

What with "the révolution of rising expectations," there's little unconscious poverty left in the world, so we're left with the two kinds in the title of this thinksheet. "Reluctant poverty" includes (a) conscious absence of what's needed to sustain and enrich human life and (b) lust/envy for more than what's needed to sustain and enrich human life--both (a) and (b) including visible (possessions/relations) and invisible (powers/privileges/rights).

What I'll call "Poverty Three" is consciousness-raising by via negativa as to what's needed to sustain and enrich human life. The evangelic foregoing of possessions/relations/powers/privileges/rights "for Jesus' sake" is anti-poverty in the guise of anti-wealth and as such has a unique dynamic and intensity in the history of human caring. (In contrast, e.g., Eastern anti-wealth is not fundamentally anti-poverty but pro-wealth-of-a-different-kind-for-oneself, i.e. "spiritual" payoff to the ascetic.)

At this stage of the human adventure, this "evangelic counsel" of poverty has more pertinence to the person, every society, and the emerging global society than ever before. The Christian no way can disengage her/himself from it and remain Christian. This leaves only the question how the specific Christian individual/group participates, witnesses, applies the catharsis reflexively and projectively.

The challenge to face the evangelical counsel of poverty comes again and again in Christian history--Jesus (where it is more contextual than substantive), Francis (...substantive-mystical), deFoucauld, Taizé. To the latter I've been close for a long time (on the committee that brought the Brothers to America, and Loree and I at Taizé were the first guests the founder, Roger Shutz, ever spoke to in English--to his translator's amazement). If you're getting "Letter from Taizé," the monthly (and you can just by writing 2150 Almaden Rd.-114, San José CA 95125, \$2 ann.), you know of the thousands of young people participating in "The Council of Youth," from whose "Opening" I here include the opening and close of the "Letter."....And in church last Sunday in Harlem I heard Wyatt Walker tell his people to pay their tithe even if they can't pay the rent: he takes the Bible literally on all this--but is taking it nonliterally taking it nonseriously? I don't know. I just don't know. But I do know all this makes me very uncomfortable and I'd rather be doing a thinksheet on something else. God bless and illumine my dis-ease, and deliver me from disingenuous arguments as well as from scribal mindlessness.

LETTER TO THE PEOPLE OF GOD

Church, what do you say of your future?

We have been born into a world which for most people is not a place to live in. A large part of mankind is exploited by a minority enjoying intolerable privileges. Many police-states exist to protect the powerful. Multi-national companies impose their own laws. Profit and money rule. Those in power almost never pay attention to those who are voice-less.

Are you going to become the "people of the beatitudes", having no security other than Christ, a people poor, contemplative, creating peace, bearing joy and a liberating festival for mankind, ready even to be persecuted for justice?

....  
Church, what do you say of your future?

Are you going to give up the means of power, the compromises with political and financial power?

Are you going to surrender your privileges, stop capitalizing? Are you at last going to become a "universal community of sharing", a community finally reconciled, a place of communion and friendship for the whole of humanity?

In each locality and over the whole world, are you in this way going to become the seeds of a society without class and where none have privileges, without domination of one person by another, of one people by another?

If we are actively involved in this, we know that we cannot demand anything exacting of others unless we ourselves stake everything. What do we have to fear? Christ says, "I came to kindle fire on the earth, and how I long for it to burn!" We shall dare to live the Council of Youth as an anticipation of all that we want. We shall dare to commit ourselves, together and to the point of no return, to living beyond hope, letting the spirit of the beatitudes come springing up in the people of God, being leaven of a society without class and where none have privileges.

We are addressing this first letter to the people of God, written on our hearts, so as to share what burns us.