating 'inordinate desires' and growing in obedience which continues throughout the believer's life.

### **Self-Denial**

One way Calvin wrote about this transformation was with the [p. 232](#) language of self-denial. A chapter of his *Institutes* bears this title: 'The Sum of the Christian Life: The Denial of Ourselves'. It continues with the assertion that 'we are not our own masters'. 'The duty of believers', as Calvin quoted the Apostle Paul, is 'to present their bodies to God as a living sacrifice'. In a similar vein Wilhelm Niesel has summarized Calvin's position on discipleship as one of holding fast to the rule which Christ gave in [Matthew 16:24](#), consisting essentially of such self-denial. It 'reaches its climax in the fact that we allow our whole life to be controlled by the will of the Lord'.

At several points Calvin expressly linked this self-denial with what he viewed as proper use of money and possessions. One element of his approach connected self-denial with giving up 'desire of, or reliance on' possessions. 'It remains for us not greedily to strive after riches' but 'always to look to the Lord so that by his guidance we may be led to whatever lot he has provided for us'. In addition to adopting this posture of reliance on God's providence in economic matters, Calvin exhorted the believer to exercise stewardship: 'We are the stewards of everything God has conferred on us'; this awareness ought to be 'our rule for generosity and beneficence'. An attitude of trust and awareness of obligations of stewardship, love and generosity, then, are manifestations of self-denial in money matters, as is curbing 'avarice, or desire' or 'other evils that or self-love spawns'.

For the Hutterites, too, self-denial was an important (probably the most important) element of the graced life. As one Hutterite testified before his martyrdom, 'we have given, surrendered, and sacrificed ourselves wholly to God'. The word that they along with other Anabaptists used to designate this reality was *Gelassenheit*, 'a complete self-denial and voluntary surrender to the will of God whereby the individual was content to resign all

aspects of his life to God'. When they confessed Jesus as Lord, they meant that 'he controlleth, ruleth over and useth our members according to his will'; he 'liveth and doeth all things in us'; 'we have completely surrendered our members to him, to wait upon him, to endure his working and to suffer his will'.

Unlike Calvin, the Hutterites believed that in the life of one who had surrendered, sin could be completely eradicated—and not just at the end of a lifetime of struggle. Riedemann wrote that 'Christ came to dwell in us by faith, and through his strength and working in us weakened, quenched, killed and took away sin, that we might be without sins'. With Calvin, the Hutterites gave God's Spirit credit for their righteousness, and they were well aware of the ongoing reality of temptation: 'the rising urge in flesh suggesting sin, the inclination or [p. 233](#) desire, evil occurrences and sinful thoughts through which man is tempted to do wrong—from these the devout are not exempt'. But 'because a devout man does not stretch out his limbs to do wrong, he is no sinner'. By the Spirit's power he 'crushes the sinful suggestion ... that sin may not be living and active' in him.

These Hutterites believed that *Gelassenheit* had definite—even preeminent—expression in economic matters. They called their persecutors blind and mixed-up people who 'know nothing of spiritual poverty and of true *Gelassenheit*, how the human must go out of himself and must hate and leave himself, as Christ says and speaks: He who does not deny everything that he has cannot be a disciple of Christ'. Being *gelassen* in effect meant not merely cultivating an attitude of detachment or a practice of moderation but being rid entirely of private property. Private possession necessarily meant personal attachment, they believed. Therefore, one could not have at the same time both temporal riches and heavenly treasure, 'since one chokes out the other'. Being Christ's disciple implied quite literally for the Hutterites that one must 'sell all, forsake and give up [one's] own temporal riches, and lose [one's] heart therefrom'.

### **Bearing the Cross**

Both Calvin and the Hutterites wrote about the life of discipleship and self-denial in conjunction with 'bearing the cross'. For Calvin the content of cross-bearing was diverse: poverty, exile, prison, insult, disease, bereavement, 'tribulations of mind'—virtually any adversity which comes to one. In his treatment of this aspect of self-denial, Calvin attributed all 'crosses' to God's providence: 'none of these [adversities] happens except by the will and providence of God ... He does nothing except with a well-ordered justice'. Unlike Jesus, whose cross-bearing only demonstrated his obedience, 'we must pass our lives under a continual cross' for many other reasons. Among these are learning to trust God rather than ourselves and developing fortitude and moderation. In sum, our cross may be any sort of misfortune, not necessarily persecution for the gospel's sake (Jesus' cross), and we bear it with a view to growth in sanctification. It comes to us from God to overturn our good opinion of ourselves (not Jesus' problem) and teach us 'to rest upon God alone'. Outwardly the cross we bear may be no different from the adversity God sends alike to 'the evil and the good ... yet only those who gladly shoulder the burden can be said to carry it'.

With regard to economic matters, Calvin believed an individual's cross might be poverty or financial difficulties, 'lest in the unmeasured [p. 234](#) abundance of our riches we go wild'. Calvin's characteristic economic concerns emerge here, too: the cross curbs inordinate desire for property, teaches us to rely on God rather than on riches, trains us in moderation and restraint.

In the Hutterite writings the focus is narrower: the cross of the Christian is borne by Jesus, the prophets and the apostles. Jakob Hutter comforted his sisters and brothers with the words: 'It has gone like this with ... all the faithful from the beginning'. The cross is not

adversity in general, sent by God to train and discipline the elect; rather it is the response of the evil world to righteous people. Remaining faithful in the face of such persecution is the sign of a true disciple.

How does this view of the cross relate to money matters? Again quoting Jakob Hutter:

All who leave and abstain from evil and all unrighteousness and fear God from the heart, serve him and keep his commandments, must be robbed and driven from their homes and cast out ... By this we can recognize with certainty that we are God's children and he is our father, that we are co-heirs of his glory and that we are dear and pleasing to his heart, like all the saints.

### **'Incorporation'**

This sense of sharing a common destiny with all God's children marks a central feature of the Hutterite conception of *Gelassenheit*. The sixteenth-century Hutterite gospel was of salvation understood primarily in corporate terms. The significance of Jesus' death is often described in Hutterite documents in these words: 'He gave himself for his church, that he might sanctify her, and hath cleansed her with the washing of water by the word, that he might present her to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle'. Other favourite images are those of 'royal priesthood' and 'chosen people'.

Organic metaphors were important, too, especially those dealing with incorporation into the body of Christ. Sometimes the metaphor of choice was botanical: The Spirit of Christ plants believers into Christ, making them 'of his character and nature, so that they become one plant and one organism together with him: he the root or stem, we the branches'. As the memorial of Jesus' death, the Lord's Supper also was for Hutterites a celebration of the oneness of the members of his body, an occasion for hope in the knowledge that as those members share in his death they can also expect to live with him. Clause Felbinger, a blacksmith, explained the Hutterite understanding of the Supper this way: [p. 235](#)

By means of bread and wine He has shown the community of His body. Even as natural bread is composed of the coming together of many grains, ground under the millstones, and each giving the others all it possesses, they have community one with another, and thus become one loaf; and as, likewise, the wine is composed of many grapes, each sharing its juice with the rest in the wine press, so that they have become one drink. Even so are we also, in that we become completely ... one in Christ: He the vine and we His branches, He the head and we His members.

This eloquent testimony makes clear the close connection between *Gelassenheit* and *Gemeinschaft* (community) in Hutterite thought and life. For some Anabaptists the corporate expression of *Gelassenheit* was much weaker; in no other group was *Gelassenheit/Gemeinschaft* understood so exclusively in terms of community of goods. For the Hutterites, *Gelassenheit* came to mean definitively the surrender of private property and incorporation into a community which practiced total economic sharing. 'Unencumbered and *gelassen*, [believers] have yielded themselves to the obedience of Christ ... and have been incorporated into the church of Christ.' This, for Hutterites, was the meaning of salvation.

Calvin also relied heavily on a notion of incorporation in his description of the life of faith. For him the language of participation for 'engrafting' did not so much refer to church life as guarantee the priority of grace in justification and sanctification, undercutting any human claims to righteousness: 'Our righteousness is not in us but in Christ ... we possess it only because we are partakers in Christ'.

For Calvin as for the Hutterites, however, church membership was essential to salvation. One of his favourite metaphors for the church makes this clear; ‘There is no way to enter into life unless this mother conceive us in her womb, give us birth, nourish us at her breast, and ... keep us under her care and guidance’. Indeed, ‘away from her bosom one cannot hope for ... any salvation’. The essential marks of the visible church, by which it nourishes faith and so can be recognized as a true church, are pure preaching and hearing of the Word of God and proper administration of the sacraments.

Thus, Calvin’s treatment of the Lord’s Supper concentrates on the way in which Christians receive Christ’s body and blood as food for the soul: ‘The chief function of the Sacrament ... is to seal and confirm the promise ... that his flesh is food indeed and his blood is drink, which feed us unto eternal life’. In this corporate act of being ‘fed by the flesh and blood of Christ’, Christ ‘grows into one’ with believers.

Like the Hutterite Felbinger’s account of the church’s Lord’s Supper [p. 236](#) observance, Calvin’s refers to becoming united with Christ. But union is differently construed. For Calvin, who distinguished between the invisible, perfect church of the elect and the present, visible *corpus permixtum*, it was also crucial to differentiate within that unity between the head (Christ) and the members (the believers). The Hutterites, however, made no distinction between visible and invisible churches, between present defects and future perfection. Likewise, they did not emphasize the difference between head and members in the body of Christ; the unity they experienced in the Supper was undifferentiated, their identification with each other and with Christ complete.

The Hutterites viewed their nearly total communion in material things as a necessary aspect of their spiritual unity celebrated in the Lord’s Supper. Calvin, on the other hand, was convinced that the unity of believers in the church—though it entails generosity and sharing—does not disturb ‘civil order ... which allows each individual to own his private possessions, since it is necessary to keep peace among men that the ownership of property should be distinct and personal among them’.

## SCRIPTURE

That Calvin believed preaching the Word to be fundamental to ecclesiastical fidelity is an indication of his high regard for Scripture’s authority. The Hutterites shared that high regard, which was rooted for them as for him in the conviction that God’s will, his law, could above all be found there. Not that his will could be discerned in Scripture apart from the activity of the Spirit. Both Calvin and the Hutterites were convinced that Spirit and Word were inseparable. As the Spirit is to be known in the Word, so the Word is enlivened by the presence of the Spirit. Scripture preached apart from the Spirit is dead letter; the living Word in contrast, ‘pierceth soul and spirit’. Likewise suspect were all claims to visions and revelations which diverged from what could be known in Scripture. As Calvin wrote:

By a kind of mutual bond the Lord has joined together the certainty of his Word and of his Spirit so that the perfect religion of the Word may abide in our minds when the Spirit, who causes us to contemplate God’s face, shines; and that we in turn may embrace the Spirit with no fear of being deceived when we recognize him in his own image, namely, in the Word.

In other respects, too, Calvin’s and the Hutterites’ understandings of the proper approach to Scripture coincided. They agreed that a straightforward, common sense interpretation was preferable to an [p. 237](#) allegorical or ‘twisted’ one. They also agreed that Christ is the key to understanding the implications of both Old and New Testaments

for Christian life. But beyond that their understandings of the relationship between the Testaments diverged—with profound consequences for their respective views of economic matters.

The Hutterites believed quite simply that the old and new were two distinct covenants and that the new covenant in Christ was ‘far superior [to] and stronger than the old covenant of Israel’. They saw discontinuities between the two precisely because they thought Jesus ‘changed things’ from the Old Testament when he introduced the new ‘covenant of grace’. That new element lay not just in the possibility of a different status before God but in the content of what is commanded. The Hutterites in effect saw Jesus as a new lawgiver, a new Moses. They located the new reality in specific behaviour, not just in disposition: true Christians should not be rulers, fight in wars or shed human blood under any circumstances; they should not take people to court or swear oaths. The Hutterites understood Jesus’ teaching on these subjects as recorded in the New Testament to be quite simply binding. Jesus’ teaching replaced Old Testament commands and examples ‘because Christ is considered worthy of greater honour than Moses’. With Jesus ‘the old kingdom and reign came to an end, and a new one began’.

The language the Hutterites used to describe the relation between the covenants played up the discontinuities: the old revelation decays; it is imperfect, dark, and must give way to the new one brought to light in Christ in strength and clarity. The most common way Hutterites pointed to the difference was to use the Pauline distinction between servanthood and sonship. The new covenant is a covenant of sonship because ‘God in Christ has separated the children from the slaves, that they might all serve him ... not in outward ceremonies, but in the Spirit and in truth’.

Calvin expressly attacked the Hutterites’ assumption that Jesus introduced a radically new standard, declaring that people who misunderstood Jesus’ teachings (in [Matthew 5](#), in particular) did so precisely because they ‘fancied Christ another Moses, the giver of the law of the gospel, which supplied what was lacking in the Mosaic law’. In fact, Calvin believed, Jesus did not add to or overturn the Mosaic law: ‘he only restored it to its integrity,’ freeing and cleansing it from the falsehoods and defilements of the Pharisees. Thus, Jesus’ teaching is distinct not from the Mosaic law but from the Pharisees’ corruption of the old legislation. Jesus restored rather than replaced the old law. [p. 238](#)

In fact, Calvin believed that the moral teachings of Jesus, the Decalogue and the natural moral law were virtually synonymous. Jesus ‘had not the least intention’ of altering the law or making innovations. God ‘appointed once and for all the rule of life, which He will never repent of’. Hence, Jesus’ task was not to give a new law but to act as ‘faithful interpreter’ of the law, ‘teaching us [its] nature, its object, and its scope’.

These basic assumptions about the relationship between old and new—of continuity in Calvin’s case and discontinuity in the Hutterites’ case—are formative for interpretations of biblical materials on property and money. Several other hermeneutical principles and devices also come into play.

While Calvin and the Hutterites agreed in general that the simplest sense of a text was to be preferred to one that required ‘twisting’, Calvin explicitly acknowledged the church’s need for people whose task is interpretation. His commentaries are ‘saturated with phrases which emphasize the simplicity of the [exegetical] task’. Still, he devoted an enormous amount of time to that task—an indication of his conviction that interpretation is important and that not all people are equipped to do it.

Hutterites, on the other hand, gave less attention to exegetical problems. They seem to have assumed that the New Testament addressed them directly. The only hermeneutical devices they saw operative were ones they thought other people used

perversely to avoid being bound by what the Hutterites viewed as the plain sense of New Testament teaching.

Calvin, more sophisticated than the Hutterites about exegesis, interpreted Scripture with several operative assumptions. Most important, related to his conviction of the continuity between old and new and to his high regard for the authority of the entire Bible, was an assumption of unity, perfection, harmony. He wrote the *Institutes* to provide students with an orderly summary of Scripture's contents; there he expounded 'a synthesis of the contents of Scripture'. With a similar bent he arranged some of his commentaries in the form of 'harmonies'; wherever he encountered apparent divergencies in biblical texts, he reconciled them.

Along with this belief in harmony, Calvin seems to have interpreted Scripture with what Jackson Forstman has called a 'rule of moderation' in mind. Consequently he often understood the law as teaching moderation and pointed to Jesus as an example of 'pure moderation'.

Calvin used several other hermeneutical devices in interpreting Scripture. One, also related to his understanding of the relation [p. 239](#) between the Testaments, was 'accommodation'; God has 'accommodated himself to men's capacity, which is varied and changeable'. Another device on which Calvin relied in exegesis was 'synecdoche'. In his treatment of the Decalogue, Calvin used this device to 'expand the scope of the commandments in two directions'—he inferred a general prohibition from a specific one, for example, and a positive injunction from a prohibition. Finally, Calvin's interpretation sometimes rested on the assumption that the words of a command are only truly understood when one appreciates the purpose for which it is given.

Listing these general assumptions and specific exegetical tools sets the stage for examining how the Geneva reformer and the Moravian communitarians interpreted key biblical texts on money and property. The passages dealt with here are among many which the sixteenth-century Hutterites included in article three of the 'Great Article Book' (ascribed to Peter Walpot), on true *Gelassenheit* and Christian community (*Gemeinschaft*) of goods. The article begins with 'the congregation's grounds for Christian community from holy Scripture'.

### **Manna in the Wilderness (Exodus 16)**

The Hutterite reading of the account of God's provisions of manna for the children of Israel emphasizes these elements of the story: God's leading of the Israelites into the wilderness and the equal distribution of manna which all (unequally) helped to gather—so that 'when it was measured out ... he who had much had nothing left over, and he who had little had no lack'. What relevance did this text have for their sixteenth-century community? The church also has been led by God out of 'the present Egypt' and into 'the wilderness of this world', and their life together should reflect the same egalitarianism: 'The rich one should have no more than the poor one, and the poor one no more than the rich one'. Instead, in their *Gemeinschaft* everything should be offered for common, equal use. This interpretation dramatizes the Hutterites' willingness to see themselves as heirs of the children of Israel, making what was for the Israelites a temporary experience in a literal wilderness a norm for the church as long as she sojourned in the spiritual wilderness of the age.

Calvin's commentary on this passage criticizes the Israelites' failure to trust God, 'whom they had found to be in all respects a bountiful Father', then moves to a discussion of the significance for sixteenth-century Christians of the gathering and distributing of the manna. Ironically, at this point the Hutterites played up continuities where [p. 240](#) Calvin also found some continuity but with an important difference. The manna was special food,

given to the Israelites virtually without work on their part; because of these unique qualities, 'it is not to be wondered that God should have called each one of the people to partake of it equally, and forbade any one to take more than another'. Ordinary food which we work for is a different matter: 'It is necessary for the preservation of human society that each should possess what is his own'. Thus, the passage in Calvin's hands became a justification for private property, with exhortation to remember that all we have comes from God's bounty and 'spontaneously and liberally' to relieve 'the wants of [the] brethren'.

### **The Rich Man (Matthew 19:16–26; Mark 10:17–27; Luke 18:18–27)**

The Hutterites saw the rich man who asked Jesus what he needed to do to inherit eternal life as one who wanted to have treasure both on earth and in heaven, who tried to serve both God and mammon. The 'Great Article Book' follows the Matthean account of this narrative, in which Jesus says, 'If you want to be perfect/complete, go and sell everything you have'. The Hutterites believed this passage confirmed that completeness (*Vollkommenheit*) consisted not in having both material and spiritual goods but in selling everything: 'For love is a bond of completeness; where it dwells it produces not just half but complete [*vollkommen*] and total community'.

Jesus' teaching which follows, about the great difficulty the rich have in entering the kingdom, was also understood in corporate terms, and—predictably enough—the themes *Gemeinschaft* and *Gelassenheit* were linked: 'If Christ did not require *Gelassenheit* and community of goods in his church from all those who ... wish to inherit the heavenly goods together, it would not be difficult for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God'.

Calvin discussed this narrative and teaching at two points in the *Institutes* and at length in his commentary on a harmony of the Synoptics. All three treatments of the passage contain explanations of the apparent connection that Jesus and the rich man made between observing the law and inheriting eternal life. Calvin construed Jesus' answer as a 'legal' reply—'accommodated' to a lawyer's question. The intent of the response was to expose the man's 'blind confidence in his own works', 'so that he might be convicted of his own weakness and make use of the help of faith'.

With reference to issues of money and property, Calvin gleaned several things from this account. In line with his concern to locate the [p. 241](#) purpose of a command and to deal with attitudes and intentions, he wrote, 'We see that Christ's only purpose was to correct the young man's wrong attitude'. The law does not command us literally to sell all (after all, rich people under the old covenant were blessed); rather 'it intends us to *be prepared* for ... poverty'. Using the device of synecdoche, Calvin even extended the command beyond attitudes toward wealth: in commanding 'the covetous rich man to give up all that he has', Christ also commands 'an ambitious man to give up all his honours ... or a shameless man all means of lust'. Calvin's characteristic emphasis on charity crops up here as well—'Christ is commanding him not simply [!] to sell but to be liberal in helping the poor'—as do warnings against inordinate desire (avarice, in this case), and praise for moderation and thrift. Also typical is Calvin's assertion that it is easy to recognize the true meaning of Jesus' words—certainly 'not all are indiscriminately commanded to sell everything'. Rather, 'to hold what God places in our hand is a greater virtue than to waste everything'.

### **The Jerusalem Community (Acts 2:40–47)**

This passage, with [Acts 4](#) and [5](#), was an absolutely fundamental warrant for the Hutterite practice of community of goods. It stands virtually without comment in the section of the 'Great Article Book' devoted to explicating the scriptural grounds for the Hutterites'



communism. They saw themselves quite simply as the ‘last church’, reformed on the pattern of the ‘first church’, as given in the text. Their ‘Great Chronicle’ narrates the origins of their practice in this fashion: some Anabaptists who migrated because of persecution from the Tyrol to Moravia, with limited financial resources, ‘laid down a coat before the people, and each person put what he had on it willingly and uncoerced for the support of the needy, according to the teaching of the prophets and apostles. [Isaiah 23](#); [Acts 2, 4](#) and [5](#)’. The words of the text applied to the community’s origins and ongoing life with directness and immediacy. Certainly the defining feature of the model in their own experience was community of goods: ‘God still has such a church on earth, which acts according to His law and walks in true community of spiritual as well as temporal gifts and goods’.

Calvin believed that this passage delineated not one but four marks of the true and genuine church—and community of goods was not among them. They were apostolic doctrine, fellowship (especially alms), celebration of the Lord’s Supper and prayer. Foremost among these in Calvin’s view was apostolic teaching, and in his description of [p. 242](#) the way the believers ‘willingly embraced the word of the apostles’ one observes not an immediate sense of commonality but rather rueful distance from the early church model:

This example ought to cause us no little shame. For whereas there was a great multitude converted to Christ through one sermon, a hundred sermons can barely move a few of us; and whereas Luke says that they continued steadfast, scarcely one in ten shows even a moderate desire to advance in the faith; indeed the majority soon come to loathe our doctrine.

Calvin did desire some guidance from the ‘striking example of love’ manifested here: ‘Luke records it so that we may learn that we are to relieve the poverty of our brethren *out of our abundance*’. Calvin was careful to add that the object of the sale of property was ‘relieving immediate necessity’ and that ‘community of goods’ was only partial and did not do away with private property among the believers in Jerusalem. The language ‘all things in common’ must not be understood literally but is only a manner of speaking—as in Pythagoras’ words, ‘All things are common among friends’. The motivation for Calvin’s clarity on this point is clear: ‘A sound exposition of this passage is necessary, on account of fanatical spirits who devise a koinonia of goods whereby all civil order is overturned’.

## **THE CHURCH AND THE CIVIL ORDER**

Calvin’s comment points to another set of assumptions which informed his views on economic matters and his reading of biblical texts on money and property, assumptions about the proper-relationship between the church and the civil order. A very different set of assumptions on this subject was operative in the Hutterite interpretation of these texts.

The basic outlook of the Hutterites on the relation between church and civil order was radically dualistic. In the works of virtually every Hutterite writer of this period, emphasis on separation of the church from the world is strong. Claus Felbinger testified that ‘complete oneness [*Einigkeit*], separation from the world, and fellowship [*Gemeinschaft*], is only to be found in the perfect kingdom of Christ, for one sees how Christ separates all those whom He has ordained for life’. Likewise, Hutter wrote: ‘We have separated ourselves from the *Gemeinschaft* of the world and their abominable life and have gone out from them.... Therefore the world hates us, and has persecuted us. This separation they saw was not merely spiritual or psychological; it was to be outwardly, visibly, concretely

manifest, absolute: ‘“What p.243 concord hath Christ with Belial?” In the same way ... the believer hath no part with the unbeliever’.

Calvin’s work, on the other hand, manifests a conviction that because God’s providence encompasses the whole of human society the church has an important social function. The Hutterites identified redemption in Christ with his creation of a pure, unblemished, separated church. For Calvin, redemption meant not separating Church and society but ‘bringing [all things] into proper order’. As Christ is the ‘perfect pattern of order’, so ‘he overcomes ... social confusion and disorder’. In this vision of harmonious existence the political order for Calvin was relative and provisional but ‘not without relation to God’s order’; it ought to approximate the order of God. Along with the church and the sacraments, the civil government ranks as one of the three external helps to faith in Christ. Magistrates’ duties include protecting and vindicating ‘public innocence, modesty, decency, and tranquillity’; the function of civil government ‘is no less than that of bread, water, sun, and air’. But, above all, it exercises duties in relation to the church: to government’s protection and care the condition of the church is entrusted. It ought to aim ‘to prevent ... true religion ... from being openly ... violated and defiled with impunity’.

Against Anabaptists (including the Hutterites), who held that ‘it does not befit a Christian to be a magistrate’. Calvin wrote that because government is ordained by God to preserve order and protect the church, ‘civil authority is a ... holy and lawful [calling] before God, ... the most sacred and by far the most honourable of all callings in the whole life of mortal men’. Unlike the Hutterites, who understood Jesus’ words about the sword as implying a prohibition on Christian exercise of civil office, Calvin maintained that, in continuity with Old Testament kingship, ‘the Lord has ... testified that the office of magistrate is ... acceptable to him’; indeed he ‘sets out its dignity with the most honourable titles’. Therefore, magistrates ‘are occupied not with profane affairs or those alien to a servant of God but with a most holy office, since they are ... God’s deputies’.

The biblical texts on money and property, read from the point of view of Calvin’s vision of society-wide harmony or from the perspective of Hutterite dualism, issue in drastically different positions on economics. Hutterite dualism, combined with an initial experience of pooling resources to meet immediate need, developed into a full-blown theology of radical communism. The separated people of God could not conceive of community in higher, spiritual things when people were unwilling to share totally in lesser, material things: ‘The p.244 communion of saints ... must show itself not only in spiritual but also in temporal things ... that there may be equality’. The Chronicle echoes Riedemann’s words: ‘It is a principal article of Christian faith to confess a holy Christian church and a community of saints, which is not a half but a whole community, both in spiritual and temporal goods and gifts’. The Hutterites radicalized even early Christian communism, instituting a communism not only of distribution but of production as well.

Calvin’s convictions about God’s concern for total social order coincide with his reading of biblical texts on economic matters as supportive of moderate (at least relative to the Hutterites’) economics, practicable by a whole society and not just by those empowered by God’s Spirit. Thus, people are enjoined to avoid temptations ‘from the right or from the left. From the right are ... riches, Power, honours ... so that ... drunk with such sweetness, men forget their God. From the left are ... poverty, disgrace ... [so that] they become despondent’ and ‘estranged from God’. Extremes are to be avoided, moderation practiced. At almost every point where a text could be read as critical of private property, Calvin insisted that God had not in fact condemned private ownership. On the contrary, God is concerned for the preservation of human society, and for that preservation

it is necessary ... that each should possess what is his own; that some should acquire property by purchase, that to others it should come by hereditary right, to others by the

title of presentation, that each should increase his means in proportion to his diligence, or bodily strength, or other qualifications. In fine, political government requires that each should enjoy what belongs to him.

Within this economy, people are to exercise their callings responsibly, be grateful to God for all good things that come to them, practice stewardship and display generosity (rather than avarice and prodigality). Far from advocating egalitarianism, Calvin believed that God willed economic inequality (within limits) to provide occasions for the exercise of charity.

While the Hutterites relegated trade to their list of forbidden professions, in the belief that ‘as a nail sticketh fast between door and hinge; so doth sin stick close between buying and selling’, Calvin viewed commerce as ‘necessary for the realization of the harmonious social order which God has prescribed’. Economic relations can reflect human perversity, but they ought to be organized to mirror God’s desire for the restoration of harmony and order in society.

In sum, Calvin’s all-encompassing social vision, coupled with his [p. 245](#) convictions about moderation and the basic harmony between the universal moral law of the Decalogue and the teachings of Jesus, enabled him to lay out an economic model for an entire society, believers and unbelievers alike. The Hutterites, stressing the radicality of Jesus’ words on money and property, constructed an economic model for a radical minority, a separate society whose interaction with unbelievers was limited to mission work and contacts necessary to maintain community life. Certainly both Calvin and the Hutterites grounded their understandings of the relationship between the church and the wider social order in Scripture. It is also evident that their convictions about church and society reacted on their readings of the texts we have examined—in Calvin’s case moderating and extending them into an economic ethic for a whole society, in the Hutterites’ case further radicalizing them to support a complete communism of production and consumption practised only by the community of saints.

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## Good News For The Poor

Elsa Tamez

*Reprinted from the book Bible of the Oppressed by the same author  
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*This is a theological analysis of poverty from a Latin American Christian—though referring to all the important passages in the Bible on the subject, the article however bases its analysis on rather an unlikely passage—[Luke 2:10](#), ‘I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people’. The direct application of the passage to the Latin American economical situation makes absorbing reading.*

Editor

I bring you good news  
of a great joy which will come  
to all the people

[\[Luke 2:10\]](#).

In the first century A.D. the ordinary people of Palestine found themselves in extremely difficult circumstances. Like all Jews they had to pay heavy taxes to the Roman Empire; in addition, they suffered greatly from the inflation that was prevalent from Egypt to Syria. In the cities there was growing unemployment, and slavery was on the increase. For these reasons, slaves and farm workers abandoned their places and formed robber bands to prey on the caravans of traders and pilgrims.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile, there was another social class that did not suffer from this situation but, on the contrary, possessed economic and political power in Palestine and profited from inflation. These were the people who formed the council of elders (generally, men from the noble and powerful families), the chief priests, the great landowners, the rich merchants, and others who exercised some political and ideological control (the scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees). This class collaborated with the Roman Empire and acted in ways hostile to the masses of the people. Its members were the open enemies of the Zealots, a guerilla group that wanted to take power and drive out the Romans.<sup>2</sup>

It was in this historical context that the Good News came. [p. 247](#)

In Latin America there are also great masses of people who live in extremely difficult circumstances. Inflation is a very serious problem in almost all the countries of this part of the Third World, and it is evident that its effects bear most heavily on the masses, that is, the poor.

Other serious problems the poor have to face are unemployment, lack of housing, malnutrition, extreme indigence, exploitation.

On the other hand, there is a group that is small by comparison with the population as a whole, but that nonetheless has great economic and political power. Some in this group exploit the proletariat in order to accumulate capital; others derive great profit by becoming partners in foreign companies or by enabling the latter to operate freely in Latin America.

The ruling class, as in first-century Palestine, collaborates in the expansion of the wealthy nations. Latin American countries governed by the military receive weapons from abroad in order to put down the discontented masses. In some Latin American countries governments favour the entrance of the multinational corporations on the pretext that this will foster industrial development.

At the international level, the economies of the Latin American countries are dependent on foreign nations and are structured according to the interests of the wealthy nations of the world. As everyone knows, these nations see Latin America as a source of raw material and cheap labour.

In such a situation the poor feel oppressed; they are hard put to breathe and stay alive. Extreme poverty and exploitation are killing them. They are forced to rise up and fight for the life of the masses.

At this moment in history good news is urgently needed.

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<sup>1</sup> Fernando Belo, *Uma Leitura Política do Evangelho* (Lisbon: Multinova, 1974), p. 43. In English see Belo's *A Materialistic Reading of the Gospel of Mark*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1981).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 37 and 44.

## THE GOOD NEWS

The Good News takes a very concrete form. The central message is this: the situation cannot continue as it is; impoverishment and exploitation are not God's will; but now there is hope, resurrection, life, change. The reign of God, which is the reign of justice, is at hand.

We have often been told that the message contained in the Good News is that Christ came into the world to save us or free us from sin. But sin is identified with those actions that society considers immoral; drug taking, adultery, excessive drinking, and so on. Thus the gospel of life is reduced to a simple behavioural change.

But the Good News cannot be so reduced. After all, any non-Christian religion can propose that kind of moral teaching, which amounts to nothing but a set of patches designed to cover over the [p.248](#) great sin that lies underneath: oppression at the national and international, the individual and collective levels.

The message of the Good News is of the liberation of human beings from everything and everyone that keeps them enslaved. That is why the Good News brings joy and hope.

Mary, the humble mother of Jesus, sang this song when she visited her cousin Elizabeth:

My soul magnifies the Lord,  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,  
for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden ...  
He has shown strength with his arm,  
He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts,  
He has put down the mighty from their thrones,  
and exalted those of low degree;  
He has filled the hungry with good things,  
and the rich He has sent empty away ...

[\[Luke 1:46-53\]](#).

Mary is here speaking not of individuals undergoing moral change but of the restructuring of the order in which there are rich and poor, mighty and lowly (vv. [52-53](#)).

The priest Zechariah likewise saw the Good News as the fulfillment of the promise of liberation:

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,  
for He has visited and redeemed his people,  
and has raised up a horn of salvation for us ...,  
as He spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,  
*that we should be saved from our enemies,*  
*and from the hand of all who hate us*

[\[Luke 1:68-71\]](#).

The news is therefore good news to the people; it is a reason for joy and gladness, since it gives the hope of a total change. In [Luke 2:10](#) a messenger of the Lord tells the shepherds: 'I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people'.

The Good News is evidently not so good for some people. King Herod was deeply concerned when they told him that the king of the Jews had been born. We are told that because he feared to lose his throne he ordered the killing of all children in Bethlehem who were less than two years old ([Matt. 2:16](#)).

The shepherds, on the other hand, rejoiced when they heard the News. The shepherds were men who lived in the fields and took turns watching over their flocks at night ([Luke](#)

[2:10](#)). They enjoyed little respect because they were part of the masses. When they received the [p. 249](#) Good News, they were glad; they listened to it and shared it with others.

The Good News that speaks of the liberation of the oppressed cannot be pleasing to the oppressors, who want to go on exploiting the poor. But the Good News is indeed good to those who want to change and to see a more just society.

For the most part, those who want to live in a society in which justice and peace reign are those who suffer hunger, oppression, poverty. For this reason the Good News is directed especially to the poor. Jesus himself said so when he read from the Book of Isaiah:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to *preach good news to the poor*.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovering of sight to the blind,  
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,  
to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

[\[Luke 4:18-19\]](#)

Then he added: 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing' ([Luke 4:21](#)).

## THE POOR

Knowing, then, that the Good News is addressed especially to the poor, let us reflect on who the poor are and why they are poor.

For many centuries now the biblical passages on the poor have been spiritualized and distorted. Poverty is regarded as a virtue, as an abstract quality that can be attributed to rich and poor alike. As a result, a rich person can be understood to be poor 'in spirit', and a poor person rich 'in spirit'.

The beatitudes that Jesus addressed to the poor have been read as referring to something spiritual. In this distorted view, the 'poor in spirit' may be:

1. those who have accepted (material) poverty voluntarily and without protest;
2. those who, though rich, are not proud but rather act humbly before God and their fellows (neither the riches nor the way they have been acquired are an *obstacle* to acting humbly);
3. those who are restless spirits and lack any element of the mystical in their religious outlook.

And yet, when Jesus reads the promise now fulfilled in him: 'He anointed me to preach good news to the poor', he is referring to all those who lack the basic necessities of life. When he says: 'Blessed are [p. 250](#) you poor' ([Luke 6:20](#)), he is referring to material poverty. The poor in spirit are the 'poor of Yahweh', that is, they are the poor and oppressed who acknowledge their poverty, and who stand before God as poor people. In other words, they are not the kind of poor people who think, and try to live, as members of the bourgeoisie.

To sum up: the poor in the Bible are the helpless, the indigent, the hungry, the oppressed, the needy, the humiliated. And it is not nature that has put them in this situation; they have been unjustly impoverished and despoiled by the powerful.

In the Old Testament there are a number of Hebrew words that are often translated by 'poor':<sup>3</sup>

1. *'ani* in its most fully developed use describes a situation of inferiority in relation to another. Concretely the *'ani* is one who is dependent. When used in combination with *dal* it describes an economic relationship. The contrary of the *'ani* is the oppressor or user of violence. God is protector of the *'anim* because they are people who have been impoverished through injustice;

2. *dal* is used in two senses: it may refer either to physical weakness or to a lowly, insignificant position in society;

3. *'ebion* often refers to those who are very poor and in a wretched state. Originally it meant someone who asks for alms, a beggar;

4. *rash* is the poor or needy person; its antithesis is the rich person. The social and economic meaning is the prominent one;

5. *misken* means 'dependent', a social inferior.

I have listed these Hebrew words with their connotations in order to show that according to almost all of them the poor are individuals who are inferior to the rich or the powerful. Their situation is not the result of chance but is due to the action of oppressors. This point is brought out in many passages of the Bible: 'They sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes—they that trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth, and turn aside the way of the afflicted' ([Amos 2:6-7](#)); 'The people of the land [or: the landowners] have practised extortion and committed robbery; they have oppressed the poor and needy, and have extorted from the sojourner without redress' ([Ezek. 22:29](#)).

There is evidently no need to reread the entire Bible in order to discover that poor persons are those who do not have the wherewithal to live because their means have been snatched away. p. 251

The authorities, for their part, frequently prove to be on the side of injustice. They close their eyes to the sinful activities of the powerful, and their role is, in fact, to maintain this order of things. Isaiah denounces them: 'Your princes are rebels and companions of thieves. ... They do not defend the fatherless, and the widow's cause does not come to them' ([Isa. 1:23](#)).

Orphans and widows were listed among the poor and helpless, because they had no one to defend them and no means of subsistence.

The accumulation of wealth is incompatible with Christianity, since any accumulation of possessions is at the cost of the very poor. The denunciation pronounced by Jeremiah is very clear: 'Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness, and his upper rooms by injustice; who makes his neighbour serve him for nothing, and does not give him his wages' ([Jer. 22:13](#)).

The New Testament also launches a strong attack on those who heap up possessions:

Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. Your riches [i.e., hoards] have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have rusted, and their rust will be evidence against you and you will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure for the last days. Behold, the wages of the labourers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. You have lived on the earth in luxury and in pleasure;

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<sup>3</sup> Julio de Santa Ana, *Good News to the Poor: The Challenge of the Poor in the History of the Church*, trans. Helen Whittle (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1979), p. 10, n. 1.

you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. You have condemned, you have killed the righteous man; he does not resist you [[James 5:1-6](#)].

At this point we are in a position to infer two points about the poor as seen by the Bible. First, poverty is regarded as something decidedly negative; it is 'a scandalous condition' and the manifestation of 'a degrading human condition'.<sup>4</sup> Secondly, this situation of poverty is not the result of some historical inevitability nor is it 'just the way things are'; it is, as we saw in Part I, the result of the unjust actions of oppressors.<sup>5</sup>

## BLESSED ARE THE POOR

God, of course, is not indifferent toward situations of injustice. God takes sides and comes on the scene as one who favours the poor, those **P. 252** who make up the masses of the people. The Bible makes perfectly clear this divine predilection and option for the poor.

The poor alone are worthy to take part in the kingdom of God. Unless the rich break with their way of life, they cannot enter this kingdom. Zacchaeus, who was a chief tax collector and a very rich man, had to give half of his goods to the poor and pay a fourfold recompense to those he had exploited. We see a quite different response in the case of the rich young man whom Christ calls: he has the opportunity to share in the kingdom of God, but since he cannot detach himself from his possessions and give them to the poor, there is no place for him in the kingdom. With reason does Christ say: 'Truly, I say to you, it will be hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God' ([Matt. 19:23-24](#)).

In Chapter [6](#) of Luke's Gospel we find contrasting but parallel statements that are part of Jesus' teachings to his followers:

Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God [v. [20](#)].

But woe to you that are rich, for you have received your consolation [v. [24](#)].

Blessed are you, that hunger now, for you shall be satisfied [v. [21](#)].

Woe to you that are full now, for you shall hunger [v. [25](#)].

Blessed are you that weep now, for you shall laugh [v. [21](#)].

Woe to you that laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep [v. [25](#)].

The reason why the Bible opposes the rich is not because they are rich, but because they have acquired their riches at the expense of their neighbours ([James 5:1-6](#)).

Chapter [5](#) of Matthew's Gospel contains further beatitudes for the poor:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven

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<sup>4</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, trans. Sister Caridad Inza and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1973), pp. 291-92.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 292-93.



[[Matt. 5:3-10](#)].

God identifies himself with the poor to such an extent that their rights become the rights of God himself: 'he who oppresses a poor [p. 253](#) man insults his Maker, but he who is kind to the needy honours him' ([Prov. 14:31](#)); 'he who mocks the poor insults his Maker; he who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished' ([Prov. 17:5](#)).

It is clear that these many passages of the Bible in favour of the poor are in serious danger of being subjected to another kind of spiritualization: that of calling upon the poor to be satisfied with their state, not of poverty as such, but of privilege in God's sight. This would be disastrous because then even the rich would feel tempted to experience certain wants in order that they too might be God's favourites. Then the situation of injustice that God condemns would be alleviated in the eyes of the world.

We must always keep in mind, therefore, that poverty is an unworthy state that must be changed. I repeat: poverty is not a virtue but an evil that reflects the socioeconomic conditions of inequality in which people live. Poverty is a challenge to God the Creator; because of the insufferable conditions under which the poor live, God is obliged to fight at their side.

In Latin America the poor are blessed, but the reason is not that they have resigned themselves to poverty but, on the contrary, that they cry out and struggle and have their mouths shut for them on the grounds that 'they are rebels and have recourse to violence'. They are blessed, but not because they voluntarily seek to be poor, for it is the mode of production forced upon Latin America that leads them to penury. They are blessed, but not because they have scorned riches; on the contrary, it is they themselves who have been scorned by those who monopolize the world's riches.

The poor in Latin America are blessed because the reign of God is at hand and because the eschatological promise of justice is drawing ever nearer to fulfillment and, with it, the end of poverty.

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## Poverty is Powerlessness

Chandrakant Shourie

*Reprinted from The TRACI Journal, 30 December 1985, with permission*

*This article specially pertains to the Indian context. Doing theology is a risky business. Involvement in the context can alter one's theology with far reaching effects as evidenced by the present effort. Struggling against the injustice done to the farmers by the allied businessmen and quasi-government officials, Shourie's theologizing rapidly turns to an action programme, perhaps inevitably so. (The following is only an abstract of the theologization process and not of the action). Whatever one might say concerning the outcome of such an effort, the burning relevancy of the following pages cannot be denied.*

Editor

Contact with poverty is a devastating experience. The sight of hunger, of disease, of the miserable existence of fellow humans scars our sensibilities and sends our responses shuddering through a spectrum of emotions. We are often too shattered to make the concerted effort of concentrating our vision amidst the kaleidoscopic expressions of poverty.

The State sweats after health and education programmes, labour intensive industry, intermediate technology, loans, and subsidies—worthwhile efforts in their own place—but it has neither solved the problems of poverty nor alleviated the suffering of the poor. After almost four decades since Indian independence, poverty, like the proverbial camel, has entered our tent. The villager gets poorer as our nation gets richer. His income, which has been static for three decades, is shivering uncontrollably now.

And we, too, are mistaken. We do not realize that worthy sentiments need tough, disciplined commitment to precipitate concern into directed action. We waste our vital energy, concern and care through our naive and simplistic outlook. We allow ourselves to be misguided in actualizing our convictions into tangible, concrete realities.

The issue is no longer health or education or employment or resources or skills or technology. The issue is no longer escalating inflation, flawed policy or rampant corruption, harsh and painful though they may be. Is the physician's anaesthetic the patient's panacea? No more are the problems the effects of poverty itself. We [p. 255](#) have misconstrued matters, focussed on the fruits and ended up wide off the mark.

The essential force has to be applied elsewhere, for the causes are ancient, the roots deep ([Matthew 7:17-18, 20](#)):<sup>1</sup> Poverty is powerlessness.

## HUMAN NATURE AND THE CONCEPT OF POWER

This leads us to the following definition of power: *Power is the ability to control various factors in order to perpetuate selfish gain over and above the legitimate interests of others.* The mechanisms of this control are coercion, subversion, exploitation, manipulation and the exchanging of mutual conveniences.

What activates these control mechanisms? What generates such power? Position and authority; control over financial resources; connections with those in power; the ability and potential to use force; educational status. A combination of some or all of these factors activates control. Poverty in its various forms, the prevalent ethos of corruption, and an unjust and diseased socio-economic order are all fruits of this tree. They are born of the same root—a distorted focus on self—variously expressed as selfishness, greed, self-glorification.

The poor also subscribe to the dynamics of this power. Our farmer will willingly bribe and pull strings—isn't that how his son can get a job? Alas, perforce of poverty, he is left cursing: 'If I had Rs. 3,000 to pay, I would have got the job!'. This is common knowledge—that's how the postmaster, the school-teacher, the peon, and others, have got there anyway. They had the money. Since the poor do not have the resources which generate this power, they believe they are powerless. Thus they become powerless. Why do they believe this? They see it operating in society; they board a bus, and people 'salaam' the powerful Thakur or the politician, make way for him, and push the villager aside, with abuses.

An influential man goes to court and comes away winning the case notwithstanding his guilt. A poor man has the file thrown at his face; his land will not be registered because

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<sup>1</sup> Biblical references taken from the Amplified Bible.

he cannot afford twenty rupees for the file clerk! Seeing is believing. Effectiveness is the gospel.

The consequences of such beliefs are essentially destructive, fanning social tensions, setting into motion a reaction and retaliation syndrome, creating interpersonal backlash, resentment, mistrust, instability, callousness, cruelty, violence, in particular: [p. 256](#)

### **The powerful consume the powerless**

Society automatically fosters keen disparity when power becomes the ability to control in order to perpetuate selfish gain. It determines the direction of aspirations for all. Naturally, legitimate interests, by and large, are denied. As the process moves to its logical climax, increasing concentration and centralization of resources will split society into irreparable fragments. With such beliefs, too, ironically, there is no place for the poor. And the poor are equally responsible, for their very acceptance of these beliefs brought them, in the first place, into existence.

### **The poor lose self-confidence**

Once the poor become the poor, they become powerless. They cannot change or oppose what they see as wrong and unjust because they believe in the same sources of power, they become doubly powerless. Neither do they have the resources they think they need. They are impotent. They have no self-worth. They have no self-confidence.

### **People lose hope and faith**

This loss of self-confidence grows into a loss of hope and faith—loss of hope for a better tomorrow, loss of faith in themselves and in the values of truth and justice on which a better tomorrow may be built. Any leader who claims to improve their lot is irrelevant and destructive because he lives not for them but for himself alone.

### **The hands of control are strengthened**

Once the poor lose their faith, hope and self-confidence, they become truly powerless. They have lost the will to oppose. They are bound, easily controlled. The powerful acquire even more power because this lack of opposition makes gluttony and the hoarding of resources child's play.

### **The socio-economic order is diseased**

The powerful do not aim for justice, honesty, integrity and compassion because they do not need to. What is more profitable is a race for power. What brings success is greed, envy, jealousy, selfish ambition. Dispensing responsibility becomes stupidity. A strong sense of duty, and honest work ethics, rapidly vanish. Power and profit are paramount. They bring the good life. Bribery, corruption and irresponsibility become the order of the day. [p. 257](#)

This has been happening in Nagod, a village in Central India:

In the block office, annual reports have not been prepared for the last 5 years. Officials require bribes to sanction legitimate loans, move a file or put their signature on a routine document. A vast army of petty officials and clerks never do an honest day's work. Parents of undeserving candidates bribe teachers to push their wards up the classes. Nutriment being provided by Government for use of Anganwadi infants are issued and, worse still, stolen.

## THE NATURE OF POWER AND THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

What would Jesus do? Let us have a brief look at the first recorded temptations of Jesus, his first public ministerial declaration, his death and resurrection, and his call to repentance.

### The definition (Luke 4:1-13)

This starter, the wrestling with Satan of our Lord, is illuminating. We see the monarch of this world, one who controls all the kingdoms in their splendour to such a degree that they are his to give away. We also see Jesus, man, the son of a poor carpenter, hungry, thirsty.

The monarch is the epitome of the powers of this world. He has at his command all the resources which generate the power of human systems. Jesus has none of this power.

However, Jesus introduces a New Order. God is its definition. He demonstrates that this monarch has no power over Him. Satan fails to control Jesus and, because he cannot accept open defeat, withdraws from the battleground. The classic encounter reveals the divinity of Jesus, power, the dynamics of which possessed priorities. So rearranged they left the ball bouncing in Satan's court.

The poor need exactly this. The antidote to poverty is power. And it is when we come to the nature of this power that we arrive at the crucial factor. A mere reshuffling of the resources does not solve anything at all, creating rather only a new population of the poor. We need to convert (Latin=turn together) to another, totally different source of power: the power which Jesus proclaimed.

### The application (Luke 4:16-20)

Jesus' ministry can be summarized in the words of verses [18](#) and [19](#). The poor are the 'captives', the 'blind', the 'oppressed'. The blindness of the poor to the nature and consequences of the power of this world [p. 258](#) stems from their acceptance of its dynamics; and this is the captivity of the poor—handing over the control of themselves and their resources to others. The vicious cycle is on. Blindness strikes. They know not what they do.

Soon the ability to avoid the consequences of this distorted power is lost. As they begin believing in terrestrial power, they become prisoners of an order they have helped create. The poor have internalized the very values which cause them grief and affliction. The system that was hitherto imposed now becomes self-perpetuating. The result is a curse-oppression ([Romans 8:22](#)).

To these people Jesus brings 'release', 'sight' and 'deliverance'. The process of releasing the chains involves generating faith and confidence among the poor: faith in the values inherent in the New Order, confidence to choose it. Faith and confidence are interrelated—faith increases confidence, confidence increases faith. The restoration of sight is twofold:

1. Making the poor challenge, from heart and mind, the existing order of power.
2. Furthering their understanding and helping their acceptance of the New Order.

The poor, having their eyes opened and their shackles freed, are now delivered in faith. They begin to put into practice concepts of the New Order. They begin to resist the control of others over their own lives and resources. They are liberated.

This is the 'good news'. Jesus had recognised the cause of poverty and the needs of the poor. His ministry was primarily for the poor. His messages to them were the answers to their powerlessness.

### **The availability**

Central to the effectiveness of the power of this world is fear. Fear rules the roost. Fear activates the autocrat. Fear cowers the controlled. There is no confrontation without fear, no stand taken in true courage against exploitation, in justice or the evils generated by earthly power.

It is at this point that Jesus' death on the Cross, and his resurrection thereafter, become significant. In that final act Jesus releases all from the fear of death. He wins victory over death—the extreme penalty that the powers of this world can inflict—and, by his resurrection, hands this victory to us. Releasing us from fear, he releases us from bondage to the powers of this world.

Such a release comes from faith in the power of God. A group which [p. 259](#) is fearless in the face of this power by virtue of the transference of its allegiance to a greater Power cannot be called powerless. The man of poverty needs to be just such a member of society. True fearlessness will then enable him to act in the way which he sees to be right.

### **The condition**

Jesus had understood that the poor would never find salvation as long as they continued to accept, believe in and apply the concepts of worldly power, He knew that unless all repented, man might die, but poverty would not ([Matthew 26:11](#)). He therefore called them to repentance. Repentance, a turning back from the kingdom of this world, a total rejection of the concept and practices of the powers-that-be—is the only escape from the inexorable vortex of poverty, blindness, captivity, oppression. As people turn to God, the power of God is made available to them. There are no exceptions; God is infinite. Just as poverty was a natural consequence of the kingdom of Satan on earth, so also would abundance be a natural product of the kingdom of Heaven ([Matthew 6:33](#)). It cannot be that one becomes powerless for the sake of another's appropriation of power.

### **The result**

Now each has ability to control his own resources, behaviour and destination; to direct these in a way which builds himself and others around to successfully resist any usurpation of this control by an external group of any second individual. The structure of power in society is changed, not by a coup or a massacre but by making the objects of worldly control and power inaccessible. 'You seek to control us and our resources. We don't seek to control you, but we will not let you control us' becomes a representation of public attitudes. Power is diffused, for these biblical values are service, not subjugation; mutual dependence, not insulation. There is fearless confrontation of attempt at subversion, manipulation and exploitation of legitimate interests. The roots of poverty are struck.

Self-control, mutual love, respect, trust, harmony and reliability are the mechanisms that become operative. There comes a climate where constructive and creative activities are taken up by a whole people. All realize the intrinsic worth of created man.

When we accept the challenge to change (and cause change) we do not, however, initiate reform; we begin to become links in a chain. Our task is taken from those before us, applied to the present and, hopefully, handed down to the future. In our whole exercise of [p. 260](#) struggling for the poor and against poverty, we have to point people to God. He

is the One who enables spiritual transformation, the basis for establishing a New Order. As Christians, we must, in a way, cease from action and, in the state of being, aspire to be Jesus' city on the hill. In a way, too, we must be the yeast which is invisible but affects the whole loaf nevertheless ([John 3:30](#)).

The struggle against poverty is spiritual, not religious. The distinction lies in this: Religious conversion is basically leaving one institutional framework to join another, both being essentially structures of the same world of power. Religious conversion results in merely flipping to the other side of a perishable coin. Spiritual conversion is superseding the order of this world in favour of the New Order of the Spirit, intrinsic ([Galatians 5:19–23](#)). The first is focussed on self; the second is rooted in God. The focus, the emphasis on the values of Jesus' new order were contemporaneous. It was no ritual. Constantly alive, vibrant, spontaneous, touching the hearts of people, the New Order was a self-renewing challenge, a reformation. Ever open to change and adaption, it perpetuated the inherent values, and not the form, of the New Order.

But are we not captives ourselves of the first order? It originates within us. Our socio-economic order is proof of this. At personal levels we, too, are captive, blind and oppressed by our own selves.

Can we rise above ourselves to control ourselves? It needs Someone to open our eyes, release us, free us, and help us internalize the process of Transformation. And yet 'what is impossible with men is possible with God'. God enables us. Submission he requires; but the more we submit, so much the more he enables to practise the Second Order.

Change is eternal and transformation slow; but reformation is the need of every generation. And it is only with the power which Jesus made available to us that we can ever hope to consider taking up the task. In fact, if we are to follow Jesus, we do not have much choice!

Jesus came—and there was a vision, an abundant, liberating tradition, a rich inheritance for the people of His time, their children and their children's children!

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## **The Urban Poor: Prime Missionary Target**

Viv Grigg

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*This article deals with the specific conditions faced by the urban poor, and investigates the question of how to minister to them, and especially to reach them with the Gospel. The insights evolved from the author's own work in slums have the appeal of relevance and workability; while the stress on the Church's diakonia, koinonia and leitourgia is refreshing. Grigg makes the thought-provoking suggestion that there should be a Protestant missionary order with its own vows and a commitment to non-destitute poverty. While primarily*

*referring to American missions, the article holds good for other missionary efforts throughout the world.*

Editor

In my book, *Companion to the Poor*, a theology and praxis was developed for establishing the Kingdom in the slums, in a Catholic-animistic setting. In the process of preparing teams for other Asian mega-cities, it seemed good for me to find out if the principles and practice developed in the slums of Manila were equally valid elsewhere, to find out if anyone in Asia had been able to generate a movement of fellowships among the urban poor.

This is a report on those two years of walking the slums of the great cities of Asia, looking for God among the poor, seeking to know how the great mission surge of the last decades had established the church among the urban poor.

The sad report is that after thorough research in eight cities, I found only two such embryo movements. The conclusion: The greatest mission surge in history has entirely missed the greatest migration in history, the migration of Third World rural peasants to great mega-cities.

I wanted to find answers to two major questions:

1. Where are the men and women who, like Jesus, choose to live as poor among the poor, establishing and tending newly formed churches day and night?

2. Is the incarnational approach necessary to establish the Kingdom among the poor? Is it the wisest approach?

## ASSUMPTIONS

Two assumptions in mission seem self-evident. The first is that Jesus is **P. 262** our model for mission. Did he not say 'As the Father has sent me, even so I send you' ([John 20:21](#))? And did not his first declaration of his own great commission tell us:

'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord' ([Luke 4:18](#)).

Did he not with these words model the gospel as *primarily good news for the poor*? Did he not focus his ministry to the poor, declaring that the ministry to the poor is holistic, involving preaching, healing, deliverance, justice and doing good deeds, though initiated by proclamation (and reception) of the Kingdom?

The second assumption is pragmatic missionary strategizing:

1. Urban is the direction of history.

2. The poor are the most responsive target group according both to Jesus' teaching and to missions history, research and sociological analysis (McGavran 1980:269-294).

3. The migrant poor are the largest, most responsive group on earth today. I have found this to be true of Muslims in Karachi, Hindus in Calcutta, Buddhists in Thailand and Catholics in Manila. All are in a state of rapid socio-economic and world-view change, and are hungry for the reality of a new relationship to a god.

Jesus commands a focus not so much on the last, unreached, unresponsive people groups in the world but on those major unreached or partially reached groups that are responsive. The first five years following a person or family's migration is the time of greatest responsiveness to the gospel, for peoples and for individuals. Roger Greenway speaks of his conversion to ministry to the urban poor with the phrase: 'If the streets are

paved, move on.' Jimmy Maroney, speaking of his experiences strategizing for church-planting in Nairobi, tells us:

'Finally, a national pastor pointed out to me that they [new migrants] were the most responsive to the gospel. In fact they proved to be more responsive to the gospel in the city than back in their villages. The traditional guardians of custom and culture do not exist in the city. People away from home are "off balance" and willing to listen to what they considered strange back p. 263 home. *I would certainly have spent more time with this group if I had it to do all over again*' (emphasis mine. Maroney 1984:117).

How wise the analysis! How sad that last line! If missions deliberately directed their strategies to the poor, there would be no need to 'rediscover' the receptivity of the poor every few years.

## **GROWTH OF URBAN SLUMS**

The experience of seeing hundreds of thousands of squatters in destitute poverty is devastating. As history moves towards its climax, the wound in God's heart for this migration of people must make it difficult for him to hold back his judgment.

If the destitution of the urban poor is staggering in itself, their numerical growth is just as devastating. Since the Second World War there has come an endless convoy of buses into the mega-city capitals of the Third World city-states, disgorging impoverished farmers and teenage adventuresses into their next step towards affluence (or more likely, poverty) in the slums, squatter areas, *favelas*, *barrrios* and *bustees*.

Between 1950 and 1980, the urban growth in Third World mega-cities rose from 275 million to just under one billion! It is expected to double by the year 2000 (United Nations 1980). Wherever land can be found, the huts and plywood shacks will go up and few governments will have the capacity to prevent it or to service the people arriving. The majority of the new arrivals will remain in the squatter areas. Each capital city will continue to grow exponentially as it exploits the resources of its rural hinterland.

Some of the most destitute of the poor live in mud homes on the streets of modern Dakha city, a new city, now three million, that will grow to twenty million by the turn of the century. The 730,000 people in the 771 squatter areas (Center for Urban Studies 1983) will, by the year 2000, make up the majority of the population. There is little possibility for the city's industrial growth to keep pace with the migration influx.

In most cities, industrial growth ranges from one to four percent annually. The population growth ranges from twelve to fifteen percent.<sup>2</sup> Shantytowns (slums, squatter areas) are expected to double in six years (U.N. 1977:10). Those unable to enter the industrial life of the city remain trapped in lives of service and patronage, without ever p. 264 being able to secure their own land or housing. The squatter and slum areas comprise from 19.6 percent (Bangkok, Sapon 1985) to sixty-six percent of the city (Calcutta, U.N. Center for Housing). For those trapped in continuing poverty, the reproduction rate remains undiminished. About half of the growth in these cities is due to population growth within the cities themselves (U.N. 1980, U.N. 1983:48).

## **THE MINISTERIAL NEEDS OF THE URBAN POOR**

More nightmarish than the poverty, and the staggering growth of that poverty, is the fact that there are no more than a handful of God's people ministering among these poor.

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<sup>2</sup> The U.N. quotes a figure of fifteen percent growth of shantytowns worldwide (1977:10).



I don't mean that there are no relief and development agencies. They are many, and most are doing good work in their defined diaconal roles. *But the church has given the poor bread and kept the bread of life for the middle class.* The search has not been for aid programmes but for people who are establishing the Kingdom of God, for men and women working and living among the poor to bring them the bread of life by both word and deed.

Yet in the midst of the darkness are some of today's heroes—in each city, a handful of people who have followed Jesus fully in his calls to renunciation and involvement with the poor. There is a pastor in one west Asian city who wears the sandals and blanket of the poor, walking as holy men do. God has used him up to a couple of years ago to mobilize and deploy 300 aid workers into the slums. There is a man of God, a doctor, on the streets of one city ministering to the sick. The government has tried to deport him for ministering to the poor. For four years he has remained in the country by bringing a court case against the government and quietly continuing.

There is a pastor who for some years has chosen to live among the poor in a relocation area of Manila. He helped build houses for the poorest in his community. The housing manager and gang leaders were curious about this man and his concern for their people. They decided to work with him on the housing. They were converted because he incarnated the love and justice of God among them. There is excitement in Bangkok, for a new generation of creative church leadership is now seeing breakthroughs for the gospel. There are now ninety-seven churches<sup>3</sup> in this city of nearly six million. Hidden in these figures there is an old, highly successful, Finnish, Pentecostal, p. 265 church planter. At seventy, he has gone back to daily spending his hours in a slum area, quietly establishing a church.

Nevertheless, in the 1,020 slums (Sopon 1985), there are only two churches and two house groups. That is, two percent of the churches are among the migrant poor. For the 600,000 prostitutes<sup>4</sup> in Bangkok there are only two ministries. For the 500,000 drug addicts, the first ministry was initiated by some Malaysians in early 1986. These figures are not given to shame us but to compel us to a new focus.

Examples of men and women who are following Jesus in his ministry to the poor should not be the exception but the rule if we as a church were following Jesus. *We must refocus our energies and make the urban poor the primary thrust of missions.*

In an otherwise excellent article on the urban poor, Francis M. DuBose makes an unusual series of conclusions:

'Like the poor who have long gathered in their urban store fronts in America, the Christian communities are proliferating among the urban poor in the wake of an impressive advance of the gospel and are gathering in "shop churches" and in "house churches" in all major areas of the world' (1984:70).

This statement is simply not true. Perhaps it is a misunderstanding of the word 'poor'. To Americans, all the world is poor, including the middle class of the Third World. Or perhaps he is inaccurate because he is using Latin American Catholic categories for the church among the poor. I have wondered whether perhaps his statement is true of the African churches, but discussions with missionaries from those countries indicate that, though there is more activity than in Asia, the percentage and focus of activity is about the same. Two years of research do not bear out his conclusions.

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<sup>3</sup> Figure from Bill Smith, Church Growth researcher on Bangkok.

<sup>4</sup> Figures for prostitutes and drug addicts have been discussed and checked with a number of sources and appear to be conservative and generally accepted. They reflect government, church leadership and media opinions.

## IS INCARNATION NECESSARY?

Some have said to me, 'Don't be too fixed on the idea of incarnation as the key.' So I talked and visited with those who had tried various things with the poor: missionaries and pastors with hearts for the poor, evangelists who would go in and preach, and churches that have aid programmes. My conclusions certainly have been modified—but come out essentially the same. Rarely had they been successful **P. 266** beyond establishing one or two families long-term into the middle-class church.

One significant movement in Asia is that generated by a dynamo of a friend in Hong Kong, Jackie (Pullinger 1980), through a ministry to drug addicts. As they are freed, many of them move back to the poorer areas where their families live. Out of this ministry has come a movement of disciples, many linked in small fellowships. The key? Jackie has for years slept and worked with these people in the destitution of the Walled City. She has lived among them. She lives much of her time on the streets. After eighteen years she still has no room to call her own.

A life lived among the poor as one of them is the key to a movement. That is part of what Jesus was talking about when he discussed grains of wheat.

In Latin America, statistics are more encouraging than in Asia because of Pentecostal growth. Many Pentecostal pastors have little choice but to work in the slums because of the economic situation. Some years back, Roger Greenway was able to establish significant numbers of slum churches in Mexico working from the outside of the slums and sending workers in (Greenway 1973).

Musing on this excellent case study, the question arises as to whether it negates the need for emphasis on incarnation. Success in this case came through a strategic focus on the slums from the outside. (If we could refocus mission agencies even to this extent that would be a major achievement.) Yet even within this approach of training and sending workers into the slums, the churches that took root did so when leadership emerged from within the community. It seemed that incarnational leadership, though in this case not that of the missionaries or of the trainees in church-planting, was the key to long-term establishment of the church in these city slums also.

In Manila, a YWAM (Youth with a Mission) training school has established another model that runs counter to incarnational theory. They have planted a slum church by sending in, every few months, a new short-term team without much language or cultural orientation. They live in a house just outside of the slum. The work has the expected problems related to a lack of indigeneity but it has been successful. Despite the problems of short-term missions and the cultural lacks, there has been enough identification with the poor for the gospel to take root and bear fruit into a church.

Based on these examples, the question moves from a question of the *necessity* to a question of the *extent* of incarnation. Linked to it is one of the major issues facing missions in the next decades: how to **p. 267** develop slum church leadership so that multiplying movements can be developed.

One of the problems involved is that it is rare to find a natural leader in a slum community who can develop a church beyond seventy people. There are several apparent reasons. Lack of management skills within the culture of poverty is one. For a church to grow beyond seventy requires administrative as well as pastoral skills. The extent of pastoral problems, and the inability of the poor to provide financially for full-time pastors, limit the use of time for broader ministry. Family dynamics tend to limit churches to three extended families, which then get cut off from their religio-cultural context.

*It appears from the available data that the extent of incarnational modelling and pastoral leadership from within the communities determines whether the church will be*

*established.* My own conclusion is that there are two levels of leadership that must be given: a combination of an educated catalyst, with a broad perspective and managerial skills, leading a score of squatter leaders functioning as pastors. That catalyst may be a foreigner or may be one of the converted, educated rich who chooses to renounce all.

The development of Pentecostal (charismatic) superchurches for the rich elite in places like Manila, Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur may provide the opportunity to call the rich to follow Jesus in his renunciation of wealth to minister to the poor. Historically, the leadership of the Catholic orders to the poor has come from the rich elite who have taken Jesus seriously at this point. Unfortunately, present imported Western theology encourages people to keep their wealth, ignoring the gospel teachings on using wealth on behalf of the poor by choosing simple lifestyles, or, for many, renunciation of wealth.

Middle class leadership is useful in initiating a work, and as a backup in areas of economic development, legal and medical help, or political issues. But it is threatening to a middle class family to have one of their sons choose the lifestyle of poverty among the poor which seems necessary to establish churches. These families are still valiantly struggling to stay out of the poverty from which they have come. Thus it appears unwise to invest large amounts of time seeking to develop leadership for squatter churches from this class. Only the leadership that lives in the community can effectively develop the church.

*As such, it is unwise to presume that student movements will be the key to the task ahead of us. They may provide some backup, and certainly, if they are trained in a poor-focused, holistic theology, may significantly affect government structures towards justice for the poor.* p. 268 But they should not be the focus of our time and energy if we are to reach the poor (perhaps with the exception of recruiting, while at university, the scions of the rich, elite families into incarnational approaches).

Biblically, we must encourage all people, at whatever level of society they are working, to have a focus of ministry to the poor. This does not imply that all should live among the poor.

We must call all people at all levels of society to lifestyles of simplicity so that others may simply live. This does not imply that all should live among the poor.

We must call all to the patterns of renunciation we see in Jesus' teaching. This does not imply that all should live among the poor.

But we must also hold out to our people the further call of Jesus for many to take up an apostolic lifestyle of identification with the poor in order that the poor people's church might be established.

Is incarnation essential? For church-planting, the leadership of the church in the slums must be incarnate in the community. The missionary, in order to train others in such pastoral work, must set the patterns of identification and model the incarnational lifestyle.

On the other hand, as development work in the slums has been observed, incarnation does not appear to be essential. However, even development work is greatly advanced by people who work with people from their own perspective rather than work for them. And if developmental work is to be done from a Kingdom perspective where the goal is more than projects, incarnation appears necessary.

In Thailand, I spent time with some Buddhist community organizers who have captured from a Christian this concept of living among the poor in order to serve them. They are paying a price for enabling the people. Why do the Christians pay a lesser price? Incarnation is more effective. It gives the poor a greater sense of dignity. It is more just. It is more loving. But no, it is not essential for development workers.

## THE GREAT MISCONNECTION

When faced with the sad failure of the great mission thrust to reach these poor, one must ask 'Why?' and beyond the why 'What can be done to rectify the failure?' The following appear to be some factors:

1. As mission leaders, we have failed to foresee both the urban growth, and the fact that most of the urban growth will be in squatter areas. The opportunity to save the cities from many traumas associated with this development, the opportunity to establish a church in every squatter area as it has formed, has been lost almost entirely. As Tom p. 269 Sine says, we have in our long-range planning unconsciously assumed a static view of the future (1981:17).

*People are being thrust out to the last frontier, but the last frontier has moved.* Perhaps we could encourage the U.S. Center for World Mission to revise their charts of unreached peoples. Instead of dividing them by religious groupings alone, perhaps they should also be divided into urban/rural and rich/poor. We may find that the largest grouping of truly 'unmissionaried' people would be the urban poor.

2. There are some missions that have made a deliberate, strategy to go for the rich, believing in a sort of religious 'trickle-down' theory. 'Trickle-down' no more works in the Kingdom than it does in the economic realm. This strategic mistake lacks in both biblical exegesis and in sociological analysis and has already been refuted (see, for example, McGavran 1980:269-294).

The gospel 'trickles up'. Any man or woman who would follow Jesus to walk among the poor will affect countless of the middle and rich classes. They come because they are curious. They hear of good deeds and, like Nicodemus, they know that this is reality. The converted rich come because, despite the failure of affluent missionaries to preach the Scriptures about repentance for unjust wealth or to live simply themselves, these new believers can read the Bible. They come searching for the person who has chosen the poor because here they know is a true answer to their problems of wealth. They come because they are concerned now for the uplift of those they have previously exploited. Jesus has an answer for the rich man. The rich middle class missionary often has only words.

3. For the same strategic reasons as America failed in the Vietnam War, it has failed in this spiritual war. Depending on affluent and highpowered programmatic approaches, the mission force has been out of touch with the realities of the Third World poor. A missionary living on \$2,800 per month in an American-style house, sending his children to an American-style school, trying to reach people who live on \$200 per year, is like a B-52 bomber attacking guerrillas.

4. However, this failure in the great American mission thrust is, at its roots, not a strategic but a spiritual failure. An American church trapped by cultural perspectives on affluence rather than biblical opposition to the American 'god of mammon' has exported this into missions. We must return to the pattern of Jesus, who chose nondestitute poverty as a way of life, who took the time to learn language and culture and who refused to be the welfare agency king. We must return to the way of the apostles and of the wandering friars who have been the key to the conversion of the world in generations before us. p. 270 Non-destitute poverty and simplicity must again become focal in missions strategy.

5. Some perhaps have concluded that the poor are unreachable. This is a culturally logical conclusion for those of European descent, growing up in the capitalism of the United States. Claerbaut (1983:69-70), in an excellent analysis on urban ministry, has some penetrating insights into American cultural attitudes to the poor.

'The truths of stratification and self-perpetuation of the socioeconomic system are not widely known or accepted. As a result, negative attitudes towards the poor persist. To

argue that poverty is a self-perpetuating condition in a capitalistic society is to attack the nation's sacred civil doctrine of the self-made person. To suggest that one is poor because of an unequal distribution of opportunities is to suggest that riches are as much a matter of good fortune as virtue.'

However, the poverty of the Third World urban poor is a direct result of social forces and oppression, not personal sin. Such oppressed poor in the Scriptures are considered to be rich in faith and the ones for whom the Kingdom is particularly to be preached (Grigg 1985:47–50).

6. The propensity for the American church to accept the agenda of the aid organizations as focal to the Great Commission has seriously skewed mission. Mission to the middle class is seen as proclamation. To the poor it has become giving handouts or assisting in development as defined by Christianized humanitarian perspectives. It is far easier for churches to give thousands of dollars than to find one of their members who would walk into the slums for a decade.

## **A PROPOSAL: PROTESTANT ORDERS WITH VOWS OF NON-DESTITUTE POVERTY**

My convictions have deepened and been modified during these months of research, wandering and preaching to the poor.

The central conviction remains: we must thrust out groups similar to the Catholic devotional communities of preaching friars. In our case, we must send communities of men and women, marrieds and singles, with commitments to live poor among the poor in order to preach the Kingdom and establish the church in these great slum areas. Westerners and upper class nationals who choose such lives of nondestitute poverty will be catalysts for movements of lay leaders from among the poor in each city. The spearhead of such a thrust will be those who accept the gift of singleness for some years. We must set up new mission structures for this to happen. The key is older couples [p. 271](#) who will choose to be recycled into this kind of ministry lifestyle and can give leadership to these communities of pioneers.

1. *Orders.* We need men and women who will commit themselves to lifetimes of simplicity, poverty, devotion, community and sacrifice in areas of marriage and family. We need orders that free men and women for pioneering, apostolic, prophetic, church-planting, and mobile roles rather than an order that limits people to a rigid structure.

2. *Devotional communities.* Most mission teams are not communities, but teams. The focus of most teams is to work. On the other hand, traditional communities in the church are by definition primarily committed to relational caring, worship and a devotional pattern. These emphases are essential if workers are to survive in the slums. Working and living two by two in various slum areas, they need to come together every two weeks for a day of ministry to each other, of worship and relaxation.

3. *Poverty, chastity, obedience.* The needed commitments to nondestitute poverty are similar to the older Catholic orders without the legalism. So too are the commitments to singleness, not as vows of celibacy, but for periods of time. As Protestants, we have lost the concept of the gift of singleness. Marriage has been seen as the only ideal. The biblical blessing on chosen or given singleness has to be recovered. Part of the blessing of that gift is the freedom to pioneer in difficult and dangerous places.

4. *New Structures.* Historically, movements among the poor have consistently been thrown out of the middle class churches. It is traumatic for one missionary living on \$2,800 per month to have to be in the same mission team with one who is willing to receive only the \$300 for his own living expenses and all his ministry and travel costs. In

order to avoid such traumas it would be wise for mission directors to create new orders of men and women called to the poor. These could be within or without their old mission boards. Ultimately, this will enhance effectiveness and prevent disharmony. However, these orders should only be under the authority of persons who have lived, for long periods, this kind of sacrificial and incarnational lifestyle. They should never give authority to administrators who have not lived out this lifestyle. Incarnational workers do not want protection. They want pastoral care from leaders who have been on the front line and who will keep them at the front line and take the bullets out when the workers are shot up.

5. May God touch the heart of some *older experienced couples* with these cries of the poor. May he raise up couples who are willing [p. 272](#) to take on a harder missionary task than they have faced in the past. Then perhaps we may redeem ourselves from failure.

## AN OPPORTUNITY LOST?

God is offering the opportunity to American missions to return to the biblical commitment to the poor and to incarnation as the primary missionary role model. The need is urgent for several thousand catalysts in the slums of scores of Third World cities who can generate movements in each city. Two billion people cry out!

If the American mission leaders, boards and pastors do not heed this call, God will sidestep them and turn to the emerging Latin American and Third World missions to meet this focus of mission in the next decades. How sad to miss the focal call of the scriptures to preach the gospel to the poor! For the God who sent his son to a manger will find a way to send other sons and daughters to those poor for whom particularly he came. He will not leave their cries unheard.

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## Book Reviews

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John Jefferson Davis, *Your Wealth in God's World*  
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