

GOOD NEWS FOR THE POOR I

Good News for the Poor

Edna Lee de Gutierrez

I grew up in Mexico City. Although my family was financially sound when I was born, sickness, injustice, and other factors contributed to leaving us in poverty. However, my childhood was very happy and I have sweet memories of life at home with my family.

My parents were committed Christians and I was raised in an atmosphere of understanding. They taught me that we were rich because we had God's abundant wealth in Jesus Christ. There were days when we didn't have much to eat, but love, care, encouragement, faith, and hope were always plentiful. The experience of the psalmist became existentially ours: "I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or his children begging bread" (Psalm 37:25, RSV). We used to repeat every day, "Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits" (Psalm 103:1-2, RSV). The Reina Valera Spanish version reads, "and forget not any of his benefits."

The Good News in Jesus Christ is ours. The Good News can make the whole and decisive difference in the life of any person. Once we belong to the kingdom of God, we have a new attitude towards life and find renewed strength to face our problems and adversities.

The Poor

The poor have common problems whether they live in rural, semi-urban, or urban communities. They barely have the means to meet their primary needs of food, housing, health, and education. Malnutrition, unsanitary living conditions, and sickness, abound among the poor. There is a saying that "poverty is a bad counselor" and at the same time, it is a good soil for promiscuity, delinquency, and ignorance.

The social, moral, emotional, psychological, and spiritual problems of the poor are complex. The poor face poverty with different attitudes. Some react with resentment, animosity, and hatred; others have a self-destructive attitude of passivity, low self-esteem, and impotence; still others have a favorable, healthy reaction of earnest desire to overcome their problems and attain success in life.

Women and children are particularly affected by poverty. Most of the women stay at home with the responsibility of caring for a large family under tremendous stress and anguish. At times they suffer their husbands' abuse and mistreatment as the men try to "forget" their problems with alcohol and drugs. Many of the women are illiterate.

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Children suffer abandonment and quite often develop bitterness and resentment. Their mothers are busy with housework and doing what they can to earn a little money, and children have to look after their younger brothers and sisters. They attend school sporadically or not at all. If they do attend school, their school performance is handicapped by malnutrition and weakness.

Good News for the Poor

“Good News for the poor” is a tremendous challenge for Christians. We must be aware of the causes and effects of poverty and recognize the problems we face in this particular ministry. We must learn to make the best use of any and all resources to achieve our goal.

We frequently hear comments like, “There are so many wonderful projects we would like to carry out but we have no money.” And so, we turn our heads and stretch out our hands to the wealthy.

Partnership is important in the task of taking the Good News to the unreached—most of whom are poor. But we should not wait for help from the wealthy to do our work. We have spiritual, human, and material resources at hand and must learn to be good stewards of them. We are Christ’s servants who have been put in charge of God’s secret truths. And the one thing required of servants is that they be faithful to the Master (1 Corinthians 4:1–2).

Today, many countries are closed, or are in the process of being closed, to foreign missionaries and evangelists. China teaches us a good lesson for evangelization. During the years of the cultural revolution, Christians around the world wondered about the future of the gospel in China: no missionaries, no church buildings, no Bibles, no religious freedom. But Chinese Christians kept faith alive by nurturing their faith in their families, gathering to worship in their homes, and by evangelizing through the testimony of their lives. They took the responsibility of evangelization and the Lord is blessing China with a wonderful harvest of people accepting Jesus Christ as their Savior.

The economies of many countries today are becoming poorer. We are reaching the point where the poor are evangelizing the poor. Evangelization is coming not only from the wealthy to the poor, but from the poor to the poor.

Church Interaction With the Poor

In January 1968, my husband accepted the pastorate of Horeb Baptist Church, a small congregation of not more than thirty people. His ministry began with the particular goal of ministering to the young and has expanded over time. Today, we minister in a variety of areas. We work with victims of illiteracy, drug addiction, and prostitution. We also have a prison fellowship and work with socially underprivileged people. Horeb is a church of prayer with a wide concept of what ministry means and a strong desire to execute God’s will and to meet our neighbors’ needs.

Ten years ago, a member of our church whose heart is in missions and evangelism invited a woman she had met in her evangelistic work to attend a service. After the service, the church had a fellowship gathering.

The visitor had a background of poverty and unfortunate consequences. She became angry when the ladies at church invited her to the kitchen to help with the dishes. Later on, she confessed she had made a vow never to go back to the church where she had been insulted by being asked to help with the dishes.

But she went back.

Eventually, she and her sister began a congregation in a community called San

Francisco Culhuacan, with the orientation and support of our church, which became the Mount of Olives Baptist Church. Although the members are economically poor, they are self-supporting.

Many opportunities to minister the Good News came after the tragedy of the earthquakes in September of 1985. Our sister’s house, and many others in the community where she lives, were severely damaged. Many families were forced to evacuate their houses and the city government granted permission to use a parking lot as a shelter for forty-five families.

Our sister saw this opportunity to minister among the families living together in the shelter. Our church supported her initiative. World Vision Mexico joined hands with us in meeting the immediate needs: tents, kitchen utensils, blankets, food, and water. Retired teachers volunteered to teach the children whose school buildings had been destroyed. Later, the tents were exchanged for prefabricated one-room houses through the help of a Canadian agency.

This community was known in Mexico City as “the cradle of thieves” and right in the middle of it the gospel was preached in words and deeds. The first converts were baptized in our church. The families living in the parking lot were eventually relocated in different neighborhoods and some of the people have joined different churches.

The people in this shelter experienced a variety of incidents that sometimes caused those involved to feel a sense of failure and frustration and the consequent temptation to give up. But there were also rewarding experiences which made us remember that God is in control of everything.

This is only one example of a project carried on through the initiative of one poor woman with the support of her church and the cooperation of a parachurch organization.

Our sister is an effective evangelist among the poor. They cannot say “She doesn’t know what it is like.” She *does* know and understand. Her burden for women and children compels her to minister to prostitutes, women in prison, and abandoned children.

What happened to her poverty when she became a Christian? Her economic poverty was not “magically” transformed into economical wealth, but her vision of life and her life *were* transformed. She was aware that her children were not condemned to live as she lived before; she became strong in the Lord and helped them to trust him through her own example. She encouraged them to study and the two youngest have obtained scholarships for further studies. She has not been as successful with all of her children, but she keeps on praying for them.

She progressed only as far as the third grade in elementary school but she has taken the courses offered at the Bible institute at church and was one of our first graduates.

“When anyone is joined to Christ he is a new being: the old is gone, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17, TEV). Her new being is committed to serving the Lord.

Something to Pray for and to Think About

Because the doors of our Christian churches are open to everybody without barriers with regard to nationality or race, economic or social status, or any other consideration, the church’s ministry is broadened to reach out to diverse groups. We have “evangelists” from different contexts.

In ministering to the economically poor, we must not make them dependent on our giving but rather help them to be self-sufficient.

The church is a channel of love, understanding, and encouragement, as well as a source of diverse opportunities to learn and work and experience new avenues of service

and cooperation.

There is a blessing in the partnership in the ministry but let us not forget that we have our own resources. Freely we have received, let us freely give what we have. We may be economically limited, but we can take the message to the “lame men” of the world:

“We have no money at all, but we give you what we have: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth . . .”

As Christians, poverty is not a handicap to serving the Lord. He uses our experience to minister to the poor and all men as well.

GOOD NEWS FOR THE POOR II

Good News for the Poor

Tom Houston

There is something almost absurd about my discussing “Good News for the Poor.” I come from a wealthy country. I am one of the affluent. I have no grounds to speak, yet I must.

For years I have had two burdens about the evangelization of the world. One, is the vast populations in resistant countries with no knowledge of the Father’s love, the Savior’s cross, or the Spirit’s power to bring them out of darkness into light. These countries form a great swath on the map of the world starting with Japan, moving on to China, the Soviet Republics in Asia, Thailand, Indochina, the Indian subcontinent, Indonesia, West Asia, the Middle East, Turkey, North Africa, and Muslim West Africa.

My second burden is the great landslide away from the Christian faith in the West, in Eastern Europe, and in the countries of the British Commonwealth. They are abandoning the Father’s love, despising the Savior’s cross, and adopting an attitude of self-sufficiency with no need of the Spirit’s power (see Table 1).

If we are serious about world evangelization, then we need to find answers to both of these challenges.

It is interesting to note that the resistant countries have never been evangelized in modern times and, with the exception of Japan and some oil producing countries, they are poor. On the other hand, the countries of the West that are becoming secular *have* been evangelized in the past and are now relatively rich.

This broad contrast is intriguing. Are the two challenges and their answers related? Is there one answer that would address both problems?

The Gospel of Luke contains material not included in the other Gospels—about 40 percent. A significant part is focused on the rich and the poor, and there are ways in which they are directly linked to each other. It suggests that what the gospel says about the poor is connected to what it says about the rich.

Good News for the Poor

Luke uses the expression *preaching, or bringing* (TEV) *Good News to the poor* twice in his Gospel. Luke indicates that Jesus saw bringing, or preaching, Good News to the poor as central to his mission. The questions that arise are:

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