

C21

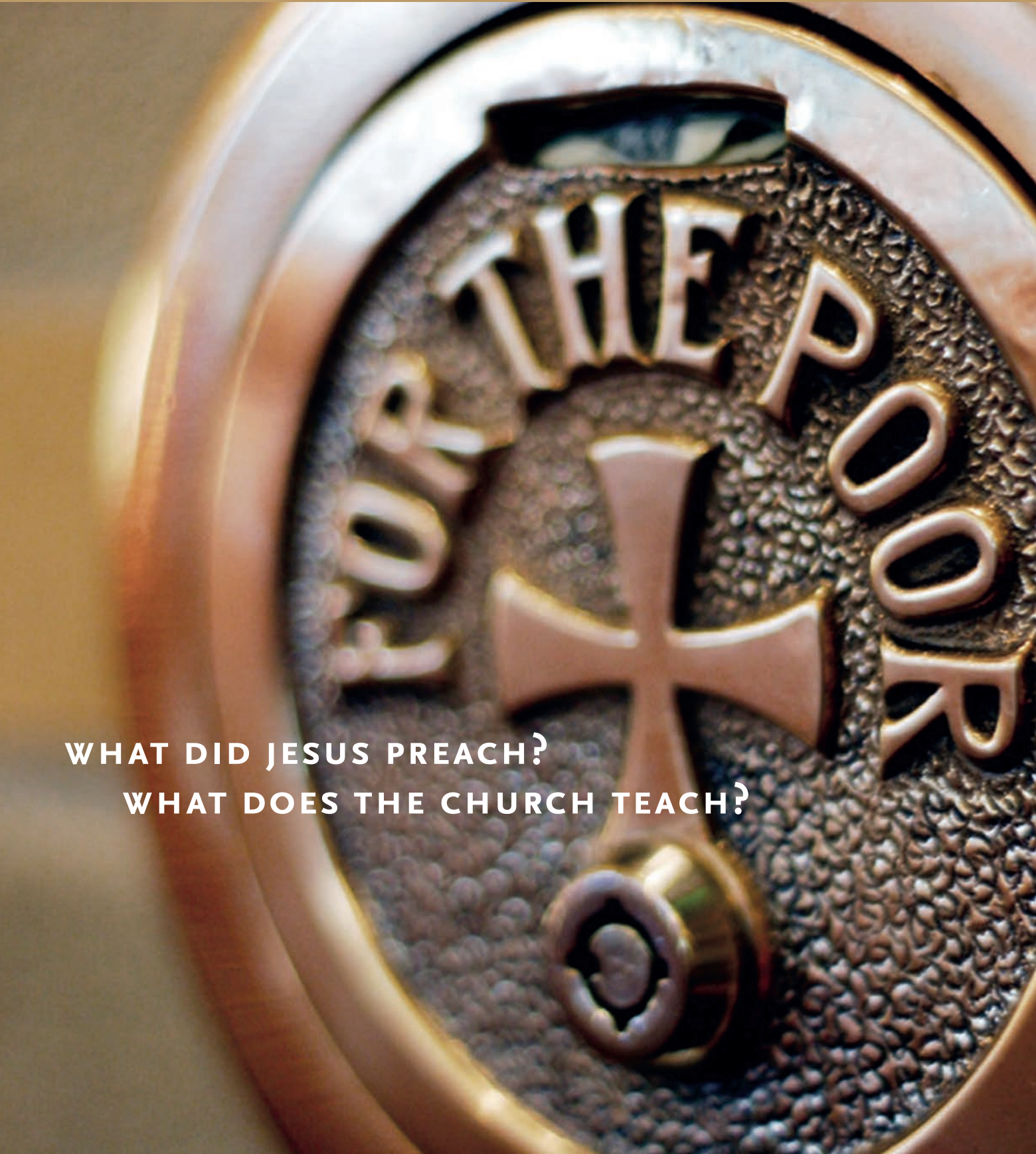


RESOURCES

THE CHURCH IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY CENTER

FALL 2014

WHAT DID JESUS PREACH?  
WHAT DOES THE CHURCH TEACH?



The Church in the 21st Century Center is a catalyst and resource for the renewal of the Catholic Church.

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FROM THE C21 CENTER DIRECTOR



Pope Francis has called for a “Church that is poor and for the poor.” It seems that Francis is inviting us to risk being vulnerable so we can realize more fully our common connection to all humanity as “children of God.”

The reality of poverty has challenged the moral convictions of humanity throughout history. How are Christians called to respond to poverty? More importantly, how do we respond to children, parents, or grandparents who suffer the effects of poverty? We might ignore these realities; blame a political ideology; volunteer or enter a career to provide services; or actively support or work towards systemic solutions.

To begin this *C21 Resources* issue dedicated to “the poor,” I draw from a reflection by the recently canonized St. Peter Faber, S.J.:

“With great devotion and new depth of feeling, I hope and beg for this, that it finally be given me to be the servant and minister of Christ the consoler, the minister of Christ the helper, the minister of Christ the redeemer, the minister of Christ the healer, the liberator, the enricher, the strengthener. Thus it would happen that even I might be able through him to help many—to console, liberate, and give them courage; to bring to them light not only for their spirit but also ... for their bodies, and bring as well other comforts to the soul and body of each and every one of my neighbors.” (c. 1543)

May God inspire each of us to be so bold in our desire to love our neighbor!

Erik P. Goldschmidt  
Director

GUEST EDITOR *C21 RESOURCES* FALL 2014

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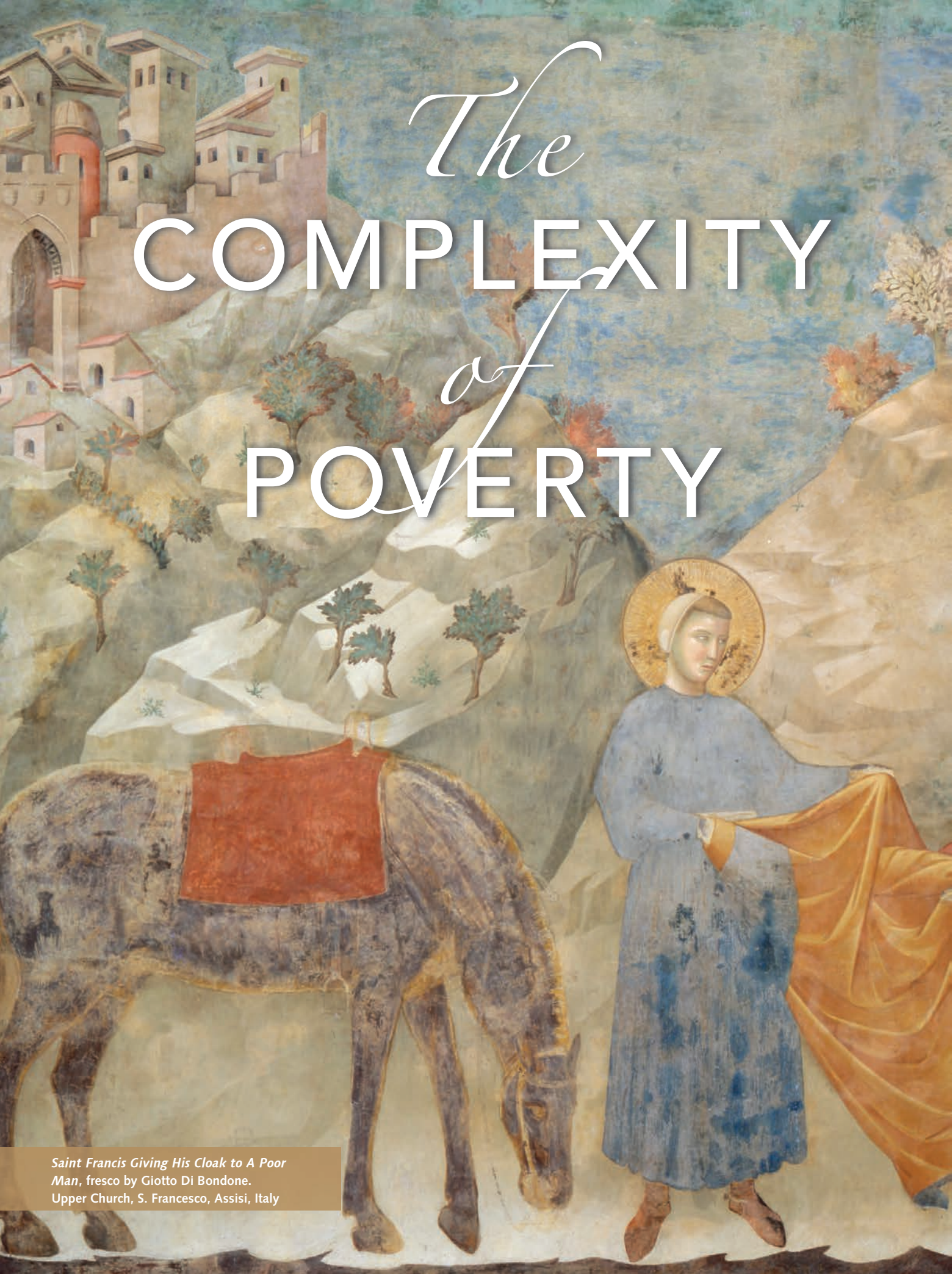
# C21 RESOURCES

THE POOR: WHAT DID JESUS PREACH? WHAT DOES THE CHURCH TEACH?

FALL 2014

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A fresco by Giotto di Bondone depicting Saint Francis giving his blue cloak to a poor man. Saint Francis, on the right, has a halo and is dressed in a blue robe. He is handing a large, golden-brown cloak to a poor man who is kneeling on the left. The poor man is wearing a simple, dark, worn-out tunic and is riding a dark, shaggy donkey. The donkey has a red saddle. The background shows a rocky, hilly landscape with a small town built on a cliffside in the upper left. The sky is a mix of blue and green, suggesting a distant or ethereal setting.

# The COMPLEXITY *of* POVERTY

*Saint Francis Giving His Cloak to A Poor Man*, fresco by Giotto Di Bondone.  
Upper Church, S. Francesco, Assisi, Italy



*Kenneth Himes, OFM*

From the outset the Christian community has wrestled with the realities of poverty and the poor. Jesus often preached parables that touched upon the reality of poverty in the experience of his listeners. In the Acts of the Apostles, there are scenes of the early Church struggling with how to think about possessions, poor widows in the community, and the proper attitude toward material wealth. In several letters Paul wrote about collecting money for the poor Jerusalem community, along with the scandal of communal meals at Corinth when rich and poor were divided from each other. And James scolded a community that overlooked its poor members while fawning over the rich.

Later Christians—hermits, theologians, monks, mendicants, mystics, social reformers, spiritual writers—have added their voices to the discussion of poverty within the tradition. At times praised as a virtue and blessed as a condition, at other times opposed as a social evil and cursed as a burden, poverty has elicited many kinds of reactions among the followers of Christ. In the essays in this issue of *C21 Resources* we present some of that diversity of viewpoint among believers.

#### FUNDAMENTAL POVERTY

Part of what accounts for the range of views is that poverty can refer to different realities. So it will be useful to point out the various meanings of poverty. The most fundamental reality of poverty is that of *creatureliness*. In a very real sense to be human is to be poor. This is the essential poverty of finitude. None of us willed ourselves into existence and none of us can sustain our existence. In a word, to be a creature is to be *contingent*. No human is necessary; the simple fact is you and I need not be.

If we exist it is because we have been brought into life by a Creator God. As Christians we believe that the Creator's will is loving and purposeful. So we do not despair over the innate poverty of the human condition, we celebrate that we have been loved into existence by a gracious God. But we are contingent, we exist only because God sustains us in existence; we are utterly dependent on the gracious purpose and plan of a God who is love. That radical sense of contingency, that universal human reality of dependence, is the fundamental poverty that makes us aware that everything that exists is due to grace. To paraphrase Thomas Aquinas, for the world to come to an end God would not have to do anything; rather God would have to stop doing something, namely holding us in existence. The essay by Johannes Baptist Metz on the temptation of Jesus in the desert is a wonderful meditation on how the Incarnation is the event of the God who became poor in the person of Jesus.

#### THE FORMS OF POVERTY

In everyday conversation poverty usually means material poverty, the lack of goods that most of us need to experience a reasonable measure of security from hunger, cold, storms, illness. Countless human beings have walked across the face of this planet who lacked such basic goods. Deprived

of resources for meeting basic bodily needs, too many people throughout history have died from hunger, thirst, exposure to the elements, and treatable illness. We have material needs and the inability to satisfy them is a terrible evil inflicted upon those who are materially poor.

There is also spiritual poverty in our world. One may have adequate material well-being yet suffer from a profound sense of isolation or marginalization, cut off from community, friendship, intimacy, love. There are those unfortunates plagued by mental and emotional suffering for whom the challenge of rising from bed is a daily struggle with depression, anxiety, grief, or despair. In our information society there are people whose lack of education keeps them on the margins of society even if they manage to put food on their tables and roofs over their heads. There are those with illnesses that separate them from the everyday interactions of those who are unburdened by disease. And as John Chrysostom reminds us in his reflection on the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, there are the affluent and materially comfortable who are truly poor, abounding in wealth but starving in virtue; propped up with false security yet their life is in peril; living a life of easy comfort but finding no meaning in luxury.

Poverty has many guises and while the external face of material deprivation is often the easiest to recognize it is not the only way that poverty appears in the human situation. While Christians must never be indifferent to the material poverty of our brothers and sisters, it is also true that Christian believers ought to be among the first to discern the signs of spiritual poverty, in our own lives and in the lives of those we encounter. The works of mercy are both spiritual and material.

### A KEY DIFFERENCE

An important distinction is that of voluntary versus involuntary poverty. From the earliest generations of the Christian community there were people who voluntarily made themselves materially poor for the sake of a spiritual good, whether that good be giving assistance to others, acquiring virtue, engaging in repentance, deepening one's prayer, or imitating Christ. Throughout the history of Christianity there have been men and women who freely took vows of poverty or simply made decisions to forsake material wealth for the sake of their faith. When done in freedom, with a clear understanding of the consequences, and after a period of mature reflection such a decision has been praised and admired by others as an act of genuine discipleship.

However, there is also involuntary poverty, the poverty that is not chosen but imposed, that is not an evangelical ideal but a countersign to the dignity of the human person. Because we are integrated creatures, both bodily and spiritual, it is not possible to divide ourselves neatly. When we have a severe toothache we also turn impatient, ill-tempered, self-absorbed, and difficult. When we are in love

the sun seems to shine brighter, the coffee tastes better, and there is a bounce to our step. Our inner and outer lives cannot easily be cut off from each other; there is a profound reciprocity between them.

Involuntary poverty can corrupt our inner life even as it makes our external life difficult. The involuntary poverty of unmet physical needs can crush the spirit of a person. Voluntary poverty can liberate people to attain a life of authentic Christianity. Involuntary poverty can oppress people so as to prevent a truly human life.

### POVERTY AND INEQUALITY

Yet another distinction to bear in mind when thinking about poverty is the difference between relative and absolute poverty. The latter can be defined in ways that are connected with the experience of radical deprivation whereby essential needs are neglected. Absolute poverty can refer to the failure to satisfy minimal levels of caloric intake, or the inability to find shelter adequate to prevent frostbite. Absolute poverty means the lack of material goods that permit daily subsistence. It entails a state of destitution that deprives a person of essential food, potable water, sanitation, shelter, health, and education. It refers not only to income but access to goods.

Tattered or shrunken as it may be, the safety net in most economically developed countries is meant to raise all people above the level of absolute poverty. The World Bank put a dollar figure on absolute poverty in the poorest nations, setting the standard at \$1.25 per person per day. Of course, conditions in richer nations require a different standard. The United States sets its poverty standard, according to recent figures, at \$15.15 per adult per day.

Relative poverty is a more difficult issue to define. It is determined with reference to social context. It is most commonly explained as the percentage of a population that has less than a certain proportion of a society's median income, for example, the percentage of the population that has less than 50 percent of the median income. Such a group may be designated as living in relative poverty. In short, relative poverty is really a way of talking about income inequality.

Relative poverty is not about survival but whether a person is able to participate effectively in the life of the society. This is not a new idea. Even Adam Smith in the *Wealth of Nations* discussed poverty not as the ability to have adequate goods to sustain life, but as the lack of what a nation's customs determine to be a decent standard of living for the least well off.

### OPPOSITION OR DUAL OBLIGATION?

Finally, there is the issue of how today's Christians are to respond to the fact of the poor, both those close at hand and those halfway around the world. As many of the voices, like those of Dorothy Day or Peter Maurin, that can be heard in this issue make clear, there is always a profound

“...FOR I WAS HUNGRY  
AND YOU **GAVE ME FOOD,**  
I WAS **THIRSTY** AND YOU  
GAVE ME **SOMETHING TO**  
**DRINK,** I WAS A **STRANGER**  
AND YOU **WELCOMED ME,** I  
WAS **NAKED** AND YOU **GAVE**  
**ME CLOTHING...**”

~ MATTHEW 25:35

obligation among Christians to provide for the poor through charity. Alms-giving has always been counted as being at the heart of the Christian life. Indeed, one of the most vivid of all portrayals of divine judgment is Matthew 25 where the sheep and goats are separated on the basis of whether or not Christ was recognized in the hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, or imprisoned brother and sister. Charity is at the center of Christian discipleship.

However, the argument has been made that charity can simply be a bandage to a problem that needs to be addressed at a deeper level. One description is that charity is equivalent to pulling drowning people out of a river, a necessary and life-saving service; yet justice finds out why people are falling into the river in the first place, making charity less urgent and necessary. Seen this way the advocates of justice can demean charity as simply saving victims while the work of justice is understood as preventing people from being victimized in the first place through the reform of society. Meanwhile, the agents of charity can dismiss justice advocates as refusing to get their hands dirty by working in direct service to the needy.

Is the relationship of charity and justice best seen as one of opposition? Or might there be another way to think about these two virtues? In his social encyclical *Caritas in veritate*, Benedict XVI described the work of justice as the “institutional path—we might also call it the political path—of charity, no less excellent and effective than the kind

of charity which encounters the neighbor directly” (7). In other words, justice can be seen as the political expression of charity, or the application of charity to the institutional and structural aspects of a society. There are two complementary and necessary moments in the response of the Christian to the evils of poverty. Philanthropy and direct personal involvement are vitally important as disciples follow in the way of the Lord Jesus, but preventing further and future poverty through social reform is also a work of neighbor love. Indeed, it may be the only way that we can assist the distant neighbor whom we will not meet face to face. The documents of Catholic social teaching make clear that the Christian tradition sets charity and justice not in tension but holds them up as dual obligations for those who hope to hear one day the words of Matthew 25:34-36: “Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” ■

KENNETH HIMES, OFM is the guest editor of this issue of *C21 Resources*.

PHOTO CREDIT: Pages 2-3: Scala/Art Resource, NY



Watch several C21 videos featuring Kenneth Himes  
Visit: [www.bc.edu/c21poverty](http://www.bc.edu/c21poverty)

# A CHURCH that is POOR and for the POOR

*Pope Francis*

**T**he pope loves everyone, rich and poor alike, but he is obliged in the name of Christ to remind all that the rich must help, respect, and promote the poor. I exhort you to generous solidarity and to the return of economics and finance to an ethical approach which favors human beings....Our faith in Christ, who became poor, and was always close to the poor and the outcast, is the basis of our concern for the integral development of society's most neglected members.

Each individual Christian and every community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor, and for enabling them to be fully a part of society. This demands that we be docile and attentive to the cry of the poor and to come to their aid....

The Church has realized that the need to heed this plea is itself born of the liberating action of grace within each of us, and thus it is not a question of a mission reserved only to a few... it means working to eliminate the structural causes of poverty and to promote the integral development of the poor, as well as small daily acts of solidarity in meeting the real needs which we encounter. The word "solidarity" is a little worn and at times poorly understood, but it refers to something more than a few sporadic acts of generosity. It presumes the creation of a new mind-set which

thinks in terms of community and the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of goods by a few....

We are not simply talking about ensuring nourishment or a "dignified sustenance" for all people, but also their "general temporal welfare and prosperity."<sup>1</sup> This means education, access to health care, and above all employment, for it is through free, creative, participatory, and mutually supportive labor that human beings express and enhance the dignity of their lives. A just wage enables them to have adequate access to all the other goods which are destined for our common use....

For the Church, the option for the poor is primarily a theological category rather than a cultural, sociological, political, or philosophical one. God shows the poor "his first mercy."<sup>2</sup> This divine preference has consequences for the faith life of all Christians, since we are called to have "this mind... which was in Jesus Christ" (Phil. 2:5). Inspired by this, the Church has made an option for the poor which is understood as a "special form of primacy in the exercise of Christian charity, to which the whole tradition of the Church bears witness."<sup>3</sup> This option—as Benedict XVI has taught—"is implicit in our Christian faith in a God who became poor for us, so as to enrich us with his poverty."<sup>4</sup> This is why I want a Church which is poor and for the poor. They have much to teach

us. Not only do they share in the *sensus fidei*, but in their difficulties they know the suffering Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them. The new evangelization is an invitation to acknowledge the saving power at work in their lives and to put them at the center of the Church's pilgrim way. We are called to find Christ in them, to lend our voice to their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them, and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them.

Our commitment does not consist exclusively in activities or programs of promotion and assistance; what the Holy Spirit mobilizes is not an unruly activism, but above all an attentiveness which considers the other "in a certain sense as one with ourselves."<sup>5</sup> This loving attentiveness is the beginning of a true concern for their person which inspires me effectively to seek their good. This entails appreciating the poor in their goodness, in their experience of life, in their culture, and in their ways of living the faith.... The poor person, when loved, "is esteemed as of great value,"<sup>6</sup> and this is what makes the authentic option for the poor differ from any other ideology, from any attempt to exploit the poor for one's own personal or political interest. Only on the basis of this real and sincere closeness can we properly accompany the poor on their path of liberation. Only this will ensure that



“in every Christian community the poor feel at home. Would not this approach be the greatest and most effective presentation of the good news of the kingdom?”<sup>7</sup> Without the preferential option for the poor, “the proclamation of the Gospel, which is itself the prime form of charity, risks being misunderstood or submerged by the ocean of words which daily engulfs us in today’s society of mass communications.”<sup>8</sup>...

The need to resolve the structural causes of poverty cannot be delayed, not only for the pragmatic reason of its urgency for the good order of society, but because society needs to be cured of a sickness which is weakening and frustrating it, and which can only lead to new crises. Welfare projects, which meet certain urgent needs, should be considered merely temporary responses. As long as the problems of the poor are not radically resolved by rejecting the absolute autonomy of markets and financial speculation and by attacking the structural causes of inequality,<sup>9</sup> no solution will be found for the world’s problems or, for that matter, to any problems. Inequality is the root of social ills.

The dignity of each human person and the pursuit of the common good are concerns which ought to shape all economic policies. At times, however, they seem to be a mere addendum imported from without in order to fill out a political discourse lacking in perspectives or plans for true and integral development. How many words prove irksome to this system! It is irksome when the question of ethics is raised, when global solidarity is invoked, when the distribution of goods is mentioned, when reference is made to protecting labor and defending the dignity of the powerless, when allusion is made to a God who demands a commitment to justice. At other times these issues are exploited by a rhetoric which cheapens them. Casual indifference in the face of such questions empties our lives and our words of all meaning. Business is a vocation, and a noble vocation,

provided that those engaged in it see themselves challenged by a greater meaning in life; this will enable them truly to serve the common good by striving to increase the goods of this world and to make them more accessible to all.

We can no longer trust in the unseen forces and the invisible hand of the market. Growth in justice requires more than economic growth, while presupposing such growth: it requires decisions, programs, mechanisms, and processes specifically geared to a better distribution of income, the creation of sources of employment and an integral promotion of the poor which goes beyond a simple welfare mentality...

Jesus, the evangelizer par excellence and the Gospel in person, identifies especially with the little ones (cf. Matt. 25:40). This reminds us Christians that we are called to care for the vulnerable of the earth. But the current model, with its emphasis on success and self-reliance, does not appear to favor an investment in efforts to help the slow, the weak, or the less talented to find opportunities in life.

It is essential to draw near to new forms of poverty and vulnerability, in which we are called to recognize the suffering Christ, even if this appears to bring us no tangible and immediate benefits. I think of the homeless, the addicted, refugees, indigenous peoples, the elderly who are increasingly isolated and abandoned, and many others....

There are other weak and defenseless beings who are frequently at the mercy of economic interests or indiscriminate exploitation. I am speaking of creation as a whole. We human beings are not only the beneficiaries but also the stewards of other creatures. Thanks to our bodies, God has joined us so closely to the world around us that we can feel the desertification of the soil almost as a physical ailment, and the extinction of a species as a painful disfigurement. Let us not leave in our wake a swath of destruction and death which will affect our own lives and those of future generations.<sup>10</sup>...

Small yet strong in the love of God, like St. Francis of Assisi, all of us, as Christians, are called to watch over and protect the fragile world in which we live, and all its peoples. ■

Selection from Pope Francis’s 2013 Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel), Nos. 58, 186-216. Reprinted with permission. For full text, visit [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

<sup>1</sup>Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio* 65.

<sup>2</sup>John Paul II, “Homily at Mass for the Evangelization of Peoples in Santo Domingo” (11 Oct. 1984), 5: AAS 77 (1985), 358.

<sup>3</sup>John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 42.

<sup>4</sup>“Address at the Inaugural Session of the Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops” (13 May 2007), 3: AAS 99 (2007), 450.

<sup>5</sup>Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* II-II.27.2.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, I-II.26.3.

<sup>7</sup>John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 50.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup>This implies a commitment to “eliminate the structural causes of global economic dysfunction,” Benedict XVI, *Address to the Diplomatic Corps* (8 Jan. 2007): AAS 99 (2007), 73.

<sup>10</sup>Cf. *Propositio* 56.

PHOTO CREDIT: Page 7: VATICAN-POPE-GUINEA by MAX ROSSI. © Getty Images.

# Poverty in the Old Testament

*Augustin George*

If we wish to arrive at an understanding of Jesus' thinking about poverty, we must begin by examining what poverty meant for the Old Testament, since this is where Jesus found both his vocabulary and the point of departure for his thought. The vocabulary and ideas of the Old Testament on poverty, however, are quite different from our own, the former arising from a totally different mentality and sociological context. Here we set ourselves the task of seeking to describe the Old Testament meaning of poverty.

...[The Old Testament] vocabulary expresses an understanding of poverty quite different from our own. For our modern languages, as already in Greek and Latin, poverty is the lack of goods; it is an economic idea. While Hebrew sometimes considers poverty a lack or a situation of begging, it views it primarily as a situation of dependence or weakness. In the biblical mind, the poor person is less one who is indigent and more one who is oppressed, an inferior or a lesser one. It is a social idea. This is why later, when the poor begin to spiritualize their condition, their ideal will not become detachment from the goods of this world but rather a voluntary and loving submission to the will of God.

## **BIBLICAL POVERTY IN ITS SOCIOLOGICAL CONTEXT**

From the time of Moses and down through the New Testament period, Israel always knew the poor, the small and humble; and shifting political situations and social structures profoundly marked its thinking on this topic.

While it is difficult for us to form a precise picture of Israel at the time of Moses, we can affirm that it was a time of collective poverty in the economic sense of the term....

In Israel's life, then, poverty was a constant and painful fact, manifesting itself especially in its consequences: dependence, humiliation, and oppression. We must now study what Israel thought of this poverty.

The Old Testament texts on this subject cover a wide range of differing evaluations that we can classify systematically under four headings:

- A. Appreciation of profane wisdom
- B. Religious judgment on poverty: It is a punishment
- C. Religious judgment on poverty: It is a scandal, a breach of covenant
- D. Different approaches to the religious acceptance of poverty

## **A. APPRECIATION OF PROFANE WISDOM**

Israel's wisdom writings, which willingly pick up the thought of older, pagan wisdom, often give us the judgments of human wisdom on poverty. It is attributed to laziness (Prov. 6:6-11, 10:4, 20:4, 13, 24:30-34), to idle talk (Prov. 14:23), to idle pursuits (Prov. 28:19; cf. 12:11), to the seeking of pleasure (Prov. 21:17, 23:20-21; Sir. 18:32-19:2). What we see here are observations based on everyday human experience, which could be verified even today. Their value consists in exhorting us to work and to take life seriously.

But these observations do not apply to every case, nor do they resolve all the problems presented by riches and poverty. Israel sensed this from its very beginnings, and so always sought to view poverty in relation to the justice and grace of its God.

## **B. RELIGIOUS JUDGMENT ON POVERTY: IT IS A PUNISHMENT**

The first reaction of the religious person of antiquity in the face of poverty was to interpret it within the schema of temporal retribution: poverty is an evil, therefore it is a

punishment. This evaluation, appearing in all the ancient religions, can be found throughout the history of Israel.

This goes hand in hand with the view, also found through the Old Testament, that regards riches as a divine blessing. The ancient stories recount with admiration the prosperity of God's friends. These views contain some valid elements: a sense of the values of this world, for example, or—especially—a deep faith in the justice of God. Their weakness lies in considering the justice of God only within the tight framework of temporal retribution. They were without the knowledge of the transcendent destiny that God grants to his own.

It is to the credit of both pagan and biblical wisdom that they felt the insufficiency of this solution and realized that, in some way, poverty was also a scandal.

### C. THE SCANDAL OF POVERTY

Despite this classical theory of retribution, it is very surprising that the sages, first pagan and then Israelite, saw poverty rather often as something abnormal. This is surely because the observation of experience quickly showed that the poor person is not always a sinner, nor is the rich person always just (cf. Mic. 6:12; Job 21:7-12; Ps. 73:1-14; Prov. 16:8, 19, 19:1, 22, 28:6; Sir. 13:17-20). It is precisely because poverty appeared as something abnormal that a believer, standing before God, sought to relieve it: (1) those who surrounded the poor person, by charitable assistance, and (2) the poor person by recourse to God in prayer.

1. *The duty of giving assistance to the poor, the widow, and the orphan* appears from most ancient times—in Mesopotamia and Egypt as well. Above all, it is the duty of the king; he, above all, has both the sovereign initiative and power. Many texts show that the poor, the feeble, and widows and orphans were especially protected favorites of the king.

In Israel, even before the rise of the monarchy, the obligation of helping the poor is formulated in the Covenant Code. This deals with the defense of the slave (Exod. 21:1-11, 21, 26-27), the widow and orphan (22:20-23), the destitute who borrows (22:24), the beggar with a lawsuit or during the sabbatical year (23:6, 11). While these commandments were inspired by earlier Middle Eastern legislation and wisdom, the Mosaic covenant gave them a new meaning, the inferior condition of the poor and the humble was felt to be a breach in the solidarity and unity of the people of God. And the covenant Lord has a special concern for the “disinherited” members of his people....

2. Face to face with the scandal of poverty, the poor person expected help from those in his community, but, above all, *he addressed himself to God in prayer*. The prayers of the poor are numerous in the Old Testament—that of the humble Hannah (1 Sam. 1:9-20), for example—but it is especially in the Psalter that the greatest number of these prayers are gathered together. The question of just who these “poor” are has often been discussed, and often they are said to be “the spiritually poor.” While the nature of the

psalms as prayer naturally moved the poor to “spiritualize” their condition (we will return to this below), it is also clear that the psalms of the poor were, for the most part, composed by the unfortunate, the humbled, the oppressed; and the “spiritualization” of the texts seems especially to be the work of those who reused them in a private or liturgical “rereading.”

### D. DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO THE RELIGIOUS ACCEPTANCE OF POVERTY

This is a delicate subject. While the “spiritual poverty” of the *anawim* is often discussed, the expression is rather equivocal. If we understand the expression to mean that the poor of the Old Testament arrived at a mystique of renouncing temporal goods, we must admit that this kind of detachment simply does not exist in the Old Testament. This is the new contribution of Jesus. Until he came, poverty, in any meaning of the term, was considered an evil: we must fight against it by communal assistance; we ask God unceasingly to deliver us from it; at best, we can consider it a test to educate us (Ps. Sol. 16: 13-14); we always hope to be saved from it, and this salvation was conceived only in terms of this world, with its temporal values.

The painful experience of poverty, however, often led the poor to accept their present condition with trust in the God who loves the disinherited and will save them. In this sense, we can speak of a “spiritual poverty” in the Old Testament, a submission to the mysterious will of God (cf. Job), an acceptance of the condition of being “small” because God loves the poor. This is not yet evangelical poverty, with its devaluation of terrestrial goods and its radical detachment. But it points in that direction.

### CONCLUSION

We have found in the Old Testament a keen sense of the suffering that poverty brings and different strong reactions to this evil. Human wisdom sees in it the consequences of laziness or disorder; faith sees in it, each in turn, a divine punishment, a scandal, a call to discover certain religious values.

These different points of view coexist throughout the Old Testament. They continue to exist today among many Christians. This should not surprise us. Throughout the ages, poverty is one of the forms of the mystery of evil. It is not the kind of intellectual problem that can be solved in theory, once and for all, but a mysterious reality that each one must face in faith, an experience in that each one is personally engaged before God. ■

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# HEIRS *to the* KINGDOM

The Poor in the  
New Testament

*PHEME PERKINS*



In Matthew's Gospel, two familiar sayings about the poor serve as bookends to Jesus' public ministry. The Sermon on the Mount opens "blessed are the poor in spirit, the Kingdom of heaven is theirs" (Matt. 5:3). As his public ministry concludes, Jesus is dining in the house of Simon, the leper, when an anonymous woman anoints his head with costly ointment (Matt. 26:6-13). Jesus rebukes his disciples who protest that it could have been sold and the money given to the poor with words that recall Deut. 15:11, "...she has done a good deed for me, *for you always have the poor with you*, but you do not always have me." These key passages pose questions that bedevil any discussion of the poor in the New Testament. Insofar as New Testament writings insist on the ethical continuity between early Christian groups and their Jewish Scriptures, the social and legal understanding of how God's covenant people will treat the poor in their midst remains in force. Insofar as the figure of Jesus, not Torah observance, is the focal point of Christian piety, exemplary stories either about Jesus or told by him (parables) define how disciples should relate to the poor.

Who are the poor? The Greek word used in the New Testament refers to those who are in economic distress, the poor, the needy, the beggar, or otherwise dependent upon others. But as a Greek translation of various Hebrew terms in the Jewish Scriptures, the word extends from economic destitution to those in need of God's help (Ps. 82:3-4). That divine intervention to bring their distress to an end is announced as the "kingdom" or "reign" of God. Matthew's "poor *in spirit*" underlines this religious dimension without negating the economic meaning of the word.

Another Old Testament passage, which Jesus selects to introduce his ministry in Luke 4:17-19, is Isa. 61:1-2. That text opens with preaching good news to the poor and includes healing those humbled in heart, and consoling those mourning, in addition to announcing freedom to prisoners, giving sight to the blind, and declaring the acceptable time (for debt relief) of the Lord. The initial group of beatitudes in Matt. 5:3-6 treats the sufferings of the poor, mourning, humble, hungering and thirsting for justice (righteousness) as reversed with the coming of God's Kingdom.

Over the past 25 years scholars have engaged in a lively debate over the question of the economic situation of believers in Jesus in Galilee as well as those comprising the urban house churches of the Pauline mission. Attempts to extrapolate from disparate and sparse archaeological and demographic data to produce a pattern of economic security and distress in urban communities have been more speculative than conclusive.

Neither the Jesus followers in Galilee nor the urban house churches of the Pauline mission had patrons from the wealthy 2 percent of the aristocratic and governing elite. The majority probably belonged to those small farmers and urban tradesmen who were "poor" in the sense that

their only reserves against a disaster were the social credit provided by family, trade associations in some cases, and the local community of friends and neighbors (1 Cor. 1:26-28). The destitute represented by street beggars, desperate day laborers, widows without family, and the like constituted the bottom category in a poverty scale.

The New Testament views the rich, the top 2 to 5 percent of the scale, from the distance of those who ordinarily deal with such persons only through their various agents (for example, the unjust estate manager of Luke 16:1-8). Greedy and conspicuous consumption of wealth is excoriated (Luke 6:24-25; Jas. 5:1-6) because such persons do not employ the riches God provides to benefit those around them, as the Torah requires (see the parables of the rich fool, Luke 12:16-21, and rich man and Lazarus, Luke 16:19-31).

Neither Jesus nor Paul has a socioeconomic project for taking apart the structures of society in order to "...bring down the powerful ... lift up the lowly; ...fill the hungry with good things, and send the rich away empty..." (Luke 1:52-53). Only the final realization of God's reign at the end of days will accomplish that. No "war on poverty" is being declared in the Beatitudes. The moral imperative for God's people is to treat the poor, the disadvantaged, the resident alien, and the enslaved in their midst with justice because the God of Israel is the patron of such persons. This is both upheld and reinforced in the New Testament. It even creates new patterns of obligation, not common in the ancient world, when believers are asked to reach out to the "brothers and sisters" who are not part of their local community. Jesus imagines the "enemy" Samaritan as a better example of the Torah's love of neighbor to a Jewish victim than the priest and Levite who pass by (Luke 10:29-37). Paul asks Gentile believers from churches in Greece to provide material support for the poor Jewish Christians in Jerusalem by appealing to the example of Jesus as one who had renounced his own status in order to become poor (2 Cor. 8:9). Not only are the poor "always with you" as the neighbor in need, they are with us as those suffering poverty anywhere.

A dramatic example of this expanded concern to alleviate the suffering of any person, regardless of whether or not the individual is part of our social network, occurs in the final parable in Matthew's Gospel, the judgment separation of the sheep and the goats (Matt. 25:31-46). The only criterion for inclusion among those "blessed by my Father, to *inherit the Kingdom* prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (v. 34) is that those blessed provided food for the hungry, drink for the thirsty, welcome for the stranger, clothing for the naked, and visits (equal assistance) to the sick and imprisoned. The mini-dialogue between Jesus, the judge, and the righteous and wicked respectively provides a fourfold repetition of the list. Like a musical refrain it should be etched in the memory of Matthew's audience. Commenting on this passage the great fifth-century preacher St. John Chrysostom pointed out to the

congregation that Jesus did not ask them to work miracles and cure the sick or even to liberate prisoners, only to care for them. Surely an easy enough obligation (*Homily on Matt.* 79.1). But as long as God's Kingdom has not "come on earth as it is in heaven," (Matt. 6:10) these works of mercy remain daily chores in the household of faith.

The New Testament also provides examples in which even the requirements of charity toward the poor within the small house church communities were ignored. The Jewish Christian traditions preserved in the Epistle of James include "visiting the orphans and widows in their affliction" (1:27) in its definition of true religion. The term "visit" translates a Hebrew root that also means "watch over." It implies providing such persons with all possible loving protection and care. Only a few verses on, James denounces lapses in the community. The first involves partiality toward a rich person over the poor one in the assembly itself (2:1-13). "God has chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and *heirs to the Kingdom*, but you have dishonored the poor," (vv. 5-6). This condemnation echoes Matt. 5:3 and 25:34 as well as two passages from Proverbs in the Greek translation that was used by early Christians (Prov. 14:21, "one who dishonors the needy sins"). Some scholars think the situation in James involved a setting in which the community was to render judgment in a dispute rather than worship. Prov. 22:22, "do no violence to the needy for he is poor and do not dishonor the weak in the gates" concerns the legal standing of the poor. Then while challenging a misplaced Pauline slogan privileging faith over works, James insists that faith without the actual works of care for the poor is dead (2:15-26; also see 1 John 3:17). "If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,' and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what good is that? So faith without works is dead" (vv. 15-17).

When Jesus says, "do not think I have come to abolish the law or the prophets...until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter will pass from the law..." in Matt. 5:17-18, he could have been referring to these works of mercy toward the poor. The poor certainly hunger and thirst to experience justice. But the eschatological "until heaven and earth pass away" also demands those virtues of endurance and hope. The poor are people, not a problem or project to be solved. Or as Jesus put it, "the least of these, my brothers." ■

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# A DIFFICULT Text

For You Always Have the Poor with You

*Bruce C. Birch and Larry Rasmussen*

**M**atthew 26:6-13 (see also Mark 14:3-9; John 12:1-8) tells of an incident in which a woman approaches Jesus and pours a jar of expensive ointment on his head. The disciples are scandalized by such waste and complain that money for the ointment could better have been given to the poor. Jesus intervenes by saying, “Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me.

For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me.” He goes on to treat the anointing as a foreshadowing of his preparation for burial.

Jesus’ statement, “For you always have the poor with you,” has been a constant nemesis to those in the Church who have tried to arouse the conscience of Christians to the harsh realities of poverty in our society and elsewhere in the world. Those who

have defined the Gospel solely in terms of individual and “internal” salvation use this text to justify a total lack of concern for the victims of poverty and the establishment of a just social order. They maintain that this text proclaims the futility of seeking to relieve the condition of the poor and focuses attention instead on the person of Jesus. To them this means the elevation of spiritual needs over material needs.

Indeed, if our exegesis is limited narrowly to this text we might well come to this point of view. Jesus *does* rebuke the disciples in their desire to give to the poor. He *does* turn attention to his own person. But does Jesus intend that we should not be concerned with the material needs of those who suffer? Is attention to Jesus' own person a turning to "spiritual" matters? When we move to a wider canonical context, our understanding of this passage begins to alter.

The first move is naturally to the wider description of Jesus' ministry in the Gospels. From the very beginning Jesus identified his ministry with the poor and the oppressed. In Luke 4:16-19, at the inauguration of his public ministry, Jesus preaches at Nazareth and chooses as his text Isa. 61:1-2:

*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.*

Jesus associated himself with the poor and with society's outcasts and was criticized for it (Matt. 11:19; Luke 7:34). In his preaching, Jesus spoke with concern for the poor and indicated that they were especially blessed by God (Luke 6:20-21). Perhaps most striking is the passage on the great judgment in Matt. 25:31-46:

*I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.*

Jesus makes clear that his very person is identified with the poor and the needy to the extent that acceptance of him is equated with

ministering to their needs. "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Matt. 25:40).

In light of the strong witness elsewhere in the Gospels to Jesus' concern with the material needs of the poor, we surely cannot understand Jesus' statement in Matt. 26: 11 to be a repudiation of his own ministry. Jesus is focusing attention in this passage on his own passion, but would not be urging that we ignore the needs of the poor and needy.

Moving more widely in the canon we find in Deut. 15:7-11 a text with a statement so similar to that of Jesus that it raises the probability that Jesus is directly referring to it. This passage is a part of the law, the Torah, which was central to the faith of Jesus and the Jews of his time. The passage is making clear that concern for the poor is obligatory in the community of faith.

*There will be no poor among you...if only you will obey the voice of the Lord your God.... If there is among you a poor man, one of your brethren, in any of your towns within your land which the Lord your God gives you, you shall not barden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother; but you shall open your hand to him and lend him sufficient for his need....You shall give to him freely, and your heart shall not be grudging....For the poor will never cease out of the land; therefore, I command you, You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor....*

This passage suggests that if the demands of the covenant were fully embodied there would be no poverty, but since Israel, like all human communities, is a "stiff-necked people," some of its inhabitants will inevitably be poor. Therefore, God's people are commanded to care for

them. This task is part of what it means to be the people of God; it is not an optional activity.

This greatly alters our consideration of Matt. 26:6-13. Jesus is responding not to the disciples' desire to give to the poor, but to their rebuke of the woman. He is reminding them that the existence of the poor is a constant judgment against the whole covenant community. The woman is not to be self-righteously singled out; the poor are a corporate responsibility. By calling attention to the constant presence of the poor Jesus is not urging us to forget their needs. He is directly referring to God's command that we care for the poor, and their constant presence is an indictment pointing to our failure as the covenant community. It is because they are always present that we do have a responsibility. Jesus then goes on to use the woman's gift to focus attention on his own passion, his own ultimate involvement in human suffering.


A wider canonical context completely alters our view of this passage. If we had searched more broadly we would have found even more texts relating the people of God to the welfare of the poor (the prophets, Paul). Far from allowing anyone to narrowly interpret Matt. 26:6-13 as elevating spiritual over material needs, an exegesis in the context of the whole Scripture overwhelms us with the power of the moral imperative regarding the poor and needy. ■

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# A Sermon on Lazarus and the Rich Man

*St. John Chrysostom*

Let us learn from this man not to call the rich lucky nor the poor unfortunate. Rather, if we are to tell the truth, the rich man is not the one who has collected many possessions but the one who needs few possessions; and the poor man is not the one who has no possessions but the one who has many desires. We ought to consider this the definition of poverty and wealth. So if you see someone greedy for many things, you should consider him the poorest of all, even if he has acquired everyone's money. If, on the other hand, you see someone with few needs, you should count him the richest of all, even if he has acquired nothing. For we are accustomed to judge poverty and affluence by the disposition of the mind, not by the measure of one's substance.

Just as we would not call a person healthy who was always thirsty, even if he enjoyed abundance, even if he lived by rivers and springs (for what use is that luxuriance of water, when the thirst remains unquenchable?), let us do the same in the case of wealthy people: let us never consider those people healthy who are always yearning and thirsting after other people's property; let us not think that they enjoy any abundance. For if one cannot control his own greed, even if he has appropriated everyone's property, how can he ever be affluent? But those who are satisfied

with what they have, and pleased with their own possessions, and do not have their eyes on the substance of others, even if they are the poorest of all, should be considered the richest of all. For whoever has no need of others'



property but is happy to be self-sufficient is the most affluent of all....

Are you listening to this in silence? I am much happier at your silence than at applause; for applause and praise make me more famous, but this silence makes you more virtuous. I know that what I say is painful, but I cannot tell you how great a benefit it contains. If that rich man had had someone to give him this kind of advice, instead of flatterers who always suggested what he wanted to hear, and who dragged him into luxurious living, he would not have fallen into that hell, nor undergone the unendurable torments, nor repented too late for consolation; but since they all made conversation for his pleasure, they handed him over to the fire....

While we are here, we have good hopes; when we depart to that place, we have no longer the option of repentance, nor of washing away our misdeeds. For this reason we must continually make ourselves ready for our departure from here. What if the Lord wishes to call us this evening? Or tomorrow? The future is unknown, to keep us always active in the struggle and prepared for that removal, just as this Lazarus was patient in endurance. For this reason he was led away with such great honor. The rich man also died and was buried, just as his soul had lain buried in his body like a tomb, and had been wearing the flesh like a grave. For by shackling the flesh with drunkenness and gluttony as if with chains, he had made it useless and dead.

Do not simply pass over that phrase “he was buried,” beloved: by it you should understand that the silver-inlaid tables, couches, rugs, tapestries, all other kinds of furnishings, sweet oils, perfumes, large quantities of undiluted wine, great varieties of food, rich dishes, cooks, flatterers, bodyguards, household servants, and all the rest of his ostentation have been quenched and withered up. Now everything is ashes, all is dust and ashes, dirges and mourning, as no one is able to help any more, nor to bring back the soul which

has departed. Then the power of gold is tested, and of all superfluous wealth. From such a crowd of attendants he was led away naked and alone, since he could not take anything with him out of such abundance; but he was led away without any companion or guide. None of those who had attended him, none of those who had assisted him was able to save him from the punishment and retribution; but removed from all those followers, he was taken away alone to endure the unbearable retribution.

Truly, “All flesh is as the grass, and all the glory of mankind is as the flower of grass. The grass has withered, and its flower has faded; but the word of the Lord remains forever.” Death came and quenched all those luxuries; it took him like a captive and led him, hanging his head low, groaning with shame, unable to speak, trembling, afraid, as if he had enjoyed all that luxury in a dream.

Finally the rich man became a suppliant to the poor man and begged from the table of this man who earlier had gone hungry and been exposed to the mouths of dogs. The situation was reversed, and everyone learned who was really the rich man and was really the poor man, and that Lazarus was the most affluent of all but the other was the poorest of all. For just as on the stage actors enter with the masks of kings, generals, doctors, teachers, professors, and soldiers, without themselves being anything of the sort, so in the present life poverty and wealth are only masks. If you are sitting in the theater and see one of the actors wearing the mask of a king, you do not call him fortunate or think that he is a king, nor would you wish to become what he is; but since you know that he is some tradesman, perhaps a rope-maker or a coppersmith or something of the sort, you do not call him fortunate because of his mask and his costume, nor do you judge his social class by them, but reject this evidence because of the cheapness of his other garb. In the same way even here, sitting in this world as if in a theatre and looking at the players on the stage, when you see many rich people, do not think that

they are truly rich, but that they are wearing the masks of rich people. Just as that man who acts the part of king or general on the stage often turns out to be a household servant or somebody who sells figs or grapes in the market, so also the rich man often turns out to be the poorest of all. If you take off his mask, open up his conscience, and enter into his mind, you will often find there a great poverty of virtue: you will find that he belongs to the lowest class of all.

Just as in the theater, when evening falls and the audience departs, and the kings and generals go outside to remove the costumes of their roles, they are revealed to everyone thereafter appearing to be exactly what they are; so also now when death arrives and the theater is dissolved, everyone puts off the masks of wealth or poverty and departs to the other world. When all are judged by their deeds alone, some are revealed truly wealthy, others poor, some of high class, others of no account.

Often indeed one of those who are rich in this life turns out to be the poorest of all in the other life, even like this rich man. For when the evening took him, that is to say death, and he departed from the theater of the present life, and put aside his mask he was revealed as the poorest of all in that other world; so poor indeed that he was not master even of a drop of water, but had to beg for this and did not even obtain it by begging. What could be poorer than this poverty? ■

ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM (c.347-407), early Church father and doctor of the Church, was known as a great preacher. He served as the Archbishop of Constantinople from 398-407.

From *On Wealth and Poverty*, trans. Catharine P. Roth (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984), 40-41, 44, 45-47. Reprinted with permission.

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# GOD BECOMES HUMAN

*Johannes Baptist Metz*

*Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And he fasted 40 days and 40 nights, and afterward he was hungry. And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." But he answered, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'" (Deut. 8:3).*

Let us overlook the external process involved in these temptations, let us try to focus on their underlying intention, on the basic strategy at work. We can then say that the three temptations represent three assaults on the "poverty" of Jesus, on the self-renunciation through which he chose to redeem us. They represent an assault on the radical and uncompromising step he has taken: to come down from God and become human.

To become human means to become "poor," to have nothing that one might brag about before God... With the courageous acceptance of such poverty, the divine epic of our salvation began. Jesus held back nothing; he clung to nothing, and nothing served as a shield for him. Even his true origin did not shield him: "He...did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself" (Phil. 2:6).

Satan, however, tries to obstruct this self-renunciation, this thoroughgoing poverty. He wants to make Jesus

strong, for what he really fears is the powerlessness of God in the humanity he has assumed. He fears the trojan horse of an open human heart that will remain true to its native poverty, suffer the misery and abandonment that is ours, and thus save humankind. Satan's temptation is an assault on God's self-renunciation, an enticement to strength, security, and spiritual abundance; for these things will obstruct God's saving approach to humanity...(As a matter of fact, Satan always tries to stress the spiritual strength of humanity and our divine character. He has done this from the beginning. "You will be like God": that is Satan's slogan. It is *the* temptation he has set before us in countless variations, urging us to reject the truth about the humanity we have been given.)

...Satan wants God to remain simply God. Satan wants the Incarnation to be an empty show, where God dresses up in human costume but doesn't really commit the divine self to this role. Satan wants to make the Incarnation a piece of mythology, a divine puppet

show. That is the strategy for making sure that the earth remains exclusively his, and humanity, too...

"You're hungry," he tells Jesus. "You need be hungry no longer. You can change all that with a miracle. You stand trembling on a pinnacle, overlooking a dark abyss. You need no longer put up with this frightening experience, this dangerous plight; you can command the angels to protect you from falling..." Satan's temptation calls upon Jesus to remain strong like God, to stand within a protecting circle of angels, to hang on to his divinity (Phil. 2:6). He urges Jesus not to plunge into the loneliness and futility that is a real part of human existence...

Thus the temptation in the desert would have Jesus betray humanity in the name of God (or, diabolically, God in the name of humankind). Jesus' "no" to Satan is his yes to our poverty. He did not cling to his divinity. He did not simply dip into our existence, wave the magic wand of divine life over us, and then hurriedly retreat to his eternal home. He did not leave us with a tattered dream, letting us brood over the mystery of our existence.

Instead, Jesus subjected himself to our plight. He immersed himself in our misery and followed humanity's road to the end. He did not escape from the torment of our life, nobly repudiating humankind. With the full weight of his divinity he descended into the abyss of human existence, penetrating its darkest depths. He was not spared from the dark mystery of our poverty as human beings...

In the poverty of his passion, he had no consolation, no companion angels, no guiding star, no Father in heaven. All he had was his own lonely heart, bravely facing its ordeal even as far as the cross (Phil. 2:8). Have we really understood the impoverishment that Christ endured? Everything was

*Then the devil took him to the holy city, and set him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, 'He will give his angels charge of you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone'" (Ps. 90:11-12).*

*Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God'" (Deut. 6:16).*

*Again the devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Then Jesus said to him, "Begone, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve'" (Deut. 6:13).*

*Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and ministered to him (Matt. 4:1-11).*



taken from him during the passion, even the love that drove him to the cross.... His heart gave out and a feeling of utter helplessness came over him. Truly, he emptied himself (Phil. 2:7). God's merciful hand no longer sustained him. His countenance was hidden during the passion, and Christ gaped into the darkness of nothingness and abandonment where God was no longer present...

In this total renunciation, however, Jesus perfected and proclaimed in action what took place in the depths of his being: he professed and accepted our humanity, he took on and endured our lot, he stepped down from his divinity. He came to us where we really are—with all our broken dreams and lost hopes, with the meaning of existence slipping through our fingers. He came and stood with us, struggling

with his whole heart to have us say "yes" to our innate poverty.

God's fidelity to humanity is what gives humans the courage to be true to themselves. And the legacy of his total commitment to humankind, the proof of his fidelity to our poverty, is the cross. The cross is the sacrament of poverty of spirit, the sacrament of authentic humanness in a sinful world. It is the sign that one person remained true to his humanity, that he accepted it in full obedience.

Hanging in utter weakness on the cross, Christ revealed the divine meaning of our Being. It said something for the Jews and pagans that they found the cross scandalous and foolish (1 Cor. 1:23). . . And what is it to us? Well, no one is exempted from the poverty of the cross; there is no guarantee against its intrusion....

Perhaps that is why Jesus related the parable of the wheat grain. Finding in it a lesson for himself, he passed it on to his Church, so that she might remember it down through the ages, especially when the poverty intrinsic to human existence became repugnant: "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12:24). ■

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The proper understanding and prudent practice of religious poverty has probably never been easy in any age. It is of the very nature of religious poverty, because it has to do with material goods with which we cannot dispense absolutely and whose value is always relative to cultural situations, that it is always a provisional arrangement that has to be constantly reevaluated and readjusted.

Our own times are characterized by conditions that make the understanding and prudent practice of poverty even more difficult than in times past. The major difference between our own age and any previous one, in relation to poverty, is our global interdependence at the economic level and our awareness of it.

First, we are aware of the immense variety in standards of living throughout the world and even in our own country. No matter how simple a lifestyle we adopt we cannot escape awareness that it is luxurious by comparison with that of many of our sisters and brothers...

Second, we are aware of the immensity of the problem of poverty, which makes individual acts of sharing and hospitality seem almost pointless...

Third, and following from the last point, we realize that the only way to affect the economic situation in which we live is to act collectively upon institutions. Poverty, the evil that is eating up our brothers and sisters in so many places in the world, is not natural disaster, nor merely the result of individual selfish choices. It is a systemic evil that must be dealt with systematically; it is institutional sin that must be dealt with institutionally. Whatever poverty means today, it has to take account of these realities.

## THE TWO FOCI OF RELIGIOUS POVERTY TODAY

Religious poverty has two foci for the contemporary religious and calls for two rather distinct, though not unrelated, types of practice. The first focus is the societal one and has to do with our individual and corporate impact on the institutional sins that are making and keeping poor the majority of the earth's people while the minority becomes progressively richer. The second focus is the personal spiritual one that has to do with our own ascetical preparation for and interior exercise of that openness to God in grateful receptivity to salvation that is the sine qua non of genuine holiness.

*The Societal Focus.* Religious poverty is the way religious situate themselves in relationship to material goods, and since material goods are foundational to our relationship with other people, religious poverty is necessarily a social virtue.... It seems to me, and to many religious, that the first objective of religious poverty today has to be contributing to the restructuring of the economic situation on a worldwide scale. This seems especially so for apostolic religious for whom the call to participate actively in the transformation of the world in Christ is so integral to their religious vocation.

There are innumerable ways in which religious can begin to exercise their vow of poverty in relation to the economic

# A VOW of POVERTY

Sandra M. Schneider, IHM

and environmental situation of our time.... The energetic exercise of *personal civic responsibilities* such as voting, writing to congresspeople, protesting local injustices, supporting nonviolent efforts to influence corporate powers, attending meetings where our presence can help is a way to help bring about the kind of society in which the poor will begin to attain justice.

Proper *corporate planning for the care of our own personnel* is another unglamorous but important contribution to the future well-being of our society. As a society we are getting older. We can plan for a future in which the elderly will have secure, meaningful, and productive lives or we can ignore the demographic data available to us and let develop a world of underemployed, unfulfilled people dragging out meaningless existences in a world that does not want them.

Another important area of personal and corporate decision making concerns the appropriate and effective *commitment of some of our personnel and resources to direct work with the materially disadvantaged*. For some of us it will be the decision to undertake that work ourselves; for others the decision to support those who do in one way or another.

*Direct involvement in political ministry* ... is a particularly powerful way to influence the distribution of money and services to the poor.

This certainly does not exhaust the possibilities of active involvement in the restructuring of our world in justice and love. These are meant only to suggest that the vow of poverty today calls upon us to do for our time what our forebears did in simpler and more direct ways for theirs.

*The Personal Focus.* It is perhaps time to revive our awareness of the intimately personal character of the practice of poverty that must complement societal involvement... Without even hoping to exhaust the possibilities I would like to point out, by way of example, a few areas in which the incorporation of poverty into our personal lives might be meaningful and spiritually fruitful for us as 20th-century religious.

The first area is one most serious religious have been bewitched, bothered, and bewildered by for several years: *simplicity of life*.... Voluntary simplicity of lifestyle says that

enough is enough, that material goods should be acquired only to the extent that they are really necessary and not as a frantic defense against mortality or an endless competition with one's neighbors.

But simplicity of life also fulfills an important function in the spiritual life of the individual.... If we want to pray, to be available for God and others, to keep our lives focused on the purposes for which we chose religious life, we cannot surrender ourselves to the current of materialism that carries our culture.

A second area in which poverty might touch our personal lives has to do less with behavior than with attitude. I am speaking of the deliberate development of the *sense of gift in life*. We live in a culture of achievement and production that believes that people should and do get what they deserve. As Christians we know that this is not so. The infinite bounty of God begins with the gift of life itself and continues with everything that sustains it. Our activity is not so much an earning our way as a cooperating with the Creator God in transforming history into God's reign of justice and love.

Building this attitude of grateful response into our lives requires a constant cultivation of faith against the seemingly self-evident "way things are" around us.... The capacity for enjoyment, for the sharing of simple pleasures, for delight in uncontrived beauty has to be developed in our artificial and overstimulated environment.

A third area in which the personal practice of poverty might be developed today is one that was not available to many religious in more enclosed times: *hospitality*. To welcome others into our homes and into our lives is naturally easier perhaps for extroverted types, but it is a challenge for everyone because it involves putting ourselves at others' disposal.

Another area of personal poverty, one that seems to me more and more significant, has to do with one of the most painful aspects of real poverty, namely, the *lack of options*. The real differences between the truly poor and people who choose a poor lifestyle is precisely that the latter choose it, and they can unchoose it if things become too difficult. Even if they never do, the fact that they can assuage the violent determinism that constitutes real poverty....

There are many aspects of our lives in which we have choices that the poor do not have. But there are also areas in which we do not have choices. We cannot lengthen our day,

and if someone consumes time we had allotted for other purposes there is no reclaiming it. We cannot do anything about weather that keeps us from getting where we need to go. We cannot keep from getting the flu and losing a week of work at a critical juncture in an important project.... When our options evaporate we experience solidarity with the poor, not the conspicuous solidarity of chosen deprivations but the real solidarity of fellow-sufferers in a world we do not control and cannot change.

One of the many areas in which many of us probably experience our lack of options most painfully is precisely that of effective action for justice. We know that most of what we do, in a personal way, will not have much effect on the unjust social systems in which we live. Even worse, we also

know that we are constantly implicated in fostering the very systems that we have analyzed as unjust and exploitative.... The point is, in many areas we really have few or no options either for effective action against or for non-participation in structural injustice. Our frustration matches in some ways (certainly not all) the frustration of our



victimized brothers and sisters. What they cannot do for themselves we cannot do for them, and the more we care the more this hurts. The name of that hurting is compassion and it is a fruit of genuine poverty.

## CONCLUSION

Let me conclude with a simple, tentative definition of religious poverty. Religious poverty is an evangelically inspired and structured relationship to material creation that involves owning well, using well, and suffering well for the purpose of transforming human existence, our own included. Its goal is a community in which all have the material supports necessary for truly human living whose fullest realization is that total openness to God that makes salvation possible and real. ■

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PHOTO CREDIT: Pages 18: Sister Helen Prejean at the Angolan State Penitentiary. © Brooks Kraft/Sygma/Corbis

# CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

## AN OPTION FOR THE POOR AND THE COMMON GOOD

“To desire the common good and strive towards it is a requirement of justice and charity... The more we strive to secure a common good corresponding to the real needs of our neighbors, the more effectively we love them. Every Christian is called to practice this charity, in a manner corresponding to his vocation and according to the degree of influence he wields in the [state] This is the institutional path—we might also call it the political path—of charity, no less excellent and effective than the kind of charity which encounters the neighbor directly...” (no. 7).

“Being out of work or dependent on public or private assistance for a prolonged period undermines the freedom and creativity of the person and his family and social relationships, causing great psychological and spiritual suffering. I would like to remind everyone, especially governments engaged in boosting the world’s economic and social assets, that the primary capital to be safeguarded and valued is man, the human person in his or her integrity...” (no. 25).

*Charity in Trust (Caritas in Veritate)*  
Pope Benedict XVI (2009)

“The Catholic way is to recognize the essential role and the complementary responsibilities of families, communities, the market, and government to work together to overcome poverty and advance human dignity” (p. 18).

*A Place at the Table:  
A Catholic Recommitment to  
Overcome Poverty and to Respect the  
Dignity of All of God’s Children*  
U.S. Catholic Bishops (2002)



“The principle of subsidiarity reminds us that larger institutions in society should not overwhelm or interfere with smaller or local institutions, yet larger institutions have essential responsibilities when the more local institutions cannot adequately protect human dignity, meet human needs, and advance the common good” (no. 48).

“While the common good embraces all, those who are weak, vulnerable, and most in need deserve preferential concern. A basic moral test for our society is how we treat the most vulnerable in our midst.” (no. 50).

*Forming Consciences  
for Faithful Citizenship*  
U.S. Catholic Bishops (2007)

“... the universal destination of goods requires that the poor, the marginalized and in all cases those whose living conditions interfere with their proper growth should be the focus of particular concern” (no. 182).

“Solidarity without subsidiarity, in fact, can easily degenerate into a ‘welfare state’, while subsidiarity without solidarity runs the risk of encouraging forms of self-centered localism. In order to respect both of these fundamental principles, the State’s intervention in the economic environment must be neither invasive nor absent, but commensurate with society’s real needs” (no. 351).

*The Compendium of the  
Social Doctrine of the Church*  
Pontifical Council for Justice and  
Peace (2005)

# C21 FALL EVENTS

**Facing the Invisible: The Role of the Marginalized in Ecclesial Reform**

*September 4, 2014 | Lecture*

Presenter: Natalia Imperatori-Lee, Associate Professor of Religious Studies, Manhattan College

Respondent: Thomas F. O'Meara, OP, Warren Professor of Theology Emeritus, University of Notre Dame

Location/Time: Gasson Hall, Room 100, 5:30 p.m.

Sponsors: Theology Department and C21 Center

**The Poor: What Did Jesus Preach? What Does the Church Teach?**

*September 23, 2014 | Lecture*

Presenter: Kenneth Himes, OFM, Associate Professor, Theology Department

Location / Time: Gasson Hall, Room 100, 5:30 p.m.

Sponsors: C21 Center, Theology Department, and School of Theology and Ministry (STM)

**Jesus: A Pilgrimage**

*September 25, 2014 | Lecture*

Presenter: James Martin, S.J., author and editor at large at *America Magazine*

Location/Time: Robsham Theatre, 6:30 p.m.

Sponsors: STM and C21 Center

**Dead Man Walking: A Conversation with Sr. Helen Prejean**

*October 9, 2014 | Movie and Conversation*

Presenter: Sr. Helen Prejean, CSJ, author, advocate, and prison minister

Location / Time: Robsham Theatre, 6:00-9:00 p.m.

Sponsors: C21 Center, STM, and Center for Human Rights and International Justice

**From Hollywood to Haiti: A Filmmaker's Journey with the Poor**

*October 21, 2014 | Film viewing and Commentary*

Presenter: Gerard T. Straub, Founder and President of Pax et Bonum Communications

Location / Time: Gasson Hall, Room 100, 7:00 – 9:00 pm

Sponsor: C21 Center and Center for Human Rights and International Justice

**"I Was a Stranger and You Welcomed Me": A Catholic Vision for Immigration Reform**

*October 27, 2014 | Episcopal Visitor Lecture*

Presenter: Most Rev. Thomas Wenski, Archbishop of Miami and Chairman of the USCCB Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development

Location / Time: Yawkey Center, Murray Function Room, 4:30 p.m.

Sponsors: C21 Center and Center for Human Rights and International Justice

**Is There a Future for Catholic Health and Social Services?**

*November 5, 2014 | Panel discussion*

Moderator: Alberto Godenzi, Dean, Graduate School of Social Work

Panelists:

- Michele Broemmelsiek, Vice President of Overseas Operations, Catholic Relief Services
- Fr. Larry Snyder, President, Catholic Charities USA
- Fr. J. Bryan Hehir, Secretary for Health and Social Services, Archdiocese of Boston

Location / Time: McGuinn Hall, Room 121, 7:00 p.m.

Sponsors: C21 Center, Graduate School of Social Work, and Boisi Center for Religion and American Public Life



Webcast videos will be available within two weeks following each event on [bc.edu/c21](http://bc.edu/c21)

**ABBREVIATIONS**

C21 Center: The Church in the 21st Century Center  
STM: BC School of Theology and Ministry

PHOTO CREDIT: Page 21: Mother Theresa holds a child during a visit to Poland in this undated image. © Tomasz Gzell/epa/Corbis

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**A NEW C21 RESOURCES WORKSHOP**

**A CHURCH OF AND FOR THE POOR**

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# Christian Families in Care for the Poor

Julie Hanton Rubio

Most American Christian families think of themselves as somewhere in the broad middle on the scale of financial wellness. They know that they are not poor, for they do not struggle to pay for basics like food, clothing, or housing and enjoy certain luxuries. Yet they are also keenly aware that they are not as rich as some people they know, see, or read about, who drive fancy new cars or go on extravagant vacations. Like most Americans, they prefer to think of themselves as middle class. Yet the majority of American families have incomes that place them among the most privileged people in the world. ...

Most of these families give some of their income away.... One can then estimate 'that approximately 3 percent of the income of Christian families is given to churches, the less fortunate, schools, health care, the arts, and to those working for political change. Of this charitable giving, only about one-third goes to serve the needs of the poor.

Is it enough? Anyone who has pondered Jesus' sayings about wealth and has seen the suffering of the poor would probably answer no, but determining what would be enough remains a difficult task.... I argue that the practice of tithing is an appropriate response for most Christian families seeking to balance care of their own with biblical and traditional understandings of responsibility for the poor....

A contemporary tithe would seek new ways to make concrete Christian obligations to aid the less fortunate and support one's local church. Thus, a more nuanced and flexible notion of tithing is needed.... Even given

necessary flexibility, the concept of a percentage remains helpful.... A percentage challenges families to make tithing a regular part of their budget, like a car payment or a 401K plan, and it ensures that their giving will increase as their income grows....

Christianity, which has included people of means from the earliest days of its existence, does not seem to require radical renunciation. It does, however, challenge everyone to question contemporary living standards, support the Church, and come to the aid of the poor. It seems that 10 percent is a reasonable level of sacrifice, given the abundance most in our society enjoy and the manifold needs of the poor around the globe, though the wealthiest of families should be encouraged to give even more.

Why, then, do more families not tithe already? The difficulties of tithing in a consumerist society are considerable. One need not be unduly or uniformly gloomy about contemporary society to see the problem. A market economy is committed to growth and needs increasing consumption to thrive. Buying and having more seem unquestionable individual and social goods. In such a system, personal and social temperance is dismantled, so it becomes almost impossible to feel as though one has enough. So when families are asked in Catholic social teaching to give out of their excess, most feel they have little to give....

Tithing is a practice with the power to check consumer culture. Certainly, it does not require embracing voluntary poverty and rejecting all unnecessary goods. However, for most families,

giving 10 percent or more of their income will mean reversing "reference group upscaling" by living more simply than those around them.... Giving 10 percent or more does not require radical change, but it does require making small sacrifices....

The choice of Christian families to practice resistance to poverty and overconsumption by tithing could have an enormous impact on the world. The problems of poverty are immensely complicated, and tithing alone cannot solve them. Nonetheless, it is a key part of a Christian ethic that recognizes abundance as a gift to be shared, links belief in Christ with attention to the least, and sees the potential of everyday practices to transform believers and the sinful social structures that inevitably distort that delight in the goods of creation that God enjoins upon all creatures.

Very few Catholic parents are in need of something more to do.... For the most part, middle-class American Catholics are hardworking, family centered, and devoted to the common good of their communities. They are engaged in plenty of service—to their children, their parents, and their parishes, as well as their children's schools, teams, and extracurricular groups.... Their gift of self to the persons they love is made concrete in hours at work to support their households and in the hundreds of small tasks, from laundry to coaching to carpooling, that fill their days. Though they have a great many more things than most people in the world, I would hesitate to say that they have lives consumed with having rather





than being. The strongly negative characterizations of the literature on consumerism seem a poor fit.

And yet one can hear in the conversations of middle-class adults a certain dissatisfaction with this way of life, a yearning for a slower pace, deeper friendships, and more time to simply be with their spouses and their children. They are conscious of their relative privilege and of the waste of resources that middle-class life entails. They know their children do not really need more things and more activities. They wish they had more time to do something for the poor. They would like to spend more time in prayer or meditation. There is a certain emptiness that is evident amid the “fullness” of middle-class American suburban life, a suspicion that busyness does not allow us to live below the surface, a sense that this life is less than it ought to be. People are generally satisfied with their families and communities, but they know at some level that there is something missing.

This emptiness in busyness is, I argue, paradoxically connected to low expectations for marriage. Middle-class families expect suburban comfort, friendly local communities, and loving families, but the modern Catholic vision for marriage and family developed by John Paul II asks for much more than what most families would dare to imagine.... He gives families a mission to serve society, working to transform its unjust structures and soften its hard edges with works of charity, mercy, and hospitality.... This vision of John Paul II is lofty and inspiring. But given the heavy load most married people are

carrying in trying to achieve a middle-class vision of happiness, it seems all but impossible.

However, I have suggested thus far that the work to which the pope calls families, the very work that seems as if it would burden families is in reality the work of communion and solidarity that will fulfill them....

Service to the poor is important not just because it is commanded but because it is needed. When people close to our homes are hungry, suffering from violence, without shelter, or in need of jobs, of all the things we choose to do on a free evening or Saturday afternoon, service should have priority....

Direct service works like nothing else to increase compassion, in part through encouraging a recognition of privilege.... Safe within the confines of middle- and upper-class neighborhoods, it is easy to feel as though everyone has as much or more than we do. Everyone we know is struggling to keep up with bills for tuition, extracurricular activities, clothes, home repair and remodeling, the modest yearly vacation, mortgage, utilities, and so forth. But walking into a shelter or soup kitchen throws our privilege into sharp relief: our shoes, haircuts, and jeans are of a different quality. Our cars look out of place. We are suddenly conscious of the value of our purses, wallets, or cellphones. Encountering those who are truly struggling enables us to think differently....

Working directly with the poor reveals not only the privilege of the rich but also the poverty of the rich.... The

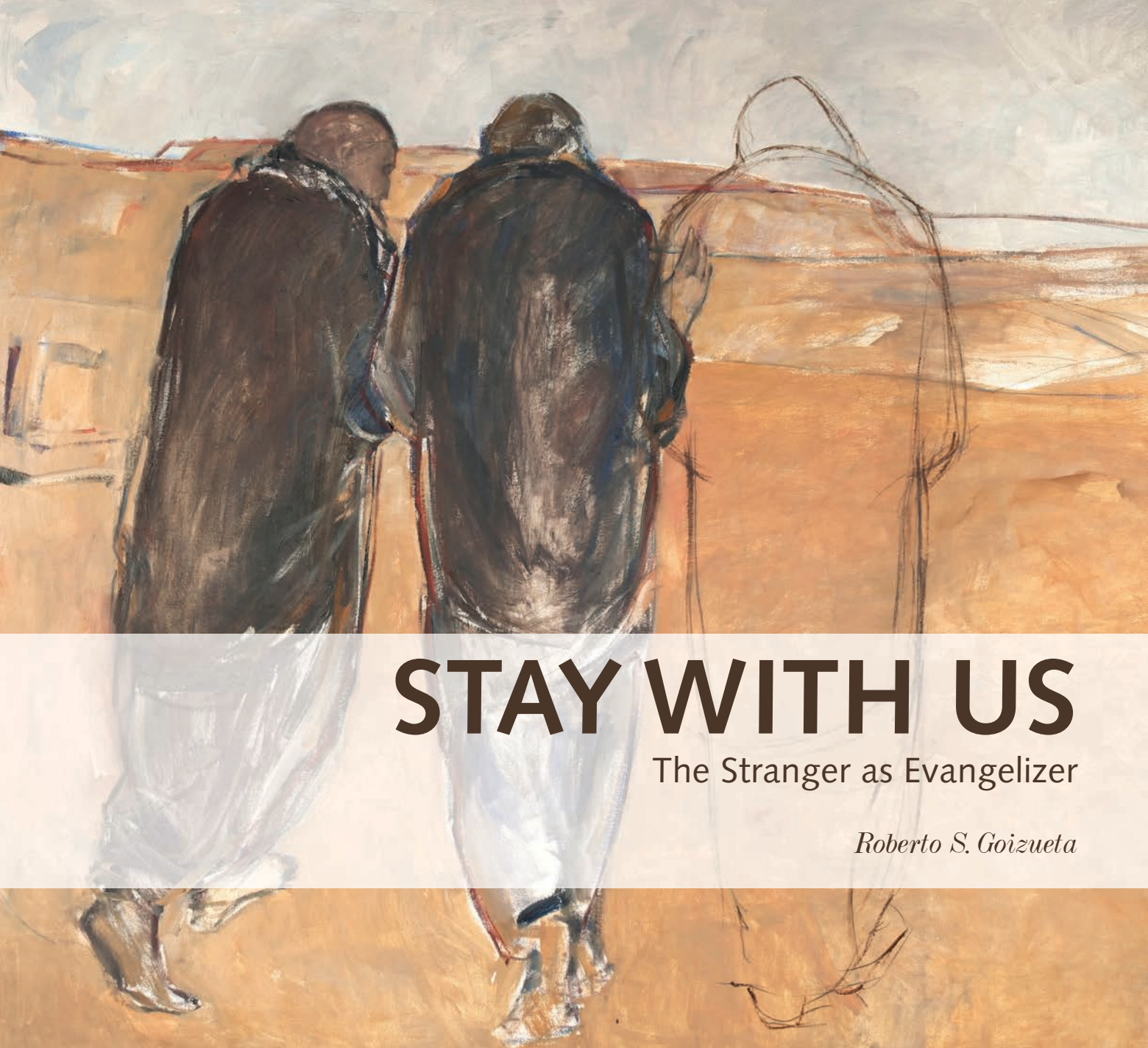
poor teach us not only about poverty but also about how to live with gratitude and joy despite suffering. ... When we see through regular contact with the poor that those with so much less than we have laugh, sing, dance, celebrate, and hope more than we are able to despite all our gifts, a new gratitude and joy can take root in us. This too can overflow in communion inside the family, in intimacy, in a willingness to sacrifice time and resources for others that is born of the same knowledge that our lives are very good....

Direct service ought to be a central practice of Christian family life, a key way of resisting depersonalization in the home and outside it.... Being with those who have little and give much breaks through the numbness that is the sickness of our middle-class tribe, allowing joy, sadness, and passion to seep in. If families commit to this practice, they will find an antidote to “emptiness in busyness” in communion—in richer relationships at home, in community with fellow believers, in service to and friendship with those in need, and in a deeper sense of gratitude and connection to the God who made us all. ■

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Selection from “Love and Justice at the Table: Practices within the Practice” in *Family Ethics: Practices for Christians* (Georgetown University Press, 2010), 164-165, 178-180, 183, 191-192, 204-209. Reprinted with permission. [www.press.georgetown.edu](http://www.press.georgetown.edu).

PHOTO CREDIT: Page 23: 150 On the Road - New York City, Boston College alumni photos. May 1, 2013.



# STAY WITH US

The Stranger as Evangelizer

*Roberto S. Goizueta*

“As they approached the village to which they were going, he gave the impression that he was going on farther. But they urged him, ‘Stay with us, for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over.’ So he went in to stay with them. And it happened that, while he was with them at table, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he vanished from their sight. Then they said to each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning [within us] while he spoke to us on the way and opened the Scriptures to us?’ So they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem where they found gathered together the 11 and those with them who were saying, ‘The Lord has truly been raised and has appeared to Simon!’” (Luke 24:28-34)

**I**t’s no coincidence that, in the Scriptures, God so often approaches us in the form of a stranger, for our God is indeed a strange, alien, mysterious God. What God would choose as the privileged witnesses to God’s love a persecuted, reviled people such as the Jews, a people literally chased from one end of the earth to the other? What God would choose as the father of God’s people an old, illiterate peasant like Abraham? What God would choose not only to take on flesh—this tired, broken, mortal flesh—but would do so in the form of a baby born to fleeing migrants who could find no sanctuary and thus had to give birth in an animals’ feeding trough? And, strangest of all, what God would choose to become one with us not only by dying, but by being executed as a condemned, abandoned criminal? What God, indeed?

This is also the God who raised that criminal from the dead and, through the words of a stranger, later approached the disciples on the road to Emmaus and, “in the breaking of the bread,” revealed to them the true identity of that stranger (Luke 24:13-35). The disciples could simply have allowed this unknown alien to go on his way but, instead, they invited him to stay—no, they “*urged him*” to stay: “Stay with us.” This invitation to “stay with us” is what makes possible the transformative turning point of the Emmaus story when, while all were at table, the disciples’ eyes were opened to the true identity of the stranger.

If our God is indeed Mystery, and not simply an idol of our making, then God approaches us not so much in the familiar, respectable, and anticipated as in the unfamiliar, unworthy, and unexpected, not so much as a respectable role model as an intrusive stranger or homeless vagabond, not so much in our pristine suburban enclosures as in the messy, “chaotic” sidewalks of our inner-city barrios, not so much in the temple or church as on the road to Emmaus. To paraphrase Pope Francis, we can recognize Christ because he smells like the beloved sheep he accompanies, and thus invites us to do the same. This is the meaning of God’s preferential love for the poor, for the stranger and alien. God’s preferential option for the poor tells us nothing about the poor, or about the alien (who are sinners like the rest of us), but it tells us a lot about God—or, at least, about the God whom we claim to worship. And it tells us a lot about ourselves, we who ourselves are but strangers and aliens “on the road.”

Perhaps that is why we so fear strangers or “aliens,” because they are but the mirrors of our own souls. By his or her very existence, the stranger’s unwelcome message is that, in the end, we’re *all* in the same boat, we’re all ultimately powerless to achieve invulnerability and security in the face of our common mortality. In the end, each of our lives hangs by a single thread held by One utterly beyond our own control. We may continue to evade this fact and, instead, try desperately to achieve an illusory security and invulnerability by building ever higher walls, moving and living ever farther from “those people” (whom, we feel assured, are “not like us”), purchasing ever larger insurance policies, or accumulating ever and ever greater number of “assets.” In the end, however, all those harried, anxious attempts are doomed to fail—that is the single certainty we can all indeed count on. And that is what the poor person, the stranger forces us to confront—the reality that we are not in control. Someone else is. But, like the Israelites in Egypt, we prefer the security of enslavement to the insecurity of liberation, so we isolate ourselves from the strangers in our midst.

If, however, *anything* is clear and unambiguous about our God, it is God’s identification with the poor, the outcast, the stranger: “So now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you? Only to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all God’s ways, to love God...” (Deut. 10:12). And what

does it mean to love God? “You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Deut. 10:19). God’s preferential love for the stranger is the safeguard of God’s Mystery, God’s transcendence against our instinctive temptation to domesticate God, to identify God with our own dreams and wishes, our own interests and desires, our own walled-off neighborhoods, with our own obsessive need for security, certainty, and invulnerability.

Our attitude toward the stranger in our midst is thus a privileged criterion of our faith in a transcendent God. Without an openness and hospitality to the stranger there can be no faith—or at least no faith in the God of Jesus Christ, the God who is revealed in the very act of breaking bread with strangers. On the road to Emmaus, the stranger is transformed into God’s own messenger, God’s own evangelizer. And the disciples, those who had counted themselves among the believers in the good news, are revealed as the ones in need of conversion, the ones in need of true faith. But that conversion is not possible unless we, like the disciples, dare to utter those three courageous, risky words: “Stay with us.”

And we can never know in advance who will be the stranger who interprets the Scripture for us, the man or woman who reveals to us a God whose love for *all* of us is beyond our wildest imaginings, beyond every border and barrier we’ve erected as protection for our paltry gods which, though powerless to break through hearts of stone, are at the very least undemanding and reassuring. In other words, the truth revealed in the breaking of the bread is that we expect and demand *too little* of our God. We remain content with the gods limited by borders and barriers of our own making, gods that promise an illusory security that must eventually crumble, even if only on our deathbed. On the other hand, the God revealed on the road to Emmaus, on the other side of the border, is one who passionately desires to be welcomed into our lives as the stranger who disrupts the fragile security built on the false assurance that “we are not like them.” Yet that disruption will be the source of our own liberation, as it was for the disciples who recognized Jesus in the stranger: “The Lord has truly been raised and has appeared to Simon!” (Luke 24:34). All we are asked to do is risk extending an invitation: “Stay with us.” ■

ROBERTO S. GOIZUETA is the Margaret O'Brien Flatley professor of Catholic Theology in the theology department at Boston College.

PHOTO CREDIT: Pages 24: © 2014 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn



Watch the C21 video presentation with Roberto Goizueta and Paul Farmer, “Accompaniment: Liberation Theology, Solidarity and a Life of Service” [www.bc.edu/c21poverty](http://www.bc.edu/c21poverty)

*“Ten times a day something happens to me like this—some strengthening throb of amazement—some good sweet empathic ping and swell. This is the first, the wildest and the wisest thing I know: that the soul exists and is built entirely out of attentiveness.” ~ Mary Oliver*

# *The Beauty of Being...* **WITH THE POOR**

*Meg Stapleton Smith*

**B**efore leaving for El Salvador, I had set high expectations for how I would spend my time there. I had crafted in my mind images of helping those whom I had not yet met, and waited in hopeful anticipation for a transformative semester. I had come to hold a firm belief that service for the poor was an essential aspect of my Christian faith. Yet, I was unaware that I had an enormous lesson to learn about what it really means to be a disciple of Christ. The Salvadorans taught me the art of presence, and brought me to an understanding on the beauty of being.

I lived in El Salvador in the spring of my junior year of college and studied with the *Casa de la Solidaridad* program. The study abroad experience is uniquely structured—three days a week are spent in class while the other two days are spent accompanying an impoverished Salvadoran community. Every Monday and Wednesday two other students and I were led by our praxis site coordinator, Hector, up a volcano to a community called Las Nubes. The community is comprised of 24 homes, made up mostly of *tierra* (land), tin, and wire. The families do not have access to running water, electricity, or garbage collection. Despite the ever-present reality of extreme poverty, life in Las Nubes is simple and beautiful. Relationships are paramount, and conversations are held as sacred space where the Divine dwells.

We spent our first few weeks in Las Nubes going to each family’s home, introducing ourselves, and talking for hours over *un cafecito*. As we sat in the hot Salvadorian sun drinking coffee, my mind drifted to thoughts about all of the things that needed to be done in this place that I was

slowly learning to call my home. I could not be present with the very people who were with me in that moment because my heart was filled with an unnerving anxiousness and a grave frustration. Not only was I discouraged by my inability to fully comprehend the Salvadorans, but I had an unremitting desire to *do* something to fix the poverty that I was encountering daily. I began to carry around a small notebook and would fill the pages with plans for fundraising money for a new community center, or checklists of steps to urge the government to bring water to the community more often. With all that needed to be done in Las Nubes, I could not conceive any possible reason as to why we were just sitting around and talking. My mind and heart were overburdened with sights of extreme poverty, and I had succumbed to feeling powerless in the face of such systematic oppression.

Over the course of the first month or so, we developed a routine of stopping first at Nina Tancho’s home. Nina Tancho was about 80 years old, four feet tall, and had only one tooth that stuck out from her bottom gum. When we walked into her home on one particular Wednesday, Nina was sitting in a white plastic chair crying silently—her face buried in her hands. When I approached her to ask if she was OK, she did not look up. I distanced myself in discomfort and disappointment that I could not help her. Hector approached her and after whispering to each other for a few moments he suddenly got up and went into the house. He came back carrying a large plastic bottle filled with cooking oil. Hector reverently knelt beside her, poured the oil into his hands as if it were holy water, and with tender and



BC alumna Meg Stapleton Smith '13, while studying abroad in El Salvador.

loving compassion, started to gently massage the bottom of her right foot. Nina Tancho instantly began to scream and moan in agony. Without hesitating, I ran over and knelt beside her chair. I fought through the boundaries of discomfort that had once paralyzed me, and reached out to grab her hand. As her fingers tightened around mine, I was hit with the realization that in that moment, nothing separated us. I was not sitting from a distance thinking about her lack of health care, and writing down ways to fix it that seem like simple solutions from my own privileged perspective. As Hector slowly lowered her foot to the ground, Nina turned to me as she wiped the tears from her eyes and said, “*Gracias por sostener mi mano* (thank you for holding my hand).”

Those simple words transformed my experience in El Salvador. As Mary Oliver describes, this was the *empathic ping* that left me so in awe of how utterly human both of us were in that moment. Although I could have chosen from hundreds of stories that are still so vivid in my mind, this one instance in Las Nubes remains my greatest lesson on presence and the beauty of being with another. For so long, I was convinced that I needed to *do* something while I was in Las Nubes, when the truth of the matter is, I simply needed to *be* there—fully present, fully vulnerable, fully myself. Through this action of vulnerability, and of dwelling in the unknown, love became palpable. The times when I would feel useless still occurred throughout the rest of my semester. Yet, every day when I showed up at my praxis site, I was loved and accepted without condition. And every day, people who had no reason to love me allowed me to humbly

walk alongside them. That is the root of accompaniment—to walk with those who suffer, and maybe even to hold their hands along the way. We enter into solidarity when we break the boundaries of separation that keep us from this connection. And it is in this understanding, that we touch the heart of the Gospel. Jesus was not a man *for* others, he was one *with* them.

The power of that touch was the transforming point of my entire Salvadoran experience. By holding Nina Tancho’s hand while she was suffering, I became completely lost in her reality. I thought I knew the Gospel, but in that moment, I began to read it in a different way. Jesus went to the margins and stood there. That was how he transformed the world. And so, he calls us to do the same. His resurrection continues to remind us that although we can say that we are followers of Christ, we are unable to reach the core of his message until we stand where he once stood. By my presence I was able to bear witness with great joy and simplicity to this good news that I believe in. Solidarity is when we realize that our salvation lies in the love of one another—there is infinite beauty in that realization. ■

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PHOTO CREDIT: Page 27: Meg Stapleton Smith

Pope Francis (then-Cardinal Bergoglio) washing the feet of a young AIDS patient, Holy Thursday, 2001.



# VOLUNTARY DISPLACEMENT

*Henri J. Nouwen, Donald P. McNeill, CSC, and Douglas A. Morrison*

According to *Webster's* dictionary, displacement means to move or to shift from the ordinary or proper place. This becomes a telling definition when we realize the extent to which we are preoccupied with adapting ourselves to the prevalent norms and values of our milieu. We want to be ordinary and proper people who live ordinary and proper lives. There is an enormous pressure on us to do what is ordinary and proper—even the attempt to excel is ordinary and proper—and thus find the satisfaction of general acceptance.

The call to community as we hear it from our Lord is the call to move away from the ordinary and proper places. Leave your father and mother. Let the dead bury the dead. Keep your hand on the plow and do not look back. Sell what you own. Give the money to the poor and come follow me (Luke 14:26; 9:60, 62; 18:22). The Gospels confront us with this persistent voice inviting us to move from where it is comfortable, from where we want to stay, from where we feel at home.

Why is this so central? It is central because in voluntary displacement, we cast off the illusion of “having it together” and thus begin to experience our true condition, which is that we, like everyone else, are pilgrims on the way, sinners in need of grace. Through voluntary displacement we counteract the tendency to become settled in a false comfort and to forget the fundamentally unsettled position that we share with all people. Voluntary displacement leads us to the existential recognition of our inner brokenness and thus brings us to a deeper solidarity with the brokenness of our fellow human beings.

## **FOLLOWING THE DISPLACED LORD**

Voluntary displacement as a way of life rather than as a unique event is the mark of discipleship. Jesus, whose compassion we want to manifest in time and place, is indeed displaced. Paul describes Jesus as the one who voluntarily displaced himself. “His state was divine, yet he did not cling to his equality with God but emptied

himself to assume the condition of a slave, and became as we are” (Phil. 2:6-7). A greater displacement cannot be conceived. The mystery of the incarnation is that God did not remain in the place that we consider proper for God but moved to the condition of a suffering human being. God *gave up* the heavenly place and took a humble place among mortal men and women. God became displaced so that nothing human would be alien and the brokenness of our human condition could be fully experienced.

Jesus Christ is the displaced Lord in whom God’s compassion becomes flesh. In him, we see a life of displacement lived to the fullest. It is in following our displaced Lord that the Christian community is formed. Jesus’ call to voluntary displacement has a very contemporary ring. It is obviously not a call to disruptive behavior, but a call to solidarity with the millions who live disrupted lives.

It is worth noting the great role voluntary displacement has played in the history of Christianity. Benedict went

to Subiaco, Francis to the Carceri, Ignatius to Manresa, Charles de Foucauld to the Sahara, John Wesley to the poor districts in England, Mother Teresa to Calcutta, and Dorothy Day to the Bowery. With their followers, they moved from the ordinary and proper places to the places where they could experience and express their compassionate solidarity with those in whom the brokenness of the human condition was most visible. We can indeed say that voluntary displacement stands at the origin of all great religious reforms.

## ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

The most inspiring and challenging example of displacement is St. Francis of Assisi. In 1209, this son of a wealthy merchant tore his clothes from his body and walked away from his family and friends to live a life of abject poverty. By moving naked out of the fortified city with its power and security and by living in caves and in the open fields, Francis called attention to the basic poverty of humanity. He revealed not only his own nakedness but also the nakedness of all people before God. From this displaced position, Francis could live a compassionate life; he was no longer blinded by apparent differences between people and could recognize them all as brothers and sisters who needed God's grace as much as he did. G. K. Chesterton writes:

*What gave him extraordinary personal power was this; that from the Pope to the beggar, from the Sultan of Syria in his pavilion to the ragged robbers crawling out of the wood, there was never a man who looked into those brown burning eyes without being certain that Francis Bernardone was really interested in him, in his own inner individual life from the cradle to the grave; that he himself was being valued and taken seriously, and not merely added to the spoils of some social policy or the names in some clerical document... He treated the whole mob of men as a mob of Kings.<sup>1</sup>*

In the small group of brothers who followed Francis in his poverty, the compassionate life was lived. These men, who had nothing to share but their poverty and who made themselves fully dependent on God's grace, formed a genuine fellowship of the weak in which they could live together in compassion and extend their compassion to all whom they met on the road. Their communal life of poverty prepared them for unlimited compassion.

St. Francis offers us an impressive example of displacement that leads to community and compassion. By moving away from their "ordinary and proper places," St. Francis and his followers illuminated the oneness of the human race. They did this not only by the way they lived together but also by the way they created space for others in their common life.

The history of the Franciscans, however, also illustrates that as soon as success and wealth seduce people back to their ordinary and proper places, community as well as compassion is hard to find. This was not only true for the Franciscans but also for many other religious groups as well. It is therefore understandable that the history of Christianity is filled with reformers who constantly displace themselves to remind us of our great vocation to a compassionate life.

If we really want to be compassionate people, it is urgent that we reclaim this great tradition of displacement. As long as our houses, parishes, convents, and monasteries are only ordinary and proper places, they will only awaken ordinary and proper responses and nothing will happen. As long as religious people are well dressed, well fed, and well cared for, words about being in solidarity with the poor will remain pious words more likely to evoke good feelings than creative actions. As long as we are only doing well what others are doing better and more efficiently, we can hardly expect to be considered the salt of the earth or the light of the world. In short, as long as we avoid displacement, we will miss

the compassionate life to which Jesus calls us.

Not everyone is called in the way St. Francis, Dorothy Day, Mother Teresa, and Jean Vanier were called. But everyone must live with the deep conviction that God acts in her or his life in an equally unique way. No one should ever think that he or she is just an "ordinary citizen" in the reign of God. As soon as we start taking ourselves and God seriously and allow him to enter into a dialogue with us, we will discover that we also are asked to leave fathers, mothers, brothers, and sisters to follow Jesus in obedience. Quite often we will discover that we are asked to follow to places we would rather not go. But when we have learned to respond to the small displacements of our daily lives, the greater call will not seem so great after all. We then will find the courage to follow him and be amazed by our freedom to do so.

Thus, voluntary displacement is a part of the life of each Christian. It leads away from the ordinary and proper places, whether this is noticed by others or not; it leads to a recognition of each other as fellow travelers on the road, and thus creates community. Finally, voluntary displacement leads to compassion; by bringing us closer to our own brokenness it opens our eyes to our fellow human beings, who seek our consolation and comfort. ■

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<sup>1</sup>G. K. Chesterton, *St. Francis of Assisi* (Garden City: Doubleday Image Books, 1957), 96-97.

PHOTO CREDIT | Page 29: Photo obtained from Archdiocese of Mobile.

# Poverty Quiz

**1.** The number of people living in poverty in the United States decreased from 2011 to 2012.

A. TRUE B. FALSE

**2.** According to the U.S. government, a family of four—(two adults and two children)—is living in poverty if it earns less than \$28,000 annually.

A. TRUE B. FALSE

**3.** Most people living in poverty are African American.

A. TRUE B. FALSE

**4.** The federal minimum wage is \$8.75 per hour.

A. TRUE B. FALSE

**5.** The poverty rate among the elderly in the United States is higher than that of any other age group.

A. TRUE B. FALSE

**6.** If every poor person in the United States lived in the same state, it would be the most populous state in the nation—the state of Poverty.

A. TRUE B. FALSE

**7.** In more than a dozen states the poverty rate is at least one out of six people.

A. TRUE B. FALSE

**8.** In more than a dozen states the poverty rate is less than 10 percent.

A. TRUE B. FALSE

## ANSWERS

1. (b) False. In 2012 there was no statistical decrease in poverty for the second consecutive year.

2. (b) False. The federal 'poverty threshold' in 2012 for a family of four with two children 17 or younger is \$23,850. A family with a household income above that is not considered "poor." However, researchers estimate that, depending on locality, it takes an income of about 1.5 to 3.5 times the official poverty level to cover the cost of a family's minimum day-to-day needs.

3. (b) False. Based on the 2010 Census, over 19.5 million non-Hispanic white Americans lived below the poverty line in 2010. In the same year, there were 13.2 million Hispanics (of any race) in poverty, 10.7 million African Americans, and 1.7 million Asian Americans in poverty. As a percentage of the population, however, 27.4 percent of African Americans lived below the poverty line in 2010—the largest percentage of any group. Some 26.6 percent of Hispanics, 12.1 percent of Asian Americans, and 9.9 percent of non-Hispanic white Americans are living in poverty.

4. (b) False. The federal minimum wage became \$7.25 per hour July 24, 2009. A single parent with one child working at this minimum wage full-time every week of the year ( $\$7.25 \times 40 \text{ hours} \times 52 \text{ weeks}$ ) would earn \$15,080 before any deductions or taxes. That is actually below the poverty line of \$15,730 for a two person family.

5. (b) False. Though the poverty rate for America's elderly (people over 65) rose from 8.9 percent in 2009 to 9.1 percent in 2012, the poverty rate for children under 18 is still higher, at 21.8 percent for 2012. That means more than one out of every five children in America lives in poverty.

6. (a) True. In 2012 the population in the state of Poverty was larger than the combined populations of Texas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Kansas, Colorado, Arizona, Utah, Wyoming, Nevada, and Nebraska. Approximately 46.5 million Americans live in the state of Poverty, 8 million more people than in the state of California.

7. (a) True. According to 2012 figures, 14 states have poverty rates above 16.6%: Arizona, Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and West Virginia. The District of Columbia also has a poverty rate above one out of six residents.

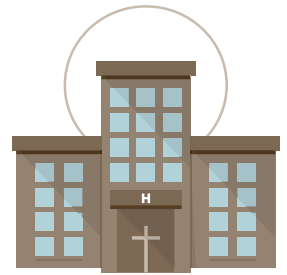
8. (b) False. According to 2012 figures, only four states (Maryland, New Hampshire, New Jersey, and Wyoming) have a poverty line below 10 percent. Every other state in the nation has at least one out of 10 persons living in poverty.

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<sup>1</sup>Based on most recent reliable U.S. Census Bureau figures for the year 2012.



# The Catholic Response to Poverty



67% of Catholic hospitals are located in urban areas

In 2012 alone, Catholic Charities' food pantries, soup kitchens, health care assistance, housing initiatives, and family aid services served

**17 MILLION CLIENTS**

100 million people in 91 countries received aid from Catholic Relief Services in 2012

**600,000 PEOPLE**

served by Jesuit Refugee Services in 50 countries in 2012



**\$24 BILLION**

of taxpayer money saved by educating 2 million students at Catholic schools every year

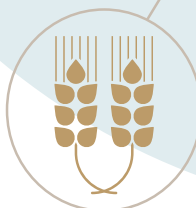


1 in 6 hospital patients—128 million people—in the US are treated at 600 Catholic hospitals



**30%**

of all refugees admitted to the US annually are resettled by USCCB's Migration and Refugee Services



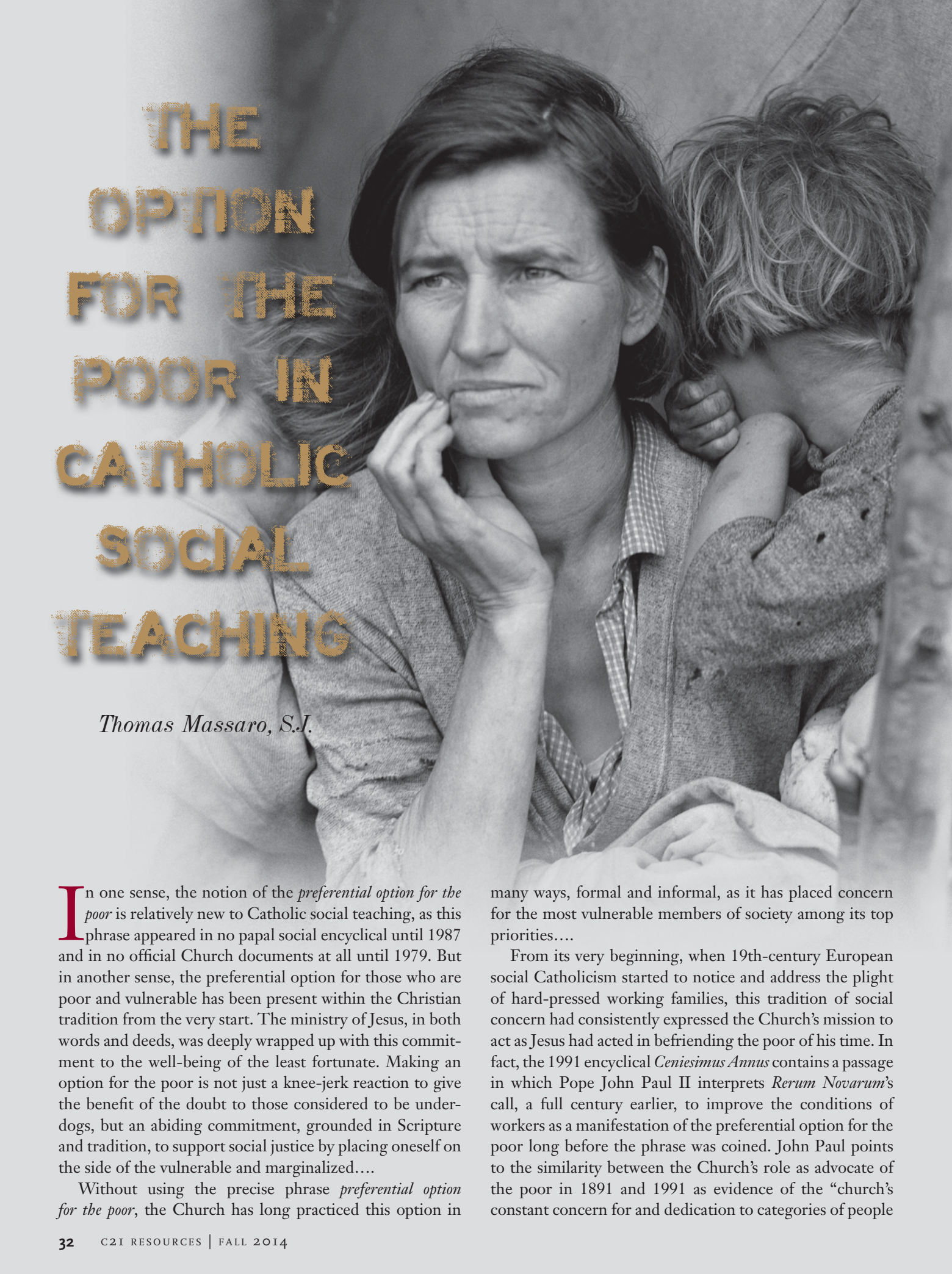
26 million people saved from hunger through Catholic Relief Services sustainable agriculture initiatives



7,800 community projects awarded grants by Catholic Campaign for Human Development since its founding in 1970



40,000 homes built in Haiti by one Caritas program in response to the 2010 earthquake



# THE OPTION FOR THE POOR IN CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

Thomas Massaro, S.J.

**I**n one sense, the notion of the *preferential option for the poor* is relatively new to Catholic social teaching, as this phrase appeared in no papal social encyclical until 1987 and in no official Church documents at all until 1979. But in another sense, the preferential option for those who are poor and vulnerable has been present within the Christian tradition from the very start. The ministry of Jesus, in both words and deeds, was deeply wrapped up with this commitment to the well-being of the least fortunate. Making an option for the poor is not just a knee-jerk reaction to give the benefit of the doubt to those considered to be underdogs, but an abiding commitment, grounded in Scripture and tradition, to support social justice by placing oneself on the side of the vulnerable and marginalized....

Without using the precise phrase *preferential option for the poor*, the Church has long practiced this option in

many ways, formal and informal, as it has placed concern for the most vulnerable members of society among its top priorities....

From its very beginning, when 19th-century European social Catholicism started to notice and address the plight of hard-pressed working families, this tradition of social concern had consistently expressed the Church's mission to act as Jesus had acted in befriending the poor of his time. In fact, the 1991 encyclical *Centesimus Annus* contains a passage in which Pope John Paul II interprets *Rerum Novarum's* call, a full century earlier, to improve the conditions of workers as a manifestation of the preferential option for the poor long before the phrase was coined. John Paul points to the similarity between the Church's role as advocate of the poor in 1891 and 1991 as evidence of the "church's constant concern for and dedication to categories of people

who are especially beloved to the Lord Jesus” (no. 11). Indeed, throughout his long pontificate, John Paul II made frequent reference to this concept, phrased in various ways, as part of his trademark call to universal solidarity. Though by no means an uncritical proponent of liberation theology, the movement that originated the phrase *preferential option for the poor*, Pope John Paul II often raised up in his addresses and writings this social priority of working for the benefit of the least-advantaged members of society.... Many of his celebrated travels abroad, especially early in his reign as pope, featured visits to desperately impoverished neighborhoods where he publicized the need for greater solidarity between rich and poor around the world.

The imperative to make an option for the poor takes on distinctive features, of course, in the social context of the world’s most affluent nations. Consider, for example, the significance of such an option within the United States, the richest society in the history of the world. Although tens of millions of Americans actually live below the federally defined poverty line, the extent and depth of poverty in the United States cannot compare to Latin America and similar parts of the developing world. Distressing social divisions are not nearly as profound in a society that is dominated by a middle-class ethos and where upward mobility, while never easy, is at least imaginably within the reach of citizens of quite modest means. Opportunities for advancement into the mainstream and even upper echelons of American society exist beyond the dreams of the vast majority of people living in other countries, who find most doors to a materially better life shut firmly against them.

What does it mean, then, in U.S. society, to make a preferential option for the poor? There are no easy answers, of course, as each individual must discern an appropriate personal response to this universal but imprecise call. Interestingly, in the course of their 1986 pastoral letter *Economic Justice for All*, the U.S. Catholic bishops speak frequently of the option for the poor, mentioning the phrase explicitly nine times. Concern for the poor quite evidently pervades the entire letter, and the document urges lawmakers, citizens, consumers, and all others to measure all their decisions by the likely effects they will exert upon the least-advantaged members of society.

To make a preferential option for the poor in a relatively affluent society may not entail an agenda of drastic social change to right a history of deep offenses against human solidarity, but it does probably mean much greater sensitivity to the impact one’s actions exert upon the vulnerable and marginalized. In a largely middle-class society like America, making a sincere preferential option for the poor will lead people to revise their lifestyle choices and numerous personal decisions, as well as to advocate for public policies to advance social justice. This commitment might include greater support for progressive taxation measures, for social safety net programs to assist low-income families, and for better funding for educational services and schools

that serve underprivileged neighborhoods.

The entire tradition of Catholic social teaching, . . . can be interpreted as a unified effort on the part of Church leaders to advocate for a more humane society where the most vulnerable members are better protected from harm. With its limited financial resources, the Church itself can do only so much to advance the lives of the poor. However, popes and bishops, as the official voices of the Church, have exerted great efforts to speak publicly about political, economic, and social issues that have profound impact upon the prospects of our neediest neighbors. The rationale for all the Church’s efforts in this regard may be summarized precisely as the desire to make a preferential option for the poor.

If these Church efforts were really to bear fruit, then what would the results look like? If the message of justice and peace within Catholic social teaching were to take root in the hearts of many believers, these disciples would work energetically for a better world, a world characterized by not only acts of individual charity but also structures of justice and equity for all people. Racial discrimination and unfair barriers to progress would be eliminated. True human development would be fostered by wider access to property and by socially responsible policies of businesses and governments throughout the world. All social institutions, from schools to corporations to social clubs, would be measured by how they treat all members of society, especially the poorest. Priorities would be altered so that more of the benefits of this abundantly blessed world would find their way to those who currently possess the least. In a prosperous age like the present one, no one should be excluded from enjoying an ample array of opportunities or be left to experience the disturbing fear of permanent powerlessness and deprivation.

Catholic social teaching includes a call for involvement in collaborative efforts to invite all people into the social mainstream; it is not an ethic for apathetic or complacent people. To adopt the principles of Catholic social thought is to concur that all people need to make sincere and vigorous efforts so that full participation is extended to all, without favoritism or discrimination. We all have something to contribute to the common good, and all may benefit from the gifts that we bring to the common table of human community and solidarity. ■

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# THE SCANDAL OF WORKS OF MERCY

*Dorothy Day*

The spiritual works of mercy are: to admonish the sinner, to instruct the ignorant, to counsel the doubtful, to comfort the sorrowful, to bear wrongs patiently, to forgive all injuries, and to pray for the living and the dead.

The corporal works are to feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, to clothe the naked, to ransom the captive, to harbor the harborless, to visit the sick, and to bury the dead.

When Peter Maurin talked about the necessity of practicing the works of mercy, he meant all of them, and he envisioned houses of hospitality in poor parishes in every city of the country, where these precepts of Our Lord could be put into effect. He pointed out that we have turned to state responsibility through home relief, social legislation, and social security, and we no longer practice personal responsibility for our brother, but are repeating the words of the first murderer, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” Not that our passing the buck is as crude as all that....

Peter Maurin, the founder of *The Catholic Worker*, was very much an apostle to the world today, not only to the poor. He was a prophet with a social message and he wanted to reach the people with it. To get to the people, he pointed out it was necessary to embrace voluntary poverty, to strip yourself, which would give you the *means* to practice the works of mercy. To reach the man in the street you must go to the street. To reach the workers, you begin to study a philosophy of

labor, and take up manual labor, useful labor, instead of white-collar work. To be the least, to be the worker, to be poor, to take the lowest place and thus be the spark that would set afire the love of men toward one another and to God (and we can only show our love for God by our love for our fellows). These were Peter’s ideas, and they are indispensable for the performing of the works of mercy....

The works of mercy are a wonderful stimulus to our growth in faith as well as in love. Our faith is taxed to the utmost and so grows through this strain put upon it. It is pruned again and again, and springs up bearing much fruit. For anyone starting to live literally the words of the Fathers of the Church, “the bread you retain belongs to the hungry, the dress you lock up is the property of the naked,” “what is superfluous for one’s need is to be regarded as plunder if one retains it for one’s self,” there is always a trial ahead. “Our faith, more precious than gold, must be tried as though by fire.” Here is a letter we received today. “I took a gentleman seemingly in need of spiritual and temporal guidance into my home on a Sunday afternoon. Let him have a nap on my bed, went through the want ads with him, made coffee and sandwiches for him, and when he left, I found my wallet had gone also.”

I can only say that the saints would only bow their heads and not try to understand or judge. They received no thanks—well then, God had to

repay them. They forebore to judge, and it was as though they took off their cloak besides their coat to give away. This is expecting heroic charity, of course. But these things happen for our discouragement, for our testing. We are sowing the seed of love, and we are not living in the harvest time so that we can expect a crop. We must love to the point of folly, and we are indeed fools, as our Lord Himself was who died for such a one as this. We lay down our lives too when we have performed so painfully thankless an act, because this correspondent of ours is poor in this world’s goods. It is agony to go through such bitter experiences, because we all want to love, we desire with a great longing to love our fellows, and our hearts are often crushed at such rejections. But a Carmelite nun said to me last week, “It is the crushed heart which is the soft heart, the tender heart,” and maybe it is one way to become meek and humble of heart like Jesus.

Such an experience is crueler than that of our young men in Baltimore who were arrested for running a disorderly house, i.e., our St. Anthony’s house of hospitality, and who spent a few nights in jail. Such an experience is dramatic, to say the least. Such an experience is crueler than that which happened to one of our men here in New York who was attacked (for his pacifism) by a maniac with a knife in our kitchen. Actually to shed one’s blood is a less bitter experience.

# F THE CY

## Feeding the Poor—At a Sacrifice

*In the first centuries of Christianity  
the hungry were fed at a personal sacrifice,  
the naked were clothed, at a personal sacrifice,  
the homeless were sheltered at personal sacrifice.*

*And because the poor were fed, clothed, and sheltered at a personal sacrifice,  
the pagans used to say about the Christians “See how they love each other.”*

*In our own day the poor are no longer fed, clothed, and sheltered  
at a personal sacrifice, but at the expense of the taxpayers.*

*And because the poor are no longer fed, clothed and sheltered  
the pagans say about the Christians “See how they pass the buck.”*

~ Peter Maurin



Well, our friend has suffered from his experience and it is part of the bitterness of the poor, who cheat each other, who exploit one another, even as they are exploited. Who despise one another even as they are the despised.

And is it to be expected that virtue and destitution should go together? No, as John Cogley has written, they are the destitute in every way, destitute of this world's goods, destitute of honor, of gratitude, of love, and they need so much, that we cannot take the works of mercy apart, and say I will do this one, or that one work of mercy. We find they all go together.

Some years ago there was an article in *Commonweal* by Georges Bernanos. He ended his article as I shall end mine, paraphrasing his words, and it is a warning note for these apocalyptic times: “Every particle of Christ’s divine charity is today more precious for your security—for your security, I say—than all the atom bombs in all the stock piles.” It is by the works of mercy that we shall be judged. ■

DOROTHY DAY (1897–1980) was a journalist, social activist, and co-founder of the Catholic Worker Movement.


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PHOTO CREDIT : Page 35: “Give Drink to the Thirsty: Study” part of the Seven Works of Mercy sequence by Ghislaine Howard. <http://www.ghislainehoward.com>

# Nurturing Justice in a GLOBAL WORLD

Carolyn Woo



Children in their village outside of Herat, Afghanistan. The lamb was distributed as part of Catholic Relief Services' efforts to assist poor farmers to increase their flocks.

"If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well,' but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it? So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead." (James 2:15-17)

Seven decades ago, a group of Polish refugees from the chaos and tragedy of World War II showed up in the unlikelyst of places—Iran. Taken into captivity by the Soviets early in the war and eventually sent to Siberia, they were allowed to leave in 1943 and made a perilous journey to the border.

Their plight garnered the attention of Catholics in the United States, leading to the formation of an international aid agency called War Relief Services.

Why did the Church in the United States do this? Because of the answer Jesus gives in Matthew 22 to the question, "Which commandment in the law is the greatest?"

"You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments."

These Polish refugees were our neighbors. Helping them, loving them, was an expression of our love of the Lord.

To carry out that gospel mandate, the Bishops serving Catholics in the United States continued this work, turning War Relief Services into Catholic Relief Services (CRS), recognizing that wherever we found those in need, we found our neighbors.

CRS's work is service, one of the three essential missions of the faithful, along with, teaching of the Word and celebration of the sacraments.

From the beginning, we offered our service to all, regardless of nationality or religious belief. We did this not because they were Catholics, but because we were.

Much of our work in the early years was a matter of getting people who had been knocked down by the war back on their feet, often through the most basic form of

aid—resource transfer; giving people food, clothes, shoes, shelter, James’s “necessities of the body.”

This is the image that comes to many minds when thinking of charity—almsgiving to the poor. It is certainly a blessed and noble act and often appropriate, especially in emergencies. Yet the Church has always known that often this is not sufficient and CRS’s mission is directed by that knowledge.

There are many poor who cannot be put back on their feet because, economically, they had never been on their feet to begin with. They cannot be helped to climb the ladder of development because even the bottom rung is out of their reach. These are the poorest of the poor. These are the people the Gospel calls us to help.

As Pope Francis has said: “It is not enough to offer someone a sandwich unless it is accompanied by the possibility of learning how to stand on one’s own two feet. Charity that leaves the poor person as he is is not sufficient. True mercy, the mercy God gives to us and teaches us, demands justice, it demands that the poor find the way to be poor no longer.”

We seek to do that by building up the capacity of individuals—and families and communities—through education, sustainable livelihoods, climate-smart agriculture, access to proper health care, and the unfettered ability to exercise their rights as empowered citizens.

Whether we are responding to an emergency or engaged in long-term development, we set our sights on how we can move people toward greater resilience so that their vulnerability is reduced in a world that expects more frequent and more intense natural disasters. We put technology and market opportunities in service to the poor—not the other way around.

In the decades after CRS was founded, during the Cold War, foreign aid turned into something of an industry. CRS became an important player, one of the largest and most respected aid agencies in the country.

In the early 1990s, the bishops on our board and many who worked here began to wonder if we were just another aid outfit, any different from secular organizations. As an agency, we began to ask: What does it mean that we are Catholic? How does that differentiate us?

Just as this was undertaken, the horrific genocide in Rwanda occurred in 1994. CRS was active in Rwanda. According to our reports, everything was going well, tasks were being accomplished, programs were successful. And then 800,000 people die. How did we not see this?

That took CRS’s soul-searching even deeper. And what emerged was a greater commitment to our Gospel mission particularly as manifested in Catholic Social Teaching. Terms like integral human development and subsidiarity are not abstract ideas to CRS. They instruct us on how we go about our work.

Integral human development tells us that it is not enough to do just one task—drill a well or deliver food—

without taking into consideration how that fits in with all of the needs of a person and his community; not just water or food but also proper nutrition, medical care, education, access to capital, etc. All must have a way to sit at the Lord’s table in its full munificence.

Subsidiarity tells us that we must not impose our beliefs and ideas, that we must listen to those closest to the ground, meeting their needs, not ours. That is why we always work through local partners—some 1,200 around the world—supporting them, learning from them, as they implement the programs. The Church is our preferred partner—about half of our partners are Church-related—for good reason. Everywhere in the world, its schools and clinics are not just at the end of the road, but down the path that goes off the end of the road. There we find religious whose calling is helping the poorest of the poor.

Pope Paul VI taught us not only that, “Development is the new name for peace,” but also that, “If you want peace, work for justice.” So we look at all we do through the justice lens, which shows the need to make peacebuilding an integral part of everything from resolving conflicts to choosing the site of a new well.

All of our employees, some 5,000 around the world, are instructed on these principles, on how fundamental they are to the work that we all do.

We receive funding not only from generous members of the Catholic community and others of goodwill, but also from the U.S. government, foundation, and international institutions. The Church has made clear many times that it is the duty of wealthy nations to help the poorer ones. One of our missions at CRS is to put that aid to work in the way that does the most good in keeping with Catholic teaching.

We challenge ourselves to serve more people around the world and more deeply engage Catholics in the United States, helping them understand the causes, manifestations, and consequences of poverty and injustice in the world. We want to be of service by providing a way for Catholics in the United States to play a role in bringing about a world in which God’s bounty is present, here and now, for everyone.

We see the face of Christ every day in the faces of those we serve. Can there be a greater privilege than that? It demands we give our very best to all we do. ■

CAROLYN Y. WOO is CEO and president of Catholic Relief Services. Catholic Relief Services is part of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. CRS is a member of the Caritas Internationalis family network, providing services in 91 countries, reaching almost 100 million people each year.

PHOTO CREDIT: Page 36: Photo by Laura Sheahen/Catholic Relief Services.



Learn more about the C21 Center’s resources related to “The Poor: What Did Jesus Preach? What Does the Church Teach?” Visit: [www.bc.edu/c21poverty](http://www.bc.edu/c21poverty)

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## A Special Agape Latte Tribute

Beloved Jesuit William B. Neenan, S.J., with Caroline Yeager '14, before speaking to an overflow crowd at the popular C21 student speaker series, Agape Latte, this past spring.

Fr. Neenan passed away on June 25, 2014. In his talk, he reminded students to honor those who have gone before them. A video of this event can be found at: [www.bc.edu/c21poverty](http://www.bc.edu/c21poverty)