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templation from afar, George Casalis has suggested the term *hermeneutical circulation*. This linguistic change carries with it a change in emphasis which recognizes that the interpreter does not sit still and let his or her mind go round a carousel of thought, but is actively moving in real life.

This constant circulation is also true of Barth. He continued to move around the circle again and again. New issues such as the 1918 Russian Revolution, the Swiss General strike, the rise of Nazi Germany, and the 1948 Hungarian Invasion led him to new suspicions and new insights into reading the Bible.³⁷ Marquardt quotes Barth himself as recognizing this: If "political relationships change, then Christians will simply take that as an occasion to read the Bible anew. . . . And quite certainly this: a new understanding of Scripture . . . is the community's decisive participation in the change of the political order."³⁸ As events led to a new reading of the Bible, this in turn led to a deeper political involvement which included membership in the SDP in Nazi Germany and his refusal to resign from it in 1933; his political activity in the war years, his deportation, and his involvement in the Church struggle; his participation in the communist led *Committee for a Free Germany*; and his continuing rejection of capitalism and the "American Way of Life."³⁹

Conclusion

In this essay we have argued (1) that biblical hermeneutics and social praxis are inextricably linked, and that a change in one involves a change in the other. This we have seen is true for Barth. His new hermeneutic which he discovered at Safenwil arose out of his socialist praxis. At the same time we have argued that (2) the orientation of this new hermeneutic remained the same throughout his life and that the themes articulated in the Safenwil period remained dominant in his mature theology.

We conclude with two remarks that flow from the above. (1) If Barth's hermeneutic arose from a socialist praxis, and if his hermeneutic did not change in orientation throughout his life, this lends further credence to the view that Barth remained committed to socialist praxis (at least in principle) throughout his life. Any basic change in praxis would have led to a corresponding basic change in his hermeneutic. (2) If Barth's hermeneutic arose out of socialist praxis, and if it was a *Reformed* hermeneutic, then he has a pivotal role to play in the search for Reformed theology that can be mature enough to be open to the challenge of liberation theology, to be in dialogue with

it, and to learn from it while at the same time remaining true to the best of its tradition.

¹ K. Barth, "The Strange New World Within the Bible" in *The Word of God and the Word of Man*. Trans. D. Horton (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957), p.43.

² *Ibid.*, p. 34.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁴ K. Barth, Preface to the First Edition of *The Epistle to the Romans*. Trans. E.C. Hoskyns (London: OUP, 1933), p.1.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁶ K. Barth, "Biblical Questions, Insights and Vistas" in *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, pp.60f.

⁷ K. Barth, Preface to the Second Edition of *Romans*, p. 8.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁹ K. Barth, "Biblical Questions, Insights and Vistas," p. 95.

¹⁰ We are speaking here of that trajectory in Calvin which sees a relationship between the Word of God and the words of the Bible, but which avoids verbal infallibility and inerrancy and links together faith, the Spirit and the Word. See for example E.A. Dowey Jr., *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology* (New York: Columbia UP, 1952) for a discussion of the two trajectories in Calvin.

¹¹ K. Marx and F. Engels, *The German Ideology*. Ed. C.J. Arthur (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1970), p. 47.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 58.

¹³ J.E. Weir, "The Bible and Marx," in *The Scottish Journal of Theology* Vol. 35, p. 344.

¹⁴ J. Miguez Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation* (London: SPCK, 1975), pp. 90f.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

¹⁶ F-W. Marquardt, "Socialism in the Theology of Karl Barth" in *Karl Barth and Radical Politics*. Ed. and Trans. G. Hunsinger (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), p. 46.

¹⁷ See *Karl Barth and Radical Politics*, p. 10.

¹⁸ G. Casalis, *Correct Ideas Don't Fall From the Skies*. Trans. J.M. Lyons and M. John (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1984), p. 90.

¹⁹ K. Barth, "To an Engineer in East Germany, June 1968," in *Letters 1961-1968*. Trans. and Ed. G.W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), p. 303.

²⁰ H. Gollwitzer, "Kingdom of God and Socialism in the Theology of Karl Barth" in *Karl Barth and Radical Politics*, p. 79.

²¹ K. Barth, "Jesus Christ and the Movement for Social Justice" in *Karl Barth and Radical Politics*, p. 36.

²² J.L. Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology*. Trans. J. Drury (Maryknoll, Orbis, 1976), p.8.

²³ For a discussion on what Segundo considers the two pre-conditions for entry into the circle, see *Ibid.*, pp. 8f.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

²⁵ K. Barth, "To an Engineer in East Germany, June 1968," p. 303.

²⁶ See K. Barth, "Answer to the Open Letter of Mr. W. Hussy in Aarburg" in *Karl Barth and Radical Politics*, pp. 40ff.

²⁷ K. Barth in E. Busch, *Karl Barth*. Trans. J. Bowden (London: SCM, 1976), p. 46.

²⁸ On the very day that the war broke out, 93 German intellectuals including Harnack and Hermann issued a manifesto in support of the war policy of Kaiser Wilhelm II and Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg.

²⁹ K. Barth in *Revolutionary Theology in the Making: The Barth-Thurneysen Correspondence 1914-1925*. Trans. J.D. Smart (Richmond: John Knox, 1964), p. 26.

³⁰ In E. Busch, *Op. Cit.*, p. 81.

³¹ G. Hunsinger, "Toward a Radical Barth" in *Karl Barth and Radical Politics*, p. 202.

³² In E. Busch, *Op. Cit.*, p. 81.

³³ J.L. Segundo, *Op. Cit.*, p. 9.

³⁴ Quoted in F-W. Marquardt, *Op. Cit.*, p. 60.

³⁵ See K. Barth, Preface to the 2nd edition of *Romans*, p. 13.

³⁶ See H.M. Rumscheidt, *Revelation and Theology: An analysis of the Barth-Harnack Correspondence of 1923* (Cambridge UP, 1972).

³⁷ For a short discussion of this see F-W. Marquardt, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 60f.

³⁸ In *Ibid.*, p. 61.

³⁹ See R. Petersen, "An analysis of the Nature and Basis of Karl Barth's Socialism" (Unpublished MA Thesis, UCT, 1985) and the essays by Marquardt, Gollwitzer and Hunsinger in *Karl Barth and Radical Politics* for a fuller discussion of these events and their significance. For Barth's response to capitalism and the "American Way of Life" see specifically K. Barth, *How to Serve God in a Marxist Land*, Ed. R. McAfee Brown (New York: Association Press, 1959). See also G. Hunsinger, "Karl Barth and Liberation Theology" in the *Journal of Religion*, Vol. 63, No. 4, 1983, in which he contends that one of the concerns that unites Barth and liberation theology is a highly critical response to capitalism.

The Evangelical Witness To the Poor and Oppressed

by Thomas D. Hanks

For our consideration of the evangelical witness to the poor and oppressed, I would like to outline ten fundamentals of biblical theology that shape and characterize the proclamation of the Good News to the poor.¹

1. Oppression and Poverty

Essential to the faithful proclamation of the gospel to the poor and oppressed is the recognition of the fundamental

character of oppression in biblical theology and in human history. Explicit vocabulary for oppression occurs more than 500 times and constitutes a fundamental structural category of biblical theology. In more than 150 biblical texts oppression is explicitly linked to poverty and is viewed in Scripture as the basic cause of poverty. True, more than 20 other causes for poverty can be found in Scripture—such as idolatry in Judges or sloth in Proverbs. However, all other causes occur but a few times each and lack the massive emphasis Scripture places on the causal link between oppression and poverty.² Since 1968, Latin American theologians have insisted that if we recognize oppression as the fundamental cause of poverty, then neither simple charity nor economic development proj-

Dr. Thomas Hanks has recently moved from Costa Rica to Argentina to work with René Padilla. This paper was originally delivered at the 1984 ETS meeting at Moody Bible Institute. It has since appeared in Spanish.

ects by themselves are adequate: the ultimate Christian answer must be *liberation* from oppression.

Historically evangelicals often have recognized the decisive character and necessity of liberation, as in William Wilberforce's struggle to abolish slavery in the British Empire.³ Such Christian initiatives throughout church history stand in fundamental continuity with Jesus' own approach and sense of mission, which involved both the verbal proclamation of the gospel to the poor as well as liberation for prisoners and oppressed and the implementation of Jubilee Year principles in the socio-economic sphere (Luke 4:18-19). The decisive, emphatic role of liberation in Jesus' own programmatic description of his mission corresponds to the fact that he stands in continuity with the Old Testament in recognizing oppression as the fundamental cause of poverty. The character of the gospel as precisely Good News to the poor is disastrously subverted when Christianity is reduced to serving as a religious-ideological prop for an oppressive status quo. If the basic cause of poverty is oppression, then the Good News to the poor *must* carry the banner headline "liberation," as Jesus recognized. His own teaching and liberation praxis, particularly as delineated in Luke's gospel, constitutes a much broader and more profound analysis of oppression and liberation than contemporary Marxist analyses of class struggle.

in Luke's portrayal of Jesus' liberating message and ministry involves the traditional domination of women by men. Widows, as women commonly poor and oppressed, receive special attention. Flenders has pointed out that Luke likes to present women and men in contrasting pairs.⁹ The contrasts highlight the common spheres and mechanisms of male domination and oppression. Jesus' teaching and praxis, the power of the Holy Spirit, and Luke's own inspired pen collaborate to oppose male domination, pride and privilege.

6. *Elders and adults vs. youth and children.* Luke gives special attention to the infancy and childhood of Jesus and John the Baptist; both die as young martyrs, and Luke notes repeatedly the role of the elders in bringing Jesus to trial and crucifixion. Obviously Luke was keenly aware of the "generation gap" (1:17) and the conflicts it engendered. Orphans as well as children of one parent receive special attention.¹⁰

7. *Respectable society vs. prostitutes and publicans.* The seventh level of oppression in Luke is represented by the social outcasts, oppressed by society as a whole. Prime examples are the prostitutes and publicans. Neither group was economically poor, but as "immoral minorities" they were despised, rejected and harassed by the "moral majority." Constantly we find Jesus honoring and stressing the basic dignity of the immoral minorities that society scorned and despised.¹¹

Essential to the faithful proclamation of the gospel is the recognition of the fundamental character of oppression in biblical theology and in human history.

To appreciate the profundity and breadth of Jesus' analysis and the radical character of his liberating gospel and praxis, let us observe how the structural hierarchy of oppression as delineated by Luke contains some seven layers:⁴

1. *Demonic powers vs. all humanity.* At the uppermost level of what C. S. Lewis might have preferred to describe as the "lowerarchy" of oppression, we have Satan and the demonic powers that dominate and oppress all humanity. Since death is their ultimate aim, with sin and illness as their preferred instruments, Jesus is appropriately described in Peter's sermon to Cornelius as "healing all who were oppressed of the devil" (Acts 10:38).⁵

2. *Empire vs. provinces and colonies.* The second level of oppression obviously is the Roman Empire that conquered and oppressed weaker nations such as Israel, using such mechanisms as military occupation and taxation. However, while Jesus ministered and Luke wrote ever with an awareness of this level of conflict, the empire was not made a primary focus of immediate struggle as it later became in the book of Revelation.⁶

3. *Local oligarchy vs. the people.* Instead Jesus focused the brunt of his political attack on the oppression exercised by the local political-religious oligarchy: chief priests, Sanhedrin, scribes, Herodians and Pharisees. The dialectical counterpart in this struggle was the common people (*laos*) whom Luke describes as normally siding with Jesus against their self-appointed "leaders."⁷ This conflict culminated in Jesus' triumphal entry and forceful but non-violent protest and occupation of the Temple site. These actions brought down upon him, as God's oppressed servant, the institutionalized violence of the crucifixion.

4. *Rich vs. poor.* The fourth level of oppression in Luke comprises all the economic mechanisms of oppression exercised by the rich against the poor. While repeatedly studied in recent years, the fundamental role of oppression is commonly downplayed or overlooked.⁸

5. *Men vs. women.* The fifth level of oppression delineated

Conclusion. Luke's theology is commonly presented as focusing on spiritual salvation. Characteristic elements we have outlined as representing seven levels of oppression are commonly listed as rather unrelated "beads on a string"—almost as if they represented psychological quirks or neuroses of Luke. However, when we approach these concerns from the starting point of Jesus' own explicit programmatic statement of his mission—to proclaim Good News to the poor and bring liberation to the oppressed—the unity and coherence of Luke's theology and the truly radical character of Jesus' teaching and liberating praxis is immediately obvious. Luke's theology is not limited to spiritual salvation—it is a comprehensive theology of integral liberation for the oppressed; and precisely for that reason it is Good News to the poor.¹²

2. "All have sinned"—the Poor included, but especially their Oppressors

Fundamental to the proclamation of the gospel to the poor is the teaching that "all have *sinned* and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23), that "Christ died for our *sins*" (1 Cor. 15:3), that "God commands all men everywhere to repent" of their sins (Acts 17:30-32; Lk. 13:3,5). Obviously if our doctrine of sin is not thoroughly biblical our entire gospel and all our evangelistic efforts become drastically distorted. This has happened in two ways.

Wheaton professor Mark Noll in a tribute to the late Francis Schaeffer concluded that Schaeffer, more than any other modern evangelical leader, "understood existentially the malaise that was eating the heart out of the modern world."¹³ In a context where intellectual leaders and communications media unite to bombard everyone with their ideology that "man is dead," that we are but animals, that we are just machines, Schaeffer insisted that "humans possess *vast dignity* because they are made in God's image."¹⁴

As Kenneth Kantzer points out in his analysis of Robert Schuller's *Self-esteem: the New Reformation*, pastorally we are working in a milieu vastly different from that of Paul and the

Reformers. The Reformers worked in the afterglow of the Renaissance and a humanism that was not secular but still profoundly religious, often Christian. They could proclaim bluntly "all have sinned" and never ask themselves how incoherent, absurd or irrelevant that might sound to beings that view themselves as one more pig at the trough or as somewhat complicated machines soon to be rendered obsolete by the latest computer (if not first pulverized by nuclear holocaust). Kantzer says we should learn from the fact that Schuller, with his "pre-evangelism" stressing self-esteem, self-worth, human dignity and human potential, is "now reaching more non-Christians than any other religious leader in America."¹⁵

puters to work: tabulate and analyze the specific sins mentioned in traditional evangelism. Why is it almost always the common failings of the poor that we denounce and almost never the characteristic sins of their oppressors?¹⁷

Paul's universal conclusion that "all have sinned" (Rom. 3:23) comes after six Old Testament quotations that denounce very specifically the institutionalized violence and lies of the oppressors (Rom. 3:10-18). The apostle also was careful to preface his exposé of human sin with clear teaching on creation (Rom. 1:20-23) and link it to a reference to the vast dignity of our human calling to live for the "glory of God." Fundamental to the proclamation of the gospel to the poor is

The character of the gospel as Good News to the poor is disastrously subverted when Christianity is reduced to serving as a religious-ideological prop for an oppressive status quo.

I refer to the evangelistic efforts of Schaeffer and Schuller because—whatever their shortcomings—their discoveries and insights are also of great significance in communicating the gospel to the poor. Today the great philosophers and the mass media have convinced everyone from European intellectuals to American rock singers that human beings are but animals or obsolete machines. By their ideologies, the great empires and oligarchies have sought to instill precisely that low view in the minds of colonies and common workers for millenia. The degree of their success in this task is the secret of their continual domination.

One of the Hebrew words for oppression means literally "to treat like an animal."¹⁶ But an animal cannot sin; neither can your computer. The dehumanizing effects of the oppressive empires and their supporting oligarchies is much worse in modern industrialized technological societies than anything suffered in the Ancient World. Pack animals and computers still have the great value of being useful. In contrast, the unemployed adults and unschooled children who are left to scavenge for a living in the slums and garbage dumps are told in effect: "You are not even as important as a watchdog or pack animal—certainly not as clever as a computer; you are lower than an animal, lower than a machine; you are useless, as disposable as the styrofoam cups you are picking through; you are garbage, the refuse and scum of society." In such a context Christian evangelists *dare* not bypass the biblical teaching on creation. Our creation in God's image and for his *glory* provides the necessary presupposition and complement to the teaching about sin.

Into the slums of the Third World, where human beings have been denied all sense of worth and dignity, Marxist groups come with an electrifying message: you whom the capitalist oppressors treat as animals and view as garbage and scum—you can become the wave of the future, the makers of history, who establish a new kind of classless society with liberation and justice for all. However, as Schaeffer insisted, the biblical teaching on our creation in God's image, for his glory, dignifies human nature infinitely more than any conceivable existentialist or Marxist view.

Since 1968 Latin American theologians have sought boldly to steal the fire back from the Marxists and begin, as Jesus did, with a bold proclamation of liberation to the oppressed, coupled with a strong denunciation of oppression. Undoubtedly some Latin American theologians, priests and pastors can be faulted for dwelling too exclusively on the sins of the oppressors and not always making clear that "all have sinned"—that given the opportunity we all tend to oppress, dominate and treat unfairly anyone who is weaker in any way. But before we denounce Latin American heresies, put your com-

not only the universal truth (all have sinned) but especially the particular prophetic denunciation of the sins of the oppressors against the poor.

3. Christology: the Resurrection of God's poor, oppressed Servant

Fundamental and utterly central to the proclamation of the Good News to the poor is a Christology that is radically biblical. Paul can summarize his entire gospel in stark economic terms:

You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich yet for your sakes he *became poor*, so that you through his poverty might *become rich* (2 Cor. 8:9).¹⁸

For Paul the incarnation of the second person of the Trinity implies a theology of revolution, just as it did for Mary (Lk. 1:52-53). The socio-economic status of Jesus and his parents receives far more attention from the gospel writers than the technical medical fact of Mary's virginity. Jesus' poverty and simple life-style have attracted much scholarly attention in recent years.¹⁹ Latin American theologians have stressed not only Jesus' humanity and poverty, but also the conflictive political dimension of his ministry.²⁰ Already in 1891 in his work *Christianity and the Class Struggle*, Abraham Kuyper recognized that Jesus "like the prophets before him and the apostles after him invariably took sides against the oppressor and for the oppressed."²¹

Precisely what upper and middle class suburban pulpits find an embarrassment to be hurriedly spiritualized or superficially rationalized, the poor in Latin America's Christian base communities find to be an exciting discovery.²² Traditional Catholics, fundamentalists and conservative evangelicals rush pell-mell from the dogma of the Virgin Birth to the dogma of the penal substitutionary atonement. Thus they manage to dodge any implications of Jesus' incarnate life: costly discipleship and a conflictive political stance on the side of the oppressed and poor.

Elsewhere I have shown that the so-called "Suffering Servant" of Isaiah 53 is in fact the "Oppressed Servant," with four Hebrew words for oppression used six times in that one chapter.²³ Particularly the circumstances surrounding and leading up to Jesus' crucifixion were manifestations of oppression—terrible abuses of ecclesiastical and political power and authority. The crucifixion itself was an act of institutionalized violence. Jesus was a victim of the same kind of violence that condemns millions in the Third World to death each year: carnivorous injustice masked behind purported political "legality" and legitimated by idolatry and religious hypocrisy

(Mt. 23). Thus on the day of Pentecost, Peter points his finger at those who had crucified Jesus and declares: "This Jesus . . . you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men" (Acts 2:23). Here was a powerful, prophetic, political act of denunciation against oppression, injustice and institutionalized violence.

Evangelicals and Catholics have rightly insisted that the atoning work of Christ was penal and propitiatory, as Scripture abundantly attests.²⁴ However, we might do well to note that one of the earliest biblical expressions of God's anger

not soon forthcoming the evangelist announced God's imminent judgment against the glaring injustice of the wealthy oppressors. Traditional exegesis commonly fails to recognize why God's judgment is also an essential part of the Good News to the poor. However, in Scripture the wrath of God, culminating in his judgment against affluent oppressors, is a fundamental dimension of the Good News to the poor.³¹

The call to radical repentance is especially difficult and costly for wealthy oppressors. The declaration that salvation is by grace alone and faith alone is particularly Good News

Jesus' bodily resurrection from the dead represents the decisive divine vindication of his non-violent praxis and all that he taught and suffered.

makes clear that what most provokes God's wrath is the oppression of the poor and the weak (Ex. 22:21-24).²⁵ God's oppressed servant suffered the institutionalized violence of the crucifixion. However, unlike conformist militarists of modern oppressive empires—capitalist and communist alike—Jesus was truly revolutionary: "God's servant 'did no violence'" (Is. 53:9). He did not respond in kind, but broke the deadly cycle of violence and made "peace by the blood of the cross" (Col. 1:20).²⁶

Jesus' bodily resurrection from the dead represents the decisive divine vindication of his non-violent praxis and all that he taught and suffered. Like the socio-economic circumstances of the incarnation, Jesus' resurrection emphatically manifests God's preferential option for the poor and oppressed—above all when they suffer martyrdom through institutionalized violence. Against the "last enemy," death itself, God unleashes his omnipotence in history on the side of his oppressed servant. Jesus' tomb is empty, his disciples astonished, his tormentors and oppressors dumbfounded and terror struck. The Easter message, then, is not some innocuous card with lavender ribbon and yellow flowers to be sold to the consumer society. Easter is conflictive, partial, earthshaking (Mt. 28:2!) Good News to the poor.

The next decisive step in the revolutionary project of the establishment of God's kingdom is the Ascension. Enthroned at God's right hand, Jesus is the Lord of history who alone is worthy to break open the scrolls as conflictive events on earth move toward their final consummation (Rev. 5). Today, divided and discouraged Marxists struggle to define and implement their "historical project." The Good News to the poor is that the Lamb who was slain is enthroned as the Lord of history. His original "historical project" is still the best: the "Upside-down Kingdom,"²⁸ the revolution of God. Beside this kingdom both capitalist and communist ideologies are hopelessly conformist. The oppressive empires that embody and propagate them do well to tremble before the "original revolution."²⁹

4. Authentic Repentance and the Empty Hand of Faith

Fundamental to the proclamation of Jesus' Good News to the poor is the call for radical repentance that expresses itself in terms of transferral of wealth from the overloaded hands of the rich to the empty hands of the poor, from the hands of the oppressors to the hands of the oppressed.³⁰ John the Baptist expressed it with classic simplicity: "He who has two coats let him share with him who has none; and let him who has food do likewise" (Lk. 3:11). Whatever the affluent may think of that demand, obviously it is Good News to the poor. "Capital"—accumulation of wealth not so shared—is prime evidence of sin and calls for repentance. When repentance is

to the poor. Isaiah's classic invitation to the exiles and prospective emigrants in Babylon well exemplifies this truth:

Come all you who are thirsty, come to the waters.
And you who have no money, come buy and eat! Come,
buy wine and milk, without money and without cost.
(55:1)

Those whose hands are truly empty find that the simple invitation to extend the empty hand of faith is most appropriate to their condition. Salvation is by faith alone—the one area, as James points out, where the poor may be said to have the advantage (2:5). And this, too, is part of the Good News to the poor.³²

5. Liberating Justice and Forensic Justification

In 1513 at the University of Wittenberg, a German professor of Old Testament by the name of Martin Luther was preparing his lectures on the Psalms for a course that was to last three years. F.F. Bruce reminds us how Luther was struck by the prayer of Psalm 31:1, "in thy justice, liberate me."³³ Medieval theology had stressed the penal, distributive dimension of justice, but working without reference to the Exodus paradigm, had failed to recognize the dimension of liberating justice. With his linguistic insights from the Psalms about God's liberating justice and faith as personal trust in God, Luther eventually returned to expound Romans and the Reformation exploded in Europe.

What Luther discovered in the Psalms about God's liberating justice, Latin American theologians, going behind the Psalms to the Exodus paradigm, have developed more fully. The Exodus enables us to understand why in the age-old conflict between oppressors and oppressed, God's distributive justice is liberating justice for the oppressed, who are suffering injustice, but penal justice for the oppressors like Pharaoh, who refuse to repent.³⁴

Given this fundamental sociological-linguistic insight, we can begin to appreciate the revolutionary character of Paul's letter to the Romans, where the fundamental theme is God's liberating justice, forensic justification being the decisive initial expression.

A Latin American *relectura* of Romans 1:16-18 reads like this:

Not in the least am I ashamed of our Christian message of Good News to the poor—I'm actually proud of it. Far from some religious "opiate of the people" it rather constitutes God's revolutionary dynamite and explodes on the scene of human history underneath all in his creation that oppresses. This gospel brings substantial healing and holistic liberation to all who integrate the message into their lives, be they religious legalists or

secular humanists. In this Good News for the poor God's liberating justice for all the oppressed detonates repeatedly in human history, destroying empires and institutions as well as individuals who harden their hearts against God's historical project of cosmic liberation. Our subversive, revolutionary message, of course, is one thing affluent oppressors do not eagerly grab up. Rather it is especially sought by the oppressed and poor and all who like them stand with empty hands, stretched out in faith—and then enthusiastically pass on this transforming Good News to others of similar condition and like attitude. God's righteous indignation is plainly revealed from heaven against all institutionalized violence and oppression, because in their zeal to oppress, people go to the extreme of making the truth itself "un desaparecido" [vanished victim in Argentinian repression].³⁵

The theme and structure of Romans make clear that Christ's propitiatory and redemptive work together with forensic justification (3:21-26) represent the decisive divine acts of liberating justice. From these deep founts flow all other facets

What evangelicals often forget is that justification by faith alone does not constitute a conservative prop for the status quo: it is radical, revolutionary theology.

of that "freedom of the Christian man" which Paul and Luther celebrated.³⁶

Romans 5: Freedom from the eschatological wrath of God, and its historical outworkings.

Romans 6: Freedom from the inherent tendency to oppress.

Romans 7: Freedom from the domination and condemnation of the Law.

Romans 8: Cosmic liberation from futility and death.

Romans 9-11: The universal scope of God's historical project of liberation, embracing both Jews and Gentiles.

Romans 12-13: Revolutionary subordination under imperial domination.

Romans 14-15:13: Liberating praxis for both strong and weak within the Christian base communities.

Romans 15:14-33: Paul's personal project for spreading the revolution throughout the Roman empire.

Romans 16: Greetings to five subversive house churches springing up under Emperor Nero's nose.

Paul thus makes explicit in the structure of Romans that forensic justification is the great foundation stone on which all other dimensions of God's liberating justice and Christian freedom are erected (5:1-2ff.). Ernest Käsemann has pointed out that in Romans 2:1-16 Paul expounds the apocalyptic theme of the final judgment, where God manifests his ultimate distributive justice, *before* turning to the justification of the ungodly (4:5), which is the dialectical and paradoxical anticipation of that final judgment.³⁷

Why, then, is forensic justification fundamental in the evangelism of the poor? First, because the poor and oppressed, like all other descendants of Adam, are sinners, guilty before God and in need of forensic justification as classically expounded by Paul in Galatians and Romans, and by Luther and Calvin at the Reformation. Historically, the poor and oppressed in Israel sought to receive justice "in the gate" of their community. However, as in any modern culture, the opposite often occurred. Wealthy oppressors could bribe judges and witnesses, pay for sophisticated lawyers and intimidate the poor with violence. The biblical doctrine of forensic justification is

Good News especially for the poor, because it testifies to a Supreme Judge who cannot be bribed, a superlative advocate who need not be hired—and who even pays for us the enormous debt that stands in the books against us.

What evangelicals often forget is that justification by faith alone does not constitute a conservative prop for the status quo: it is radical, revolutionary theology. As F. F. Bruce has pointed out, historically this doctrine has revolutionized and democratized European ecclesiastical and political structures, leading to the collapse of feudal hierarchy, overthrow of monarchy, rejection of the ideology of divine right of kings, etc. Bruce concludes:

The man who has had such personal dealings with God, and has been raised to his feet by almighty power and grace, can never be enslaved in spirit to any other man. The doctrine of justification by faith underlies and undergirds the forms which democracy has taken in those lands most deeply influenced by the Reformation; it is a bastion of true freedom. Luther was charged with "inciting revolution by putting little people in mind of their

prodigious dignity before God." How could he deny the charge? The gospel, as he had learned it from Paul, does precisely that.³⁸

We should add that just as the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries saw ecclesiastical and political structures begin the process of democratization, so in the 19th and 20th centuries the great conflict has centered more on the democratization of economic structures in the various types of New Deal, Fair Deal, Great Society, Socialism, Marxism, Communism, etc.

We also need to appreciate and develop the profound anthropological and psychological implications of our proclamation of justification by faith in contexts of oppression and poverty. Increasing numbers of Marxist leaders and liberal or humanist social workers are coming to the conclusion that the most devastating and *irreparable* effects of poverty are not the external physical deprivations, terrible as these are. The most insuperable problem is the continual shame, humiliation and insults that crush all sense of dignity, self-esteem and self-worth and systematically eliminate all basis of hope for change.

Bruce J. Malina's recent anthropological study of "Honor and Shame" as pivotal values in the ancient biblical world provides fundamental insight for the proclamation of justification by faith to the poor.³⁹ By relating Malina's insights to Paul's teaching in Romans, we can see that for Paul, forensic justification of the ungodly implies *social vindication* on the human plane. Käsemann has pointed out the significance of Romans 3:4, which he calls a "key passage for the whole of Paul's doctrine of justification."⁴⁰ Here the Apostle cites Psalm 51:6 (LXX): "So that you may be justified—proved right—in your words and prevail in your judging." Divine, forensic justification occurs in a conflictive social context and carries with it the implication of social vindication. This dimension of social vindication Paul makes even more explicit in Romans 5:1-11, where three times he repeats "we boast" (5:2,3,11)—the same verb earlier used to describe *improper* boasting in human works (3:27; 4:2). In Romans 5:5 the Apostle adds that Christian hope does not *put to shame*.

To appreciate fully the significance of these texts for the poor and oppressed, we must recall passages like Hannah's

Song (1 Samuel 2:1-10) and Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55). Here oppressed, humiliated women exalt in their social vindication in the presence of their oppressors and detractors. Hebraic "justice in the gate" undoubtedly provided countless similar experiences of social vindication. The decisive experience of forensic justification thus carries with it not only peace with God, reconciliation and adoption as his sons (Rom. 5:1, 10-11; 8:14-17), but also implies social vindication of the despised, the humiliated and rejected. When we realize what justification and the accompanying sense of social vindication can mean to the poor, we can perhaps begin to understand why Luther's early preaching was soon followed by the Peasants' Revolt. Evangelicals like to recall how Paul's Epistle to the Romans has sparked four great theological revolutions in the church: those of Augustine, Luther, Wesley, and Barth.⁴¹

U.S.A., and China) find themselves characterized by common trends and agreement in their fundamental ideologies:

- a. slavish, uncritical pursuit of technological innovation and domination;
- b. unprecedented growth of state power with common idolization of military power;
- c. unscrupulous use of violence, with integrative propaganda used to mask their atrocities.⁴⁴

To protect and liberate the poor and oppressed from the domination of the great empires throughout history, to foster fullness of life before the onslaughts of the powers of death, God puts his Secret Weapon in the hands of the poor and oppressed—the power of his Holy Spirit, communicated through his Word and Sacraments. Thus fundamental to the

Biblical Christianity has never been a matter of the affluent evangelizing the poor; rather . . . it is the poor who evangelize their affluent oppressors.

A fifth revolution for the poor and oppressed of the Third World awaits the discovery and proclamation of the full implications of Paul's teaching on forensic justification as the first and decisive expression of God's liberating justice.

6. Regeneration—New Birth, baptism of the Holy Spirit: Power to the Powerless

Fundamental to the proclamation of the Good News to the poor is the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. Decades ago biblical theologians began to emphasize that "Spirit" in biblical theology is not to be equated with the negative Greek philosophical concept of non-material.⁴³ Rather in biblical theology God's Spirit represents something positive: divine power—"You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you" (Acts 1:8).

As we have seen in our analysis of oppression, Scripture shows that human life is conflictive: society consists of a hierarchy of multiple layers prone to oppression, hence the weaker, dominated elements continually struggle for liberation. Joel's prophecy, quoted by Peter in his Pentecost sermon makes clear that God gives his Holy Spirit not to reinforce the privileges and power of the oppressors. Rather God puts the power of his Spirit on the side of the weak and oppressed to effect a democratization of power in human life and society:

I will pour out my Spirit [divine power] upon *all* flesh [humanity in its weakness]; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy [marking the end of male domination]; and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams [the generation gap bridged; the end of domination by the elders and their traditions]; yea, and on my male slaves and my female slaves in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy [liberation from socio-economic domination as the poor become history-makers].

This biblical teaching on the revolutionary democratizing work of God's Spirit has suffered a thousand distortions in church history. It has been co-opted by political and ecclesiastical hierarchies to justify the cruelest oppression and religious persecution. It has been subverted by Christian militarists of all ideologies to justify the slaughter of millions in war—despite Zechariah's rebuke and promise: "Not by military might and power, but by my Spirit, says the sovereign Liberator" (4:6). Jacques Ellul has pointed out how the three great oppressive empires in today's world (the U.S.S.R., the

proclamation of the gospel to the weak, the powerless, the poor, is God's promise: "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit is come upon you" (Acts 1:8):

- power to love the brethren and create authentic human community (Rom. 5:5)
- power to love even your enemies who oppress and persecute you (Rom. 12:14-21)
- power to bear witness and suffer martyrdom, to enlist even your persecutors in the ranks of the apostles (Acts 7:9).

7. Salvation and Holistic Integration

Fundamental to the Good News to the poor and oppressed is the proclamation of full salvation in all the breadth and depth of biblical teaching. C. I. Scofield in his note on Romans 1:6 wrote: "The Hebrew and Greek words for 'salvation' imply the ideas of *deliverance*, safety, preservation, *healing* and soundness: 'salvation' is the great inclusive word of the Gospel." In the Spanish translation of Scofield, the first definition given for salvation is "liberación." This breadth of the biblical concept is easily confirmed in texts such as Zechariah's prophecy in Luke 1:67-79, and Mary's Magnificat (Luke 46:55). Zechariah speaks of being "*saved* from the hand of our *enemies*, and from the power of all who hate us" (Luke 1:71). Despite the obvious breadth of the New Testament concept of salvation indicated by the Greek word usage and summarized in Scofield's note, popular evangelicalism tends to limit the meaning of New Testament teaching on salvation to justification, forgiveness, and spiritual regeneration. John Stott has given a well-argued defense of this common, restricted interpretation of salvation.⁴⁵ However, as I have argued elsewhere, Stott's sharp distinction between secular political liberation and spiritual salvation may well rest more on a platonizing of the New Testament linguistic data rather than historical-grammatical exegesis.⁴⁶ A proper *historical* approach must begin with the Old Testament understanding of the *multiple* blessings of the Abrahamic covenant of grace as these blessings continue in the New Testament.

Hermeneutically, we might point out that Calvin, insisting on the fundamental continuity of the Old and New Testaments, found it necessary to stress that the Old Testament always contained a vertical, *non-material* dimension, including justification and forgiveness.⁴⁷ Latin American theologians, confronted with centuries of platonizing interpretations of key biblical texts, have stressed that the New Testament offer of

salvation contains a *material* dimension, including salvation from enemies, liberation from oppressors.⁴⁸

Within the Old Testament itself we see a progressive deepening of the teaching on justification and forgiveness, especially after the exile, and in Jeremiah's proclamation of the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-34; Ps. 130:8). Similarly in the New Testament, Jesus begins by promising "liberation" to the oppressed (Lk. 4:18-19), but uses the same word (*aphesis*) in the great commission with reference to *forgiveness* of sins (Lk. 24:47). Paul's gospel begins with the broad concept of liberating justice (Rom. 1:16-17) but soon focuses in on our deepest need: forensic justification of the ungodly. Elsewhere I have shown in detail how Isaiah 53 presents salvation in three dimensions: as forensic justification based on penal substitution (the evangelical perspective), as physical healing (the Pentecostal perspective), and as liberation from socio-political oppression (the Latin American perspective).⁴⁹ The Johannine interpretation of salvation in terms of abundant life (10:10) confirms the conclusion that "salvation" should not be reduced to the non-material, interpersonal dimension, even in Paul.⁵⁰

However, in proclaiming the Good News of full salvation to the poor and oppressed, biblical theology requires that we proceed with historical awareness and pastoral sensitivity. Popular pentecostal "prosperity" theology lacks biblical balance and destroys the historical dialectic of biblical teaching in this area. Even in Deuteronomy, while obedience brings prosperity, affluence produces apostasy and judgment.⁵¹ In later historical contexts, obedience and fidelity often augments oppression and persecution (Ps. 44; cf. Job). Similarly in the New Testament, while the promises of the Abrahamic covenant continue in all their breadth,⁵² fidelity may also result in persecution and loss of goods (Heb. 10:32-39); hence those who are justified but dispossessed of their earthly goods learn to boast and rejoice even in their common experiences of oppression and persecution (Rom. 5:3; 8:31-39). Such texts remind us that we should not restrict "full salvation" to the purely vertical and non-material; but neither dare we allow materialist, secular or Marxist philosophies to dictate to the church an agenda of "bread alone" nor usurp the biblical emphasis that Jesus came to save us from our sins (Mt. 1:21).⁵³

8. Christian Base Communities and House Churches vs. Empire and Priestly Hierarchy

One tragic dimension of the suffering of the poor is poignantly expressed in Proverbs: "The poor are shunned by their *neighbors*" (14:20). "A poor person is shunned by all his *relatives*—how much more do his *friends* avoid him" (19:7). Because of this devastating social alienation, fundamental to the Good News for the poor is Jesus' purpose as expressed classically in the promises contained in Matthew's gospel: "Where two or three are assembled in my name, I am right there in their midst" (13:20). "I will multiply and build up my house churches and base communities, and the power of death shall not prevail against them" (Mt. 16:18). The radical New Testament teaching on authentic Christian community as embodied in base communities and charismatic house churches is part of the Good News to the poor. Luke describes the great banquet from which the poor are not excluded or shunned but rather eagerly sought out and urged to come (Lk. 14:12-24).

This strand of the gospel is Good News to all the poor and oppressed in their social alienation. Jesus offers his personal friendship, but also the social solidarity of the new communities that gather in his name. Jesus promises the fullness of his personal solidarity and presence to groups of two or three that do not even come up to minimal standards for Jewish

synagogues. Thus he reminds us that authentic Christian community commonly stands in conflict with the traditional authoritative hierarchies that seek to legitimate and promote the privileges and interests of the dominant classes and empires.

Ironically, the radical ecclesiology of Matthew's gospel provides the very texts that have been co-opted to legitimate the traditional church hierarchy in Latin America (Mt. 16:13-20; 18:15-20). Yet when Paul describes the "church" in Rome he speaks of persecuted emigrants and slaves in five house churches—a far cry from our modern image of St. Peter's basilica, Pope, curia, college of cardinals, etc.⁵⁴

The radical New Testament ecclesiology with its house churches and charismatic, democratic leadership enables a Christian assembly to devote its full economic resources to the needs of the poor instead of squandering them in vast building programs and professional salaries. Whenever Christians succumb to the "edifice" complex and professionalize the clergy, inevitably that is bad news for the poor. Then we may offer only erudite discourses in ornate architecture, but must leave it to leftist political groups to take up pressing concerns such as daily bread for widows, clean water and decent housing for the slums, and medical care for impoverished families. A recent issue of *Newsweek* estimates that in Brazil alone there are 60,000 Christian base communities. The article says:

With the *Bible* as their primer, members studied their responsibilities—and their rights—as citizens. They dug wells and built health centers and schools. And they learned how to protest when the government tried to thwart their projects. . . . Their membership—approximately 10 million—makes them perhaps the most important force for change in the giant, fast-growing country.⁵⁵

Bill Cook has pointed out that individualistic Protestant evangelism of the poor has resulted in individual upward social mobility, while the base communities are more faithful to New Testament teaching on solidarity in Christian community. He concludes: "This fundamental flow in our Calvinistic ethic—our rank individualism—is responsible, I believe, for the superficiality of much of Protestant evangelism."⁵⁶

The tremendous force of the Christian base communities and their leaders in Latin America represents an unprecedented threat to oppressive regimes, along with the traditional hierarchies that have legitimated them. The powers of death have responded with a wave of institutionalized violence, assassination, torture, imprisonment and exile affecting more than 1200 priests, nuns and evangelical pastors since 1968. However, the base communities and house churches continue to multiply and grow, because the resurrected Lord of Life is in their midst. That too is a fundamental part of the Good News to the poor.

9. The Blessed Hope and Realizable Eschatology

Fundamental to the Good News for the poor and oppressed is the full biblical teaching on the Christian hope. As in the case of salvation and liberation we may say that hope in the Scriptures has two *spatial* dimensions: the spiritual, heavenly sphere, and the material, earthly sphere. Hope in the Good News for the poor also contains two *temporal* dimensions: prophetic, "realizable" eschatology, and apocalyptic consummation. The apocalyptic dimension, dominant in the New Testament, includes the triumphant personal return of Jesus as World Liberator, with the resurrection of the dead and final world judgment—the New Jerusalem descending from heaven to earth.

Historically, the apocalyptic and utopian elements in Scrip-

ture sprang from small, weak, oppressed communities in times of cruel persecution; hence they have particular relevance for the oppressed and poor today. Institutionalized violence and martyrdom is commonly their lot, but the apocalyptic hope assures them that the resurrected Liberator, whom they love and follow, will personally return in certain triumph. Fallen young martyrs, tragically cut off in the prime of life, will be raised to share with Jesus in his millennial reign on earth (Rev. 20:1-6). Universal resurrection will be followed by world judgment. The single criterion for world judgment will be solidarity with Jesus as he confronts us in the person of the poor and oppressed: the hungry, thirsty, naked, homeless, sick and imprisoned.⁵⁷ The blessed hope of the Liberator's triumphant personal return, millennial reign, universal resurrection with world judgment based on the single criterion of good works done for the poor—all this is glorious good news to the poor, but a drastic threat to all who oppress and persecute them. This hope is also a threat, as Jesus' parable shows, to all whose egotism and greed so dominate their horizon that they remain indifferent to the sufferings of the poor, and who thus passively support the mechanisms and structures of oppression and persecution.

The prophetic dimension of Christian hope, more prominent in the Old Testament, refers to those earthly first fruits and anticipations of the millennial reign and eternal state—what we might call “realizable eschatology.” Although New Testament writers, with their anticipation of an imminent parousia, commonly stressed the purely futuristic, apocalyptic dimension, 2000 years of church history reminds us that we dare not neglect the Old Testament, prophetic, “realizable” strand. In Romans Paul speaks of the Old Testament Scriptures, with their strong elements of material, political, realizable eschatology, as providing a firm basis of hope even for gentile believers (15:4, 12-13). Providentially, but perhaps unintentionally, the Apostle also points us to this essential function of the Old Testament in his final letter to Timothy (3:14-17), as we shall see in our final section.

Various materialist, secular and Marxist movements consistently offer the poor the hope of improved earthly conditions. Non-Christian religions of the oriental and neo-platonic types offer escape from the pain and suffering of the material realm. Tragically, most traditional Christian theology and evangelism have not faithfully maintained the powerful biblical dialectic between the heavenly and earthly, and between realizable eschatology and apocalyptic consummation. Especially since Augustine, neo-platonism to a greater or lesser extent has dominated virtually all Christian eschatology. Recently, negative overreactions to naturalist materialism and Marxist faiths often further exaggerate this fundamental perversion of biblical teaching. Affluent Christians commonly are quite happy with this domestication of the Christian hope. With their material needs abundantly satisfied, they eagerly respond to promises of escape from future earthly tribulation to an eternal life in the heavenly sphere.

The results of this situation may be observed throughout the Third World: middle-class missionaries, as well as national evangelists who uncritically accept their ideology, establish churches in the most terrible slum conditions, but offer only a neo-platonic hope of escape to heaven. Marxists in the same environment tell the poor: you can become a history-maker” and change these miserable conditions; work with us to establish the new classless society, free from imperialist domination, with peace, freedom and justice for all.

Latin American Christian base communities have sought to reappropriate the fire that Marxist groups have stolen. While usually not explicitly premillennial, the emphasis on the ma-

terial, earthly eschatology is much closer to early patristic premillennialism than to the Augustinian neo-platonic spiritualization that has dominated both Catholic and Protestant eschatology, even in its current premillennial and dispensational forms. The dominant, recurring notes in the prophetic hope for the poor as they are expressed in the base communities are: peace, freedom, and justice.

The peace on earth, which angelic messengers announced to poor shepherds at the Liberator's birth, first came to clear expression in the history of human thought in the oracles of Isaiah and Micah. These two prophets spoke of peace to a poor, oppressed nation that was reeling under the impact of cruel Assyrian invasion (Mic. 4:1-5; Is. 2:1-5; cf. 9:1-6). In Micah the hope of the poor for universal, permanent peace on earth appears to result when Israel's great day of atonement and Jubilee law is extended to all the gentile nations, with the result that “every man will sit under his own vine and under his own fig tree” (4:3).

Just distribution of land (representing the means of production in an agricultural society) clearly is essential to universal, permanent peace in Micah's vision. In continuity with the Exodus paradigm, the Jubilee law, and Micah's vision, Jesus also focused on radical land reform and Jubilee celebration as intrinsic to his mission and Good News to the poor (Lk. 4:19; Mk. 10:29-31; Mt. 5:5-6). Our Lord is quite explicit that just redistribution of possessions is not merely a future apocalyptic element, but an essential part of eschatology that is realizable “in this present age” (Mk. 10:30).⁵⁸

However, Micah's prophetic hope for world peace and economic justice refers also to universal conversion, freedom, education in Torah, and disarmament. Today when nuclear holocaust threatens the human species—affluent and poor alike—with destruction, when ferocious wars between communist states and between Islamic nations have discredited alternative ideologies, it is time for Christian evangelists to reclaim that fundamental element in our original message of “peace on earth.” Militaristic empires ever seek to instrumentalize the poor in their efforts at world conquest. The Christian gospel offers the only firm basis for peace—based on the divine promises and commands—and seeks to enlist the poor not as cannon fodder for empirical conflict, but as courageous peacemakers (Mt. 5:9).

The poor, who commonly suffer the institutionalized violence condemned in Scripture, are exhorted to abstain from vengeance (Mt. 5:38-48; Lk. 6:27-36; Rom. 12:14-21), stop the vicious cycle of violence, and establish communities that refrain from war and that expand by the power of God's Word and Spirit rather than by military conquest (Zech. 4:6; Is. 9:7). Beginning with the angelic message to the shepherds, God in the gospel has committed the great hope and key to peace into the hands of the poor. As they share their Good News, a world weary of wars and rumors of war discovers the only firm basis for hope: faith in the promises of God and obedience to the clear commands of Jesus and his apostles.⁵⁹ Biblical Christianity has never been a matter of the affluent evangelizing the poor; rather, in the first century as today, it is the poor who evangelize their affluent oppressors.⁶⁰

10. The Epistemological Privilege and the Epistemological Certainty of the Poor

Fundamental to the Good News to the poor is the confident affirmation that the Scriptures attesting this gospel are true, not religious myth or political propaganda in the service of oppressive imperial ideologies. Latin American theologian Hugo Assmann apparently was the first to speak of the “epistemological privilege of the poor.”⁶¹ This epistemological

privilege forms part of Luke's Good News to the poor. Actually, you might say it started when the angels announced Messiah's birth to poor, illiterate shepherds. This constituted an unprecedented "headstart" program, and they managed to locate the Messiah some two years before the wealthy wise men managed to confirm their "star hypothesis." Then when the seventy[two] return from evangelizing the poor in the Galilean villages, Jesus is filled with joy through the Holy Spirit and exclaims: "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children" (10:21-22). In contrast and conflict with elitist-controlled education, Jesus celebrates the democratization of knowledge and education signaled by his incarnation, miracles and teaching ministry. Culminating the educational revolution begun in the Old Testament,⁶² this democratization of knowledge and education constitutes a fundamental dimension of the Good News to the poor as recorded in the gospels. It is also accompanied by a corresponding judgment on an oppressive elite (Lk. 10:21) who substitute imperial propaganda for sound education and permit their ideologies to blind them both to the revelatory character of Jesus' Good News to the poor and to the imminent divine judgment on the oppressors (Lk. 10:10-16; cf. Mt. 23). As Howard Marshall explains, the "infants" [nēpiois] in Jesus' saying represent the poor, needy and oppressed who accept the gospel.⁶³ Jacques Ellul has prophetically analyzed how propaganda functions in contemporary societies, especially in the dominant empires of the U.S.S.R., U.S.A., and China. He points out that it is not the illiterate peasant, but precisely the educated elite—those who gorge themselves on technologically processed information—who are most susceptible to and most completely dominated by imperial propaganda that is not disruptive but "integrative."⁶⁴

Complementary to the biblical teaching on the epistemological privilege of the poor is our evangelical emphasis on epistemological certainty. However, what is commonly forgotten in all our weighty tomes on propositional revelation and inerrancy is that epistemological certainty, grounded in the work of the Holy Spirit and the authority and truth of God's Word (incarnate, preached and inscripturated), is not ideologically neutral nor the special prerogative of the affluent, but rather constitutes a fundamental strand of the Good News to the poor (Lk. 16:17; Mt. 5:17-19; Lk. 21:33; Mk. 13:31; Mt. 24:35; Jn. 17:17). Jesus' stress on the epistemological privilege and certainty of the poor is, of course, also elaborated by Paul as part of his understanding of the Good News to the poor (1 Cor. 1:18-31, esp. 27-29; 2:1-16, esp. 18).⁶⁵

The radical implication of this evangelical certainty strand in the Good News to the poor is perhaps best communicated by a Latin American paraphrase of Paul's *locus classicus* on the inspiration of the Old Testament (2 Tim. 3:14-17):

But as for you, Timothy, keep applying to your praxis all you have learned and thus become certain of. Remember the godly women in your family who dared to teach you, and be grateful that you were not (like so many) consigned to illiteracy, but from infancy were taught the Old Testament Scriptures. This subversive literature is able to make you wise for salvation, healing, and integral liberation through commitment to God's Spirit-empowered Liberator and Messiah. Our Hebrew Scriptures do not at all reflect the idolatrous propaganda and ideologies of oppressive empires; rather in their entirety they have been breathed out by God's powerful Spirit of truth. Hence they are helpful in every age for instructing the humble poor and illiterates in true wisdom; for reproving oppressors of all sorts; for correcting

our praxis, and for training us in justice that is truly liberating; in order that the ministry of every believer may have a prophetic quality, and that he or she may be equipped and trained to carry out the kind of good works that don't simply create passivity and paternalist dependence, but that really help the poor and oppressed to discover their full dignity and freedom as God's sons.

The inspiration, perspicuity and authority of the Scripture, according to Paul, thus also constitutes an inalienable strand in the gospel, the Good News to the illiterate, the poor and the poorly educated.

Conclusion

We have outlined ten elements that are fundamental in biblical theology for the proclamation of the Good News to the poor and oppressed. In 1970 black evangelist Tom Skinner brought students at the Urbana convention to their feet cheering with his ringing declaration, "The Liberator has come!"⁶⁶ Often since then I've had to ask myself: Do affluent white evangelicals preach a different gospel? Are the conflictive, triumphant strains of Jesus' Good News to the poor and woes to the rich still clearly recognizable in our message? Or in our zeal to make "evangelical" synonymous with "conservative" have we utterly failed to conserve those fundamentals so essential to our Lord and to Paul—those characteristics of the gospel that make it *preferentially* Good News to the poor? There is, as Paul insists, "no other gospel" (Gal. 1:6-9).

¹ By "poor" I mean those lacking elements necessary to human life: land or employment, food, drink, clothing, housing and health—both physical and psychological (honor, dignity, sense of worth, identity, hope, freedom). See Job 24:1-2, Mt. 25:31-46. Jacques Ellul has written extensively seeking to define both the biblical and sociological concepts. See his *Money and Power* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1984 [1954, rev. 1979]), pp. 141-151; *The Betrayal of the West* (New York: Seabury, 1978 [1975]), pp. 85-125.

² Thomas D. Hanks, *God So Loved the Third World* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1983), pp. 38-39, 58-60; see also Elsa Tamez, *The Bible of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1982); Jacques Pons, *L'Oppression dans L'Ancien Testament* (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1981).

³ John Pollock, *Wilberforce* (London: Lion, 1977), p. 238.

⁴ Young Kim, "The Vocabulary of Oppression in the Old Testament," Drew University Ph.D. thesis, 1981 (available from University Microfilms International). Kim's outstanding analysis of the mechanisms of oppression in the Old Testament provides the starting point for my analysis of the levels of oppression in Luke.

⁵ Hanks, op. cit., pp. 50-60, esp. 53, 54; Kim, op. cit., p. 264, citing Dt. 28:27-42; Is. 38:10; Ps. 103:3-6; cf., the abundant pentecostal and charismatic literature related to this theme, but often rather myopic in exegesis, hermeneutics and theological perspective.

⁶ Juan Stam, "El Epocalipsis y el imperialismo" in Elsa Tamez and Saul Trinidad, eds., *Capitalismo: Violencia y Anti-vida* (San José: EDUCA/DEI, 1978, Vol. I, 351-394. Richard J. Cassidy, *Jesus, Politics and Society: A Study of Luke's Gospel* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1979), pp. 50-97; Richard J. Cassidy and Phillip J. Scharper, eds., *Political Issues in Luke-Acts* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1983), pp. 38-48.

⁷ I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1978), pp. 241f., 868f. (note especially Lk. 22:2; 23:5); Richard J. Cassidy, *Jesus, Politics and Society*, pp. 52-54; 63-64, 92-93, 101-107, 114-127; *Political Issues*, pp. 146-167; Colin Brown, ed., *Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), II, p. 799.

⁸ Walter E. Pilgrim, *Good News to the Poor: Wealth and Poverty in Luke-Acts* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1981); Luke T. Johnson, *Fortress*, 1981; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX, Anchor Bible 28* (New York: Doubleday, 1981), I, 247-251; Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974, p. 41); I. Howard Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), pp. 122, 141-144, 206-209; W. Graham Scroggie, *A Guide to the Gospels* (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1948), pp. 373f.; Kim, op. cit., in his treatment of the Old Testament mentions specifically the rich, merchants, creditors, employees and landholders (people of the land), pp. 273-277.

⁹ Helmut Flinders, *St. Luke: Theologian of Redemptive History* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967), pp. 9-10; Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty, *All We're Meant to Be* (Waco: Word, 1974), pp. 215f.; James G. Sigountos and Myron Shank, "Public Roles for Women in the Pauline Church: A Reappraisal of the Evidence," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, Vol. 26:3 (Sept. 1983), pp. 283-295. Note the neglect of the factor of oppression and Exodus paradigm in Scroggie, op. cit., p. 191; Marshall, *Luke: Historian*, pp. 139f.; Morris, op. cit., p. 40; James B. Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1981), pp. 36f., 79-93; Stephen B. Clark, *Man and Woman in Christ* (Ann Arbor: Servant, 1980), pp. 226-231.

¹⁰ While occasionally noted by Lukan specialists, the age factor does not appear to have received much attention, nor has its place in the overall context of Luke's teaching on oppression and liberation. Kim, op. cit., notes the role of elders as oppressors in the Old Testament (Is. 3:14-15; Num. 22:7, 14; Judg. 8:6, 16; 10:8, 14). On the role of elders in Luke-Acts, see Lk. 9:22; 20:1; 22:24-30, 52, 66; Acts 4:5, 8, 23; 6:12; 22:5; 23:14; 24:1; 25:15; cf. 2 Pet. 5:1-5; 2 Tim. 4:12; Jas. 1:27. For the role of children and youths, see Lk. 1:15-17, 41, 66, 76-78; 2:6-7, 8-12, 16, 22, 24, 50-52; 7:11-17; 9:38, 46-48; Acts 7:19; Scroggie, op. cit., pp. 375f.; Morris, op. cit., p. 41; Fitzmyer, op. cit., p. 188; cf. Mt. 2:18-21; 18:2-5; 19:13, 14; Mk. 10:141-15.

¹¹ Scroggie, op. cit., pp. 365-370, 380; Morris, op. cit., p. 80; John G. Gager, "The Social World of Early Christianity" in *The Bible and Liberation* (Berkeley: C.R.R.E., 1976), pp. 120-130.

¹² Marshall moves in this direction, but does not quite arrive; *Luke: Historian*, pp. 94-102.

¹³ "Francis Schaeffer, 1912-1984," in *Eternity*, July-August, 1984, p. 12.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Kenneth S. Kantzer with Paul W. Fromer, "A Theologian Looks at Schuller," *Christianity Today*, August 10, 1984, p. 23.

¹⁶ Hanks, op. cit., pp. 9-10 (on *nagas*).

¹⁷ José Pereira de Souza, "Los Efectos de la Cruzada de Costa Rica 1972 sobre las iglesias evangélicas de San José," Masters thesis, Seminario Bíblico Latinoamericano, 1973.

- ¹⁸ None was richer than He; none became poorer than He." Philip E. Hughes, *Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), p. 299. C. K. Barrett refers to "the absolute naked poverty of the crucifixion" in *A Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1973), p. 223.
- ¹⁹ Ronald J. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1977), pp. 95-98; Sider, ed., *Living More Simply* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1980); *Life Style in the 80's* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982).
- ²⁰ Jon Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1978); see my critique, Tomás Hanks, *Opresión, Pobreza y Liberación* (Miami: Caribe, 1982), pp. 121-127.
- ²¹ Cited by Harvey Conn, "Sin in the City: the Privatization Myth," *Occasional Essays XII* (June 1984), p. 48.
- ²² Ernesto Cardenal, *The Gospel in Solentiname* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1979). See also the literature cited on the Christian base communities under note 56 below.
- ²³ Hanks, *God So Loved*, pp. 73-96.
- ²⁴ Ibid., also sections of my doctoral thesis on propitiation and wrath, "The Theology of Divine Anger in the Psalms of Lament," Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1972, pp. 1-24, 483-586.
- ²⁵ Hanks, *God So Loved*, p. 16.
- ²⁶ Ibid., pp. 105-108; Pons, op. cit., pp. 27-52; Kim, op. cit., pp. 22-27, 45-46, 178-184; G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringren, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament IV*, 478-487.
- ²⁷ José P. Miranda points out the failure of Marx's dialectics in having nothing to offer as counterpoint to our last enemy: "When Marx avoids the problem of death and therefore does not even glimpse the possibility of resurrection, it is not precisely his lack of faith in God but rather insufficient dialectics for which we must approach him." *Marx and the Bible: A Critique of the Philosophy of Oppression* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1974), p. 279; cf. Sobrino, op. cit., pp. 259-272; 374-381.
- ²⁸ Donald B. Kraybill, *The Upside-Down Kingdom* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1978); cf. Jacques Ellul, *Changer de Revolution* (Paris: Seuil, 1982).
- ²⁹ John H. Yoder, *The Original Revolution: Essays in Christian Pacifism* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1971); Norman K. Gottwald, *Tribes of Yahweh* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1979), p. 593. Also, see note 40 below.
- ³⁰ Pilgrim, op. cit., pp. 129-134; Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, pp. 694f. (on Zacchaeus, Lk. 19:1-10).
- ³¹ Luke 3:18 (cf. 10-17); Rom. 2:16 (cf. 1-15); Rev. 14:6 (cf. v. 7); First World commentators often have difficulty seeing what is so "good" about the news in such texts; thus Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), pp. 272f.; but cf. Marshall, pp. 61, 149 and Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), pp. 56-57.
- ³² As G. C. Berkouwer points out, "Calvin aptly compares faith to an empty vessel" [Institutes III:7], *Faith and Justification* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954); See Donald G. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), I, pp. 223-253; Peter Davids, *Commentary on James* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), pp. 110-112; James Adamson, *The Epistle of James* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), pp. 108-110.
- ³³ F. F. Bruce, *Paul, Apostle of the Free Spirit* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1977), pp. 470f.
- ³⁴ Thomas Hanks, "The Kingdom and the Poor: Perspectives from Psalm 72," *Occasional Essays X1* (June 1983), esp. pp. 67-83.
- ³⁵ For the linguistic basis of the *relectura* of Rom. 1:18 (violence . . . oppression), which depends on the LXX translation of Hebrew terms for violence and oppression, see my review of Jacques Pons, *L'oppression dans L'Ancien Testament, Occasional Essays X1* (June 1983), esp. pp. 103-105.
- ³⁶ Martin Luther, "Treatise on the Liberty of a Christian Man," [1520] in *Three Treatises* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1943). Regarding the structure of Romans, Anders Nygren's commentary is a helpful starting point.
- ³⁷ Käsemann, *Romans*, pp. 56-57.
- ³⁸ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (London: Tyndale, 1963), pp. 39-40.
- ³⁹ Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from cultural anthropology* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), pp. 1-24. See also the anthropological emphasis in Peter Worsley, *The Three Worlds: Culture and World Development* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1984), pp. 41-44, 332-344. The significance of Worsley's work is pointed out by Christopher Hill in his review article, "Keeping One Half of the World Poor," *The [Manchester] Guardian* (overseas weekly edition), May 6, 1984, p. 23.
- ⁴⁰ Käsemann, *Romans*, pp. 56-57.
- ⁴¹ Bruce, *Romans*, pp. 58-60; *Paul*, pp. 469-474. Donald Grey Barnhouse made a similar point in his expository sermons on Romans but omitted mention of Barth. How different church history would have been had Phoebe failed to deliver Paul's letter!
- ⁴² Promising earlier developments, such as Hans Küng's work on justification in Barth's theology, Vatican II, and massive increase in Bible distribution and reading in Latin America, augmented both by the base communities and charismatic movement, have yet to bear their full fruit in the development and application of forensic justification. A growing number of Latin American theologians, both Protestant and Catholic, foresee significant theological development in this area.
- ⁴³ Walther Eichrodt, *The Theology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), I, p. 215. Few terms in the history of philosophy and theology are as widely used in so many senses with so little attention to careful definition.
- ⁴⁴ These points occur repeatedly throughout Ellul's 40 books and more than 600 articles. See, for instance, *The Technological Society* (New York: Vintage, 1964); pp. 284-291; *The Technological System* (New York: Continuum, 1980), pp. 55-57, pp. 134f.; *Propaganda* (New York: Vintage, 1965), pp. 74-75, 250-270; *The Betrayal of the West* (New York: Seabury, 1975), pp. 134, 193-200; for details, Joyce Main Hanks, *Jacques Ellul: A Comprehensive Bibliography* (Greenwich, Conn.: JAI Press, 1984), indexed references to technique (pp. 134f., 275f.), propaganda (pp. 131f., 274); state (p. 277); violence (pp. 136, 251); totalitarianism (pp. 135f., 280); U.S.A. (p. 281); U.S.S.R. (p. 277); war (pp. 136, 281f.).
- ⁴⁵ John R. W. Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1975), pp. 82-105. See also Robert Saucy, "Dispensationalism and the Salvation of the Kingdom," *Theological Students Fellowship Bulletin*, May-June, 1984, pp. 6-7.
- ⁴⁶ Hanks, *God So Loved*, p. 132, note 9.
- ⁴⁷ *Institutions of the Christian Religion*, Book III:X-XI.
- ⁴⁸ Mortimer Arias, *Salvación es Liberación* (Buenos Aires: Aurora, 1973); Gabriel Fackre, *The Christian Story* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), pp. 190-194.
- ⁴⁹ Hanks, *God So Loved*, p. 73-96.
- ⁵⁰ Elsa Tamez, op. cit., pp. 75-82.
- ⁵¹ Dt. 8; 32:13-18.
- ⁵² Rom. 5:1-11; 2 Cor. 8-9; on Mk. 10:29-31 see William L. Lane, *Commentary on the Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), pp. 370-373; Fernando Belo, *A Materialist Reading of the Gospel of Mark* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1981), pp. 173f.; "Vagabond Radicalism in Early Christianity," in Willy Schottruff and Wolfgang Stegemann, eds., *God of the Lowly* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1984), pp. 157-160.
- ⁵³ Ellul warns against the common notion that the poor must first have their material needs met before the gospel can be proclaimed to them; *Violence* (London: SCM, 1970), pp. 37-40.
- ⁵⁴ Bruce, *Romans*, pp. 266f. Correlation of the vocabulary for work with the women mentioned in this chapter shows that women seem to be doing the great bulk of the work in these house churches, probably because the men had to fulfill secular callings.
- ⁵⁵ *Newsweek*, Oct. 22, 1984, p. 13.
- ⁵⁶ Guillermo Cook, "The Protestant Predicament: From Base Ecclesial Community to Established Church—A Brazilian Case Study," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 8:3 (July 1984), p. 100; John Eagleson and Sergio Torres, eds., *The Challenge of Basic Christian Communities* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1979); on house churches, aside from traditional Plymouth Brethren literature, see Howard A. Snyder, *The Problem of Wine Skins* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1975); *The Community of the King* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1977); Robert Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980); David Prior, *The Church in the Home* (London: Marshall Morgan & Scott, 1983).
- ⁵⁷ Gustavo Gutierrez, *Teología de Liberación* (Salamanca: Sígueme, 1972), pp. 254-265. Gutierrez' interpretation on certain points, of course, may not be correct. If the "last word" on this intriguing but difficult text has been written, I have not seen it. Cf. Jacques Ellul, *The Ethics of Freedom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), pp. 319-331d; Robert McAfee Brown, *Unexpected News: Reading the Bible with Third World Eyes* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), pp. 127-141.
- ⁵⁸ See literature cited under note 52.
- ⁵⁹ John H. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), *passim*.
- ⁶⁰ Gustavo Gutierrez, *The Power of the Poor in History* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1983), pp. 16-22.
- ⁶¹ "Ponencia de Hugo Assmann," in Sergio Torres and John Eagleson, eds., *Teología en las Américas* (Salamanca: Sígueme, 1980), pp. 339-343, esp. p. 340.
- ⁶² Norman Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 409.
- ⁶³ I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, p. 434.
- ⁶⁴ *Propaganda, passim*: Michael R. Real, "Mass Communications and Propaganda in Technological Society" in Clifford G. Christians and Jay M. Van Hook, eds., *Jacques Ellul: Interpretative Essays* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1981), pp. 108-127.
- ⁶⁵ See, however, the distinction made in the Westminster Confession, Chapter I, between the perspicuity for the ordinary person regarding the way of salvation, and theological controversies that must be resolved by reference to the Hebrew and Greek.
- ⁶⁶ John R. W. Stott, et al., *Christ the Liberator* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1971), pp. 208-209

The Challenge of Religious Pluralism

by Harold Netland

Even a cursory survey of the theological literature of the past three decades indicates that theologians have discovered what missionaries and nonwestern Christians have known for a long time: we live in a religiously pluralistic world in which the great majority of people hold religious convictions quite different from those of orthodox Christianity.

Today there is unprecedented interaction between various cultures, and western theologians are becoming aware as never before of the great diversity among religious traditions, and also of the implications of this for doing Christian theology. For someone who has done his or her theologizing exclusively

within the western intellectual context, it can be most unsettling to be invited, for example, to give a series of lectures in, say, Kyoto or Bangalore, and there to be exposed firsthand to sophisticated, articulate, and sincere adherents of other faiths.

With increased awareness of religious pluralism has come a host of disconcerting and perplexing questions: If Christianity is the true religion, why is it that so much of today's world rejects it in favor of diametrically opposing religious traditions? Why are there so many diverse religions? Is it theologically and morally acceptable to maintain that one religion is uniquely true, and that others are at best incomplete or even false? Is Jesus Christ really so unique after all? The challenge to Christian theology posed by pluralism should not be minimized. Canon Max Warren seems to have had prophetic insight when he observed—almost thirty years ago—that the impact of agnostic science upon theology will turn out to have been as mere child's play when compared to the challenge to Christian theology of the faith of other men.¹

Harold Netland is a missionary in Japan serving with the Evangelical Free Church of America. Portions of this essay appeared in earlier form in Dr. Netland's "Religious Pluralism and Truth," in Trinity Journal, 6, (1985) pp. 74-87, and are included here with permission of the editor.