



8th Day Center
for Justice

Toward a Spirituality
of Justice

8th Day Center for Justice was founded in 1974 as a collaborative effort of six communities of women and men religious to follow the biblical mandate to work for justice. Today there are over twenty-five member communities. We have constituents in every state and in over thirty-six countries.

The name “8th Day” was chosen to acknowledge that creation is still in process with the human community as co-authors. Much of our work is done in coalition with a variety of grassroots groups - international, national and regional - who share a vision of a more just world.

Because Justice is constitutive of the Gospel, our work is a concrete expression of our spirituality. We ask ourselves how what we are doing affects the most vulnerable among us and the next seven generations.

Frequently, 8th Day Center for Justice is invited, not to lecture about social justice, but to lead groups in the process of social justice. the material in this booklet was compiled to facilitate this process. You may want to consider such a process for your own church, religious community or community group.

Justice and Charity

by Jim Dinn, Pax Christi

Social justice and charity are sister values, but charity seems to be the sibling that people give the most attention to. Social justice, on the other hand, is more easily overlooked or given a back seat.

The past 100 years have seen a dramatic development in the Catholic Church's emphasis on social justice. As Pope John Paul II emphasizes in *Centesimus Annus*, religious teaching today "must include among its essential elements a proclamation of the church's social doctrine." It is as if the teaching of the church needed to gradually grow into that recognition and emphasis just as we individually must do also.

Justice and charity are both rooted in the social dimension of the gospels. Both reflect the same gospel mandates. The Beatitudes, the Sermon on the Mount, and such parables as the Last Judgment, the Good Samaritan, the Rich Man and Lazarus, the Pharisee and the Tax Collector — these and dozens of comparable passages inspire acts of justice and charity.

Both can be powerful Christian responses to human need. The dividing line between them is often blurred and, in reality, many a response is a dynamic blend of justice and charity. For descriptive purposes, however, some people find it useful to see charity in terms of giving direct aid and justice in terms of correcting structures.

For example, if we see someone drowning in a river, we try to save the victim. But suppose we find another person struggling in the water an hour later at the same place, then two or three the next day. If we finally realize that they are falling in the river because there is a hole in the bridge, we might change our response. We could still wait by the riverside to aid victims or we could take a hammer and nails and try to rebuild the bridge.

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Of course, more often the structure that needs changing is not built of wood or steel. It is more likely a social structure. And the biggest obstacle is that all of us grow attached to social structures just as they are. The more comfortable we are, the less need we feel for change.

Even the more flawed structure is an extension of ourselves. It is hard to dissociate ourselves from it, hard to endure others' criticism, hard to undertake or permit change. Our defensiveness about the status quo of our institutions is entangled with our defensiveness about ourselves. We instinctively sense that if the institution needs to change, we may well be forced to change with it. And the institutional shortcomings to which we are blind are often reflections of the same shortcomings in ourselves. So we smile on the charity that assists the needy within the existing structures and resist or resent the justice that threatens to reform the structures.

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Archbishop Camara of Brazil has commented, "When I tried to help the poor, people said I was a saint. When I asked why they were poor, people called me a communist." The archbishop touches on a rather widespread irony. Sometimes people applaud those who try to help the needy through direct assistance but they are critical of any attempt to change the structures that put the people in need.

Even within a system of slavery, being "nice" to a slave did not provoke the kind of resistance and opposition from the slave owners that working against the structure did. Within our own system that fosters private ownership and competitiveness, nobody feels threatened at the idea of sponsoring programs to help the needy or donating to causes. But suggesting responsibility for others' needs or implying that the poor are entitled to share in our resources — these ideas disturb us because they call familiar structures into question. They move us out of the more comfortable zone of charity into the challenging zone of justice.

This is why working for social justice can be controversial. If we respond to ozone depletion by giving direct aid (nursing the skin of cancer victims) nobody would object. But if we work to pass and enforce laws to eliminate the chemicals that deplete the ozone, some companies and investors are sure to oppose us. If we knit bandages and collect medicine for war casualties, we will be universally admired. But if we work to prevent war, we risk being branded as unpatriotic or subversive.

In our imperfect world, of course, there will be continuing need for direct aid to be rendered even as we struggle for structural solutions. As for the competing claims that justice and charity make on us, Archbishop Camara offers this suggestion: "In the war against injustice, 80% of our time and effort must be devoted to changing structures and promoting human advancement; but 20% must be set aside for tending the wounded and the victims of war."

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There are no limits to the variety of arenas that need our attention. Education, civil rights, environment, war and peace, rights of the elderly, rights of the handicapped, women's rights, immigration, literacy, employment, etc., all cry for our commitment.

Any method of involvement is possible. It may initially be a matter of learning more about a particular issue. We might join or form a group of people to share ideas or prayer about a local need. We might get involved in contributing to a cause, or fundraising for it. We might find ourselves getting into letter writing, demonstrating, lobbying. No issue is too minor or insignificant to provide an outlet for our principles.

In all of this we are reminded that we need to be guided by the Spirit and sensitive to our own gifts. Precisely because structures are extensions of ourselves, we must undergo and must help others undergo a change of heart. Our U.S. bishops in their pastoral letter on economics put it this way: "the transformation of social structures begins with and is always accompanied by a change of heart."

A Base Christian Community Model of Scripture Reflection

This is a way of prayer and **action** using the model of Scripture reflection that began in South/Central America. A Scripture passage is read four different times with a different reader each time. The first question is announced before the first reading of the passage. After the reading there is a little reflection time followed by brief sharing on the first question. The same sequence is used for the other three questions. If one person does all the readings, s/he should read with a different emphasis. Since the Scriptures were written for the community, it is recommended that you look at someone in the community during each reading.

1. What phrase/word strikes you or leaps out at you and what **feeling** does it elicit? Deal concretely with the reading/story. (Take time to share in twos/threes and then with the larger group, as time allows, because the Scriptures are written for the community.)

2. What didn't you like, understand? What makes you nervous? When you feel uneasy about something in the reading, that tells you/community that is something you have to deal with. (Take time, as above.)

3. What does this passage say to us today? Or, if the community is addressing a specific issue/problem, what insight does this passage give us about it? Don't spiritualize. (See below)

4. What are we going to do together to make the Scripture come alive?* We have not heard the Gospel until we act on it. The action must be something concrete that flows out of the reading used. (Allow some quiet time. The group can be broken into smaller groups of 5-8 if you wish.)

Three Rules:

1. Don't spiritualize. If you are using the Gospel in which Jesus heals the blind man, don't say I am blind...rather deal with the fact of the blind man. Also, response should be concrete—we are going to respond by...(some concrete action). If we act (not pray, study and analyze), the Gospel will mean something different the next time we hear it. Thus, I change, we change and the world changes.

2. Don't individualize. The Gospel is meant for the community even though you may take something from it. The community responds as a unity.

3. The interpretation is best which is the most radical for conversion and gives the most justice to others. The power of conversion is important.

Some other rules: don't take the passage out of context; nor out of the Gospel; don't go on a tangent.

- *• What can we BEGIN doing?
- What can we STOP doing?
- What can we CONTINUE to do in a more INTENTIONAL way?

Some helpful questions:

- What is one action we can do to make this issue/problem more just?
- What part will I play in this effort?
- When are we going to do it?
- How will we do it?
- When will we evaluate how successful we have been?

Notes from a talk given by Megan McKenna, PhD, Pax Christi Convention 8/1/87. Adapted by 8th Day Center for Justice, 5/98.

The Two Feet

In our commitment to seek justice, we often talk about “solidarity with the poor” or the church’s “preferential option for the poor.” Below are two elements of such a commitment: direct service to the poor, and changing the social, political and economic structures that cause poverty. Thus, one foot of Christian commitment to the poor is in direct service with the *victims* of poverty, while the other foot is in our efforts to end *victimization*.

Direct Service

helping people
survive their present
crisis in poverty

- Volunteer time or money to...
food pantries, food basket collections,
clothing centers,
shelters for the homeless,
“crack baby” hospitals/centers,
drop-in centers for the abused,
overseas relief agencies
- Visit the economically poor,
including the elderly, shut-ins,
prisoners and AIDS patients
 - Support pregnant teens
- Provide quality education for the poor
 - Transport elderly to church, grocery shopping, doctors, etc.
 - Sponsor an immigrant family
- Provide services for poor single mothers
- Rehab apartments/homes for the homeless
 - Provide job training for the disadvantaged
 - Tutor poor youth and adults
 - Teach ESL to immigrants

Social Change

removing the causes
of the social problems
by
changing structures

- Educate toward critical thinking that leads to action to eliminate the root causes of social problems
- Raise awareness of conditions and causes of poverty
- Support & join networks that address social problems
- Work with and promote groups committed to positive structural change
 - Start a co-op or credit union
 - Monitor government agencies
 - Change corporate policies that hurt the poor through boycotts and letter writing
- Write letters to newspapers about issues of poverty
 - Join political protests
- Support people's efforts at self-determination
 - Help with voter registration
 - Support political candidates willing to change economic priorities
 - Write and speak to legislators on behalf of the poor, the marginalized, and the environment.

We need both feet to walk and keep our balance as Christians living in today's world.

Obviously, this is not an all-inclusive list but it does show the two basic elements of the gospel call to seek justice for the poor.

(Adapted by the 8th Day Center for Justice from the Campaign for Human Development, USCC, Diocese of Charlotte)



Another Way to See the Global Village

If we could shrink the Earth's population to a village of precisely 100 people, with all existing human ratios remaining the same, it would look like this:

There would be 57 Asians, 21 Europeans, 14 from the Western Hemisphere (North and South) and 8 Africans.

51 would be female, 49 would be male.

70 would be non-white; 30 white.

70 would be non-Christian; 30 Christian.

50% of the entire world's wealth would be in the hands of only six people and all six would be citizens of the United States.

80 would live in substandard housing.

70 would be unable to read.

50 would suffer from malnutrition.

One would be near death; one would be near birth.

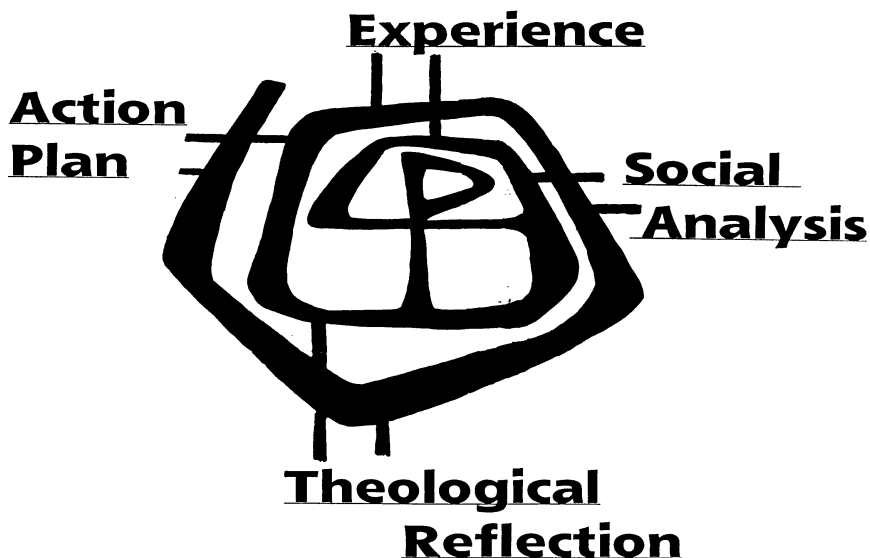
Only one would have a college education.

No one would own a computer.

When one considers our world from such an incredibly compressed perspective, the need for both tolerance and understanding becomes glaringly apparent.

*Reprinted from Tracings, the newsletter of the University Library, UC/
San Diego, May 15, 1996*

Social Justice Process



The Social Justice Process: notice that in the very center is the Greek letter “chyros”, which stands for Christ. Out of our faith in Christ we have an **experience**. Then we think about it (**social analysis**) and consider how God is present (**theological reflection**). Finally, we do something (**action**). Notice that this process is a spiral because our action then becomes a new experience which we think about and which prompts us to do something else.

This is not a new process because we do it every day, usually in an unconscious way. But the key to a social justice process is to do it *together* and with *purpose*. Only in this way can we have an impact on the social problems that face us today. We can't do it alone no matter how smart or courageous we are. The problems are just too big. So, in the social justice process our emphasis is upon US and the SYSTEMS and ACTION: for us to look at systems that affect our lives--political, social, economic, etc.-- because these are the ways we belong to community.

(adapted by 8th Day Center for Justice from *Social Analysis*, J. Holland & Peter Henriot, SJ, The Center of Concern)

ANY SITUATION OR INJUSTICE HAS AN ECONOMIC, ENVIRONMENTAL, SECURITY, ECOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL

POLITICAL

Totality of people's participation in decisions which affect their lives.

Patterns and institutions to organize and decide the collective life of the group. Forms of government: democracy, military dictatorship, socialist state, communist state, monarchy, oligarchy, hegemony.

Who decides? What? For Whom? How does deciding get done? Who has the power?

ECONOMIC **Production/distribution**

Patterns of ownerships and control of land, capital, technology,

Who owns? Who controls?

ECOLOGICAL

The earth is one coherent, living organism in which all creatures, including humans, interact and sustain one another and the earth itself. This whole earth is in a similar relationship to the cosmos. "We are stuff of the stars." Carl Sagan

Whose values determine how the earth's resources are used?

What are the human and ecological costs of our consumerism and militarism? How are they factored into our economy, spirituality and lifestyle?

Which communities suffer the most from environmental pollution?

ALL THE SYSTEMS INTERACT AND AFFECT ONE ANOTHER

SECURITY

The way in which society

When does defense become aggression? How does the military industry affect military aid and the military balance of domestic and international power? Who controls it? Who benefits? What are the non-violent alternatives?

ONOMIC, RELIGIOUS, CULTURAL, SOCIAL,
L REALITY OR SYSTEM NAMED BELOW.

ECONOMIC
ution/consumption.
nd derision-making about
resources, labor.
Who pays? Who gets?

RELIGIOUS
'Religion is an expression of humanity's ultimate concern -the articulation of longings for a center of meaning and value, for connection with the power of being.' (Paul Tillich)
Includes: creed/beliefs, code/behaviors, cult/rituals.
What religious beliefs or practices support this situation? What religious beliefs or practices challenge this situation?

THESE SYS-
TERRELATE
IMPACT
ANOTHER

CULTURAL
Sum total of the ways of believing, thinking, feeling, acting which constitutes, what people call their "way of life."
Reflected in media, education, arts/entertainment, sports, mores, health, housing.
What values are evidenced? What do people believe in? Who influences what people believe in?

ECONOMIC
y protects itself.
ression/oppression?
ry, foreign
udget, impact
licy?
s? Who suffers?
rnatives?

SOCIAL
How people group to relate to one another... ethnic group, racial group, lass group, age group, sex group.
Who is left out? Who is included? What is the basis of exclusion? What is the basis of inclusion?

ACTIONS FOR SYSTEMIC CHANGE

What does it mean to be an agent of systemic change? Progressive economist Gar Alperovitz suggested that, in the West, revolution is unlikely. Reform of the current system, though necessary to reduce human suffering and environmental damage is not enough. What is needed is reconstruction according to a new vision - "the difficult path of slowly building new ways, and as these gather force, adding to them both institutionally and through political demands oriented to new institutional goals."

In practical terms this kind of reconstruction involves envisioning a transformed society which engenders sustained multifaceted action rooted in the values of that vision. This type of systemic change requires a critical mass of people acting in various roles according to their talents. Committed individuals and institutions acting in each of seven roles are essential for systemic change:

1) Some must study, research and teach the elements of the new vision, and the institutions needed, doing the social analysis and building the case for change (as many of our educators and scholars are doing).

2) Some must build the value base, the spirituality for the vision - developing new attitudes, new preferences, the affect around new values of community, equality, real freedom, co-responsibility; helping develop social conscience among people (as poets, storytellers, musicians, artists, dramatists, preachers, video producers).

3) All must choose individual and corporate lifestyles consistent with a world in which all people have opportunity to live in dignity, and in which we live in harmony with the natural world.

4) Some must create the alternative patterns and institutions that embody the new vision (as alternative investment and cooperatives are doing).

5) All of us must work to transform existing institutions from within according to the new values (as in some parishes, schools, religious congregations).

6) Some must develop strategy and organize to work for political change and all of us must participate as active citizens (as we do in political advocacy through Network, Bread for the World and 8th Day Center for Justice).

7) All of us must stand in non-violent opposition to all that goes in the wrong direction (through boycotts & civil disobedience; by opposing capital punishment, nuclear weapons, sanctions against Iraq & the School the Americas).

No one of these actions is sufficient; all are necessary for transformational social change.

The power of combining these seven actions for systemic transformation is twofold: 1) It does not let anyone claim there is nothing s/he can do for systemic change; by demystifying systemic change it enables everyone to take on some part of the necessary action; 2) it gives a glimpse of the power of a committed group of people to effect change, and makes the process of social change understandable. It give credence to Margaret Mead's familiar words: "Never doubt that a small group of committed people can change the world. Indeed it's the only thing that ever has."

(Amata Miller, IHM, August 27, 1994 - adapted)

Spiritual Growth and the Option for the Poor

by Albert Nolan

For I was hungry and you gave me food;
I was thirsty and you gave me drink;
I was a stranger and you made me welcome;
naked and you clothed me;
sick and you visited me;
in prison and you came to see me.

Matthew 25: 35-36

Reverend Albert Nolan, OP, is a former provincial of the Dominicans in South Africa and former national chaplain of the Young Christian Students in South Africa. In September, 1983, he was elected master general of the Dominicans but was permitted by the General Chapter to refuse the appointment in order to continue his work in South Africa. He is the author of Jesus Before Christianity (Orbis, 1978). The following speech was given to the Catholic Institute for International Relations, London, at its annual meeting, June 29, 1984. It is reprinted with permission of the Irish Missionary Union, Dublin.

I have chosen to speak about the service of the poor. I want to talk about what this service of the poor means, and how it should develop, the spiritual development we can go through in our service to the poor in the many different ways in which we try to perform.

There is a real development that goes through stages in very much the same way as the stages of prayer. For example, some of us will know quite a bit about the stages of humility, steps of humility which St. Bernard talks about. Or, the stages of love and charity that we read about in our spiritual books. Now I am suggesting that in our commitment to the poor there is a parallel spiritual experience that also goes through different stages. Crisis, dark nights and light... and it is that which I would like to speak about.

Compassion

The first stage then, as I understand, of this commitment to the poor is characterized by compassion. We have all been moved personally by what we have seen or heard of the sufferings of the poor. That is only a starting point and needs to develop and grow. Two things help this growth and development of compassion. The first is what we have now come to call exposure. The more we are exposed to the sufferings of the poor, the deeper and more lasting does our compassion become. Some agencies these days organize programs and send people off to a Third World country to enable them to see something of the hardships and grinding poverty. There is nothing to replace the immediate contact with pain and hunger. Seeing people in the cold and rain after their houses have been bulldozed. Or experiencing the intolerable smell in a slum. Or seeing what children look like when they are suffering from malnutrition.

Information is also exposure. We know and we want others to know that more than half the world is poor and that something like 800 million people in the world do not have enough to eat and in one way or another are starving. For many people the only experience of life from the day they are born until the day they die is the experience of being hungry. All sorts of information can help us become more compassionate, more concerned. Providing, of course, that we allow it to happen. That we don't put obstacles in the way by becoming more callous, or saying, "It's not my business," or "I'm in no position to do anything about it." We as Christians have a way of allowing our compassion to develop, indeed, we have a way of nourishing this compassion as a virtue. Indeed, we can see it as a divine attribute, so that when I feel compassionate I am sharing God's compassion, I am sharing what God feels about the world today. Also, my Christianity, my faith, enables me to deepen my compassion by seeing the face of Christ in those who are suffering, remembering that whatever we do to the least of his brothers and sisters we do to him. All these things help, and this developing compassion leads on to action, action of two kinds that we may to some extent be involved in.

The first of these is what we generally call relief work, the collecting and distributing of food, money, blankets and clothes, or the development of sophisticated ways of doing things. And the second action that leads immediately from our compassion would probably be a simplification of our lifestyle, trying to do without luxuries, trying to save money to give to the poor, doing without unnecessary material goods and so forth. There's nothing extraordinary about that; it's part of a long Christian tradition: compassion, alms giving, voluntary poverty. My point is that this is the first stage. And what seems to be extremely important is that we go on from there.

Structural Change

Now the second stage begins with the gradual discovery that poverty is a structural problem. That is, poverty in the world today is not simply misfortune, bad luck, or inevitable due to laziness, ignorance or a lack of development. Poverty, in the world today, is a direct result of political and economic structures. It is the result of political and economic policies. In other words, the poverty that we have in the world today is not accidental, it has been created. It has been, I almost want to say, been manufactured by particular policies and systems. In other words, poverty in the world today is a matter of justice and injustice and the poor people of the world are people who are suffering a terrible injustice. Not that I want immediately to blame individuals. Certainly the greed of the rich is the reason why there are the sufferings of the poor, but what I am trying to say is that it is a structural problem. We are all involved in this; we're the victims, we're the pawns, whatever you like, but we're all part of it. It is a structural problem.

This characterizes what I am calling the second stage of our spiritual development. It immediately leads to indignation or, more bluntly, anger. It leads to anger against the rich, against politicians, against governments for their lack of compassion, for their policies that cause poverty and suffering. Now anger is something that we as Christians are not very comfortable with. It makes us feel a little guilty when we discover that we are angry.

But there is a most important sense in which anger is the other side of the coin of compassion. If we cannot be angry then we cannot really be compassionate either. If my heart goes out to the people who are suffering, then I must be angry with those who make them suffer.

The problem, of course, for us Christians is that there can even be a crisis at this stage. What about forgiveness, or loving one's enemies? Anger doesn't mean hatred to begin with. I can be angry with a person whom I love; a mother can be angry with a child because the child nearly burned the house down. And must we not be angry with the child because of love and concern, to show the child seriousness of love and concern? So sometimes I must be angry. Sometimes I must share God's anger. The Bible is full of God's anger, which we tend to find embarrassing at times, rather than helpful to our spiritual lives. My suggestion that we need to share God's anger means not hatred, but rather, as we say so often, not a hatred of the sinner but a hatred of sin. What I want to suggest here is that the more we all understand the structural problem as a structural problem, the more we are able to forgive the individuals involved. It's extremely important for us in South Africa, for example, to recognize that the wickedness, the extreme wickedness of what is happening is not something that we can

blame P.W. Botha [former Prime Minister of South Africa] for, as if he were by himself a particularly wicked individual. We blame the system, and if he were to disappear, someone else would go on. It is not a question of hating or blaming or being angry with individuals as such, but of tremendous indignation against a system that creates so much suffering and so much poverty. My suggestion is that the more we have that anger, the closer we are to God. And if we cannot have that anger, not only about South Africa but about any system or any policy that creates suffering, we don't feel about it as God feels about it and our compassion is wishy-washy.

During the second stage, our actions will be somewhat different, or we may add to what we were doing before. Because as soon as we realize that the problem of poverty in the world is a structural problem, a political problem, then we want to work for social change. Relief work deals with the symptoms rather than the causes. Relief work is somewhat like curative medicine and the work for social change is somewhat like preventative medicine. We want to change the structures, the systems that create the poverty. We don't want to just relieve people when they are suffering from that poverty. Both are necessary but at this stage you begin to recognize the need for social change. And this may be through a tremendous amount of activity on our part, action for social change, trying to fight the system and to maybe change governments, getting involved in politics, campaigns of one sort or another. For some people, it leads to paralysis. What can I do against the system? I can't do anything to effect structural change. What can one possibly do in Britain about the structures in the world and policies that create poverty? Some people feel totally paralyzed by it, while others become very active. This, then, is what I would describe as the second stage; a struggle that goes on within a person at this stage.

Humility

We come now to the third stage. It's difficult to know what to call this third stage. Basically, it develops with the discovery that the poor must and will save themselves and that they don't really need you or me. Spiritually, it's the stage where one comes to grips with humility in one's service to the poor. Before we reach this stage, we are inclined to think that we can, or must, solve the problems of the poor. We, Europeans, aid agency people, conscientized middle-class people, the church maybe, leaders, either alone or perhaps together with others, have got to solve all these problems. Governments or people who are educated must solve these problems of the poor. We see the poor as what we often call the needy; we must go out and rescue them because they are helpless. There may even be some idea of teaching them to help themselves. But it's always *we* who are going to teach *them* to help themselves.

There is a tendency to treat the poor as poor, helpless creatures. Now I am suggesting that at this third stage the shock comes, perhaps gradually, as we begin to realize that the poor know better than we do what to do and how to do it. That they are perfectly capable of solving structural problems, or political problems. In fact they are more capable of doing it than you and I are. It is a gradual discovery that social change can only come from the poor, from the working class, from the Third World. Basically, I must learn from them; I must learn from the poor, from the working class, from the Third World. Basically I must learn from them; I must learn from the wisdom of the poor. They know better than I what is needed and they, and only they, can in fact, save me. I need something that only they can give me. It is not that I have things that only I can give them.

This can amount, in spiritual terms, to a crisis. It can also amount to a very deep conversion. I myself came first to pastoral work after a doctorate in theology from Rome. I thought I had the answers, only to discover gradually that I really knew nothing and that the people who were uneducated, who seemed to be simple, ordinary poor people, to whom I would have to speak, very simply, they knew better than I. For example, what needed to be changed in South Africa and how it needed to be changed. I had come to terms with that.

We discover that the poor are his chosen instruments and not me. The poor themselves are the people that God wants to use and is going to use in Christ to save all of us from the crazy madness of the world in which so many people can be starving in the midst of so much wealth. This can become an experience of God acting and of God's presence in the poor, not merely as an object of compassion, not merely seeing the face of Christ in their sufferings, but discovering in the poor, God saving me, God saving us, God acting and speaking to us today.

The hazard in this third stage is romanticism. Romanticizing the poor, the working class, the Third World. As soon as we've made this discovery, we tend to put the poor on a pedestal: the poor, the Third World, the working classes perhaps. We can get ourselves into a position where, if somebody is poor and says something, then it is infallibly true. Or, if somebody comes from the Third World, we must all listen simply because he comes from the Third World. And if he does do something, it must be right. That's romanticism, and it's nonsense. On the other hand, it is a kind of romantic nonsense that somehow we all seem to need at one stage. As long as we recognize what we're doing, I don't think it necessarily is very bad. But it can become a problem at the end of this third stage. We are likely to reach a crisis, a crisis of disillusionment and disappointment because the people of the Third World, or the poor, have not lived up to the heroic picture we had of them. We have misunderstood the structural problem. It doesn't mean

to say that poor people in themselves are any different as human beings from anyone else. They have their problems, like anyone else.

Solidarity

That brings me to the fourth and last stage. That stage, I am suggesting, centers around the experience of solidarity, real solidarity with the poor and the oppressed. And I think the real beginning of this stage of our spiritual development is the disappointment and disillusionment that we experience when we discover that the poor are not what we thought romantically they were. I am not saying that we do not have a great deal to learn from the poor. I maintain that. I am not saying that the poor are not going to save themselves and us. I maintain that. I am not saying that they are not God's chosen instruments. They are. All of that remains true. But they are human beings: they make mistakes, are sometimes selfish, sometimes lacking in commitment and dedication, sometimes waste money, are sometimes irresponsible. They are sometimes influenced by the middle class and have middle-class aspirations and sometimes believe the propaganda and perhaps don't have the right political line. Maybe they are not all that politicized. Nevertheless, I can and must learn from them. Nevertheless, only the poor and the oppressed can really bring social change. It is simply a matter of moving from romanticism about the poor to honest and genuine realism, because that's the only way that we can move into this fourth stage. I'm talking about the stage of real solidarity.

Real solidarity begins when it is no longer a matter of *we* and *they*. Up to now I've described everything in terms of *we* and *they* because this is how we generally experience it. Even when we romanticize the poor, make tremendous heroes of them, put them on a pedestal, we continue to alienate them from ourselves — there is a gap between us and them. Real solidarity begins when we discover that we all have faults and weaknesses. They may be different faults and weaknesses according to our different social backgrounds and our different social conditions and we may have very different roles to play, but we have all chosen to be on the same side against oppression. Whether we're in Europe or South Africa, whether we're black or white, whether we were brought up in a middle class or working class, we can be on the same side against oppression, well aware of our differences. We can work together and struggle together against our common enemy — the unjust policies and systems — without ever treating one another as inferior or superior but having a mutual respect for one another while recognizing the limits of our own social conditioning. This experience, and it is an experience of solidarity with God's own cause of justice, can become spiritually an experience of solidarity with God in Jesus Christ. It is a way of coming to terms with ourselves in relationship

with other people, with our illusions, our feelings of superiority, with our guilt, our romanticism, which then opens us up to God, to others, to God's cause of justice and freedom. This is a very high ideal and it would be an illusion to imagine that we could reach it without a long, personal struggle that will take us through several stages — dark nights, crisis, struggles, shocks and challenges.

The four stages I have described then are not rigid so that you have to go through exactly one stage after another. It does get mixed up. But I have presented this model in the hope that our attitude to the poor may always remain open to further development. The one really bad thing that can happen to any of us is that we get stuck somewhere along the way. We are then no longer able to appreciate others who have gone farther. Because we don't realize that it's a process, we also don't appreciate and understand those who are still beginning. We need to understand that we and the church are all going through a process, spiritual development, a growth and a struggle. We're in it together and we need to help and support one another in it. We in South Africa and the church in general, are going through this process. Let us help it, encourage it, struggle with it in ourselves, because today it is the only way we are going to come closer to God and be saved.

Reflection Starters

1. At what stage in helping the poor are you? Compassion? Seeing poverty as a structural problem? Realizing the poor must save themselves? Becoming disillusioned with the poor?
2. Imagine yourself moving through these four stages.
3. Picture Jesus meeting you at one of the four stages and carry on a dialogue with him about being in this stage in your attitude toward the poor.
4. Who is the poorest person you know? What has that person done for you over the years? Nothing?
5. Suggested actions? Volunteer at a soup kitchen or thrift shop. Support and join a network, or a similar project, that addresses structural dimensions of social problems.

To be hopeful in bad times is not just foolishly romantic. It is based on the fact that human history is a history not only of cruelty, but also of compassion, sacrifice, courage, kindness. What we choose to emphasize in this complex history will determine our lives. If we see only the worst, it destroys our capacity to do something. If we remember those times and places - and there are so many - where people have behaved magnificently, this gives us the energy to act, and at least the possibility of sending this spinning top of a world in a different direction. And if we do act, in however small a way, we don't have to wait for some grand utopian future. The future is an infinite succession of presents, and to live now as we think human beings should live, in defiance of all that is bad around us, is itself a marvelous victory.

--Howard Zinn (You Can't Be Neutral on a Moving Train: A personal history of our times, p. 208)

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