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THE LIVING PARABLE OF THE PEASANT: A Comparative Study of European/North American Scholars & the Community in Solentiname, Nicaragua in their Understandings of Four Lukan Parables

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THE LIVING PARABLE OF THE PEASANT:
A Comparative Study of European/North American Scholars & the Community in Solentiname, Nicaragua in their Understandings of Four Lukan Parables

by

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INTRODUCTION

The parables of Jesus have been interpreted in many ways and by many different methods in the history of the Christian community. Biblical scholars have wrestled with their interpretations throughout the centuries, and in the last five centuries increasing numbers of lay persons have had more direct access to further biblical study. Even more recently, liberation movements throughout the world--and especially in Latin America--have engaged the "common people," (peasants and campesinos), many of whom are illiterate, in biblical study. The community in Solentiname, Nicaragua is such a group of farmers and fisher-folk, in which biblical interpretation has played an important role. What new and/or transforming insights does such a community as Solentiname bring to understanding of the Bible and especially the parables? Are their interpretations of scripture valid and/or helpful? What do their insights say to the tradition of parabolic interpretation in the North American churches today, and my own ministry within these traditions? These are crucial questions which this study will explore and illuminate.

In order to wrestle with the above questions and grasp the significance of the insights of The Gospel In Solentiname[1] into the parables, it is necessary first to explore the background of the interpretation of the parables by North American and European scholars and then the biblical perspectives of liberation theology. At this point the study will then focus on the insights of the community of

Solentiname in relation to the parables: a comparison and contrast of European/North American and Solentiname perspectives on parables in Luke will provide the basis for an in-depth examination of actual interpretations and their meaning to the Christians in Solentiname and in Europe/North America.

It is important to note which parables have been chosen and what factors led to these choices. The criteria are two-fold: 1) the themes of the parables must have been included in the discussions recorded in The Gospel in Solentiname. 2) Since this study is by no means exhaustive of the parables or the perspectives of Solentiname (or liberation theology in general), the choice of parables needed to be coherent and focused. Because of its concern for the themes of wealth and poverty, important themes in liberation thought, the Gospel according to Luke provides some of this focus. Thus, four Lukan parables have been selected for use in this study: 1) The Good Samaritan, Luke 10:25-37, 2) Riches or The Rich Fool, Luke 12:13-21, 3) The Wedding Guests and Banquet, Luke 14:7-24, and 4) Dives (the Rich Epicure) and Lazarus, Luke 16:19-31.

Luke has a strong and central concern for the life of the poor and how the Christian faithfully uses and perceives possessions and wealth.[2] His redactional presentation of the life of Jesus in his gospel depicts Jesus as one who was intentionally close to the poor, oppressed, blind, women, widows and orphans. Luke's unique perspective is

seen, in that three of the four parables dealt with in this study are found only in his gospel. While Luke expresses greater concern for the poor than do Matthew and Mark (and John), it is important to keep in mind that Luke's perspective is one that has deep meaning within the biblical message as it blends with other perspectives about the good news of God in Jesus Christ to form a rich, meaningful whole.[3]

While Luke's analysis is by no means exhaustive of the whole of Christian tradition, the meaning, then, that is gained from the study of the Lukan parables within the perspectives of the community in Solentiname and traditional interpretation may extend to Christian life today. In the appendix I will explore what the insights gained from this study say to my life and ministry in the twentieth-century church. Insights for ecumenical gatherings, U. S. Christians, my own denomination, my own congregation, and my ministry as a lay professional can certainly be gained. This final reflection, which leads to new understandings and changing actions may be most important in assessing the worth of such a study.

[1]Ernesto Cardenal, The Gospel in Solentiname, trans. Donald D. Walsh, 4 vols. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1975-1982).

[2]Walter Pilgrim, Good News to the Poor: Wealth and Poverty in Luke-Acts (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1981).

[3]See Richard J. Cassidy, Jesus, Politics and Society: A Study of Luke's Gospel (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, Books, 1978); and Luke Timothy Johnson, Sharing Possessions: Mandate and Symbol of Faith (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981) for more in depth discussion of Luke.

CHAPTER I:

THE PARABLES IN EUROPEAN/NORTH AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE

A grasp of the traditional scholarly interpretation of the parables is very important to appreciate the European/North American understanding of the parables in this century. "From the patristic period to the end of the nineteenth century"[1] the predominant view of the parables was to see them as allegories--with the details of a particular parable having specific, independent meanings. European and North American scholarship on the parables in the last century has changed this view quite drastically.

Adolf Jülicher is given credit for finally discrediting the allegorical interpretation of the parables. Jülicher pointed out the distortions that allegorization had brought to the parables. While Jülicher's contribution was very great, C. H. Dodd faulted him for holding to the opposite extreme from allegorizing--that is, looking for only a single, general message within each parable. What was to fill in this gap left by Jülicher? At this point, C. H. Dodd presents the classic definition of the parable:

> At its simplest the parable is a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life, arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness, and leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought.[2]

Most European/North American scholars of the parables would accept this definition as a starting point but would add their own crucial insights.

A. T. Cadoux "laid down the principle that the parables must be placed in the setting of the life of Jesus,"[3] and B. T. D. Smith illuminated the factual details of the background of the parables. C. H. Dodd, then, paid particular attention to the theological meaning of the parables in relation to Jesus' setting in life. Joachim Jeremias, while appreciative of Dodd, sought to avoid Dodd's emphasis on "realized eschatology" in the parables and to go into detail in placing the parables in their historical setting:

> The parables of Jesus are not--at any rate primarily--literary productions, nor is it their object to lay down general maxims. . . but each of them was uttered in an actual situation of the life of Jesus, at a particular and often unforeseen point . . . they were mostly concerned with a situation of conflict--with justification, defense, attack, and even challenge. For the most part, though not exclusively, they are weapons of controversy. Every one of them calls for an answer on the spot.[4]

This original meaning is two-fold, including 1) the setting in which the parables were told, and 2) the meaning of the parables in the early church, before they were written down.

In the scholarship of Amos Wilder and Dan Otto Via, the importance of literary style and language of the parables is emphasized. Wilder stresses two aspects of language appropriate to interpreting the parables: First of all, the parables are told in the language of the people and are

intended, in this way, to be current and meaningful. Secondly, Wilder points to the central importance of the "revelatory character" of the parables, in that what they reveal is shocking and significant.[5] Via also turns to literary criticism of the parables to obtain insights into their meanings. While Wilder places importance in the situation of the parables, though, Via questions "the prevailing Dodd-Jeremias position that the parables of Jesus must be interpreted exclusively in connection with Jesus' Sitz im Leben."[6] He points to the fact that the concrete historical situation is difficult to obtain and claims that a predominantly historical approach to the parables is inappropriate. The human elements, aesthetic nature and possibility that a parable may not say anything to the present leads Via to emphasize the permanent significance of the parables. This permanent significance is not what others have followed as the one-point approach:

> Interpretation should not isolate one point but should call attention to the total configuration, to the nature of the interconnections, and to the understanding implicitly contained therein.[7]

The interconnectedness of aspects of a parable is well-expressed by Via in this way.

John Dominic Crossan focuses his concerns about the parables around the historical Jesus. However, he cautions against using the context of a parable to interpret its historical situation, because the gospels (especially Luke) do not often express a contextual unity. He would assert

that parables proclaim the Kingdom, but:

> This does not mean that they are timeless truths or meta-historical models. But, on the other hand, they do not so much fit into a given historical situation as create and establish the historical situation of Jesus himself.[8]

Finally, he stresses the unsettling and challenging effect--the overthrow of values--of the parables on those who respond to them in commitment and faith.

Kenneth Ewing Bailey, a European/North American theologian whose viewpoint is shaped, however, by having lived for many years in the Middle East, points to the need for reexamining the parables in the light of past and present-day Middle-Eastern culture and literary forms which are important in understanding the Palestinian situations in which Jesus originally set forth His parables. Three areas of methodology are proposed: 1) examination of pertinent ancient literature, 2) discussion of Middle-Eastern peasants, and 3) evaluation in light of Oriental versions of the gospels.[9] Similar to Via, Bailey stresses the "dependent significance" of details within each parable.[10] However, Bailey's unique attention to Middle-Eastern cultural/social impact on and importance for understanding the parables is quite different from Via's emphasis on the literary aspects.

As has been elaborated upon, the foundation of theological insights into the parables, in Europe and North America, has been changing and growing within the last century. All scholars seem to agree, though, that through the use of common language and images the parables are

intended to capture the hearers' attention, bring about change in the hearers' faith and actions, and reveal to the hearers aspects of the Kingdom of God. Disagreements that have arisen as to the importance of the historical setting, literary background, and the allegorical vs. one-point approach are to be taken seriously. As a matter of caution and richness in the interpretation of the parables, it is important to note, initially, that in all translation and interpretation "pre-understanding is necessary for the acquirement of understanding."[11]

With this caution in mind, how important are the historical situation, literary background, allegorical and one-point approaches to the parables? The historical situation of first century Palestine, in general, and the setting of each parable, in particular, are certainly important and valuable in interpreting the meaning of the parables. Crossan and Via point out that the historical situation is often very difficult to ascertain. This is true, and although Jeremias stresses learning the original meaning of the parables in the midst of situational controversy and within the early Christian community, detailed historical analysis is too far removed from first century Palestine to truly understand the situations in any detailed way.

Uncovering the historical situation is important in a more general way--in understanding the culture and relationships that are portrayed and employed in the parables. The literary background and style of the parables is important

in that it is crucial in creating the transforming effect that is intended by the parables. This area of concern certainly deserves more study. Finally, Via and Bailey certainly point to the importance of an approach to the parables that is neither primarily allegorical or one-point-oriented, rather an approach that struggles with the interrelationships of the details and dynamics and people within a parable.

European/North American scholarship, although it has contributed important insights into the meaning of the parables, also contains some important weaknesses in regard to interpretation of the parables. Most importantly, European/North American approach to biblical study of the parables has often been too theoretical. Often this biblical study remains in the isolated area of theory and scholarship without deeply affecting Christian life. Although many of the European/North American scholars' insights into the parables are very meaningful, the radical life-changing messages of the parables often seem not to have much of an impact in the daily lives and witness of European/North American Christians. Cultural barriers, church structures, and human sinfulness distance us from parabolic truths and often create an environment in which the realities critiqued by the parables are distorted or overlooked. Thus, the vitality and deep meaning of the parables are often lost by European/North American Christians through a theoretical or individulistic understanding. Despite weaknesses,

Crossan aptly describes the intended transforming nature of the parables:

> When the north pole becomes the south pole, and the south the north, a world is reversed and overturned and we find ourselves standing firmly on utter uncertainty. The parables of reversal intend to do precisely this to our security because such is the advent of the Kingdom.[12]

The weakness remains crucial, though, that theory concerning the parables often remains theory, in European/North American understanding, and it is in this way quite incomplete.[13]

[1]Warren S. Kissinger, The Parables of Jesus: A History of Interpretation and Bibliography (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1979), p. xiii.

[2]C. H. Dodd, The Parables of the Kingdom (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938), p. 16.

[3]Joachim Jeremias, The Parables of Jesus, trans. S. H. Hooke (New York: Scribner, 1955), p. 21.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Amos Niven Wilder, Early Christian Rhetoric: the language of the gospel (London: SCM Press, 1964), p. 80.

[6]Dan Otto Via, The Parables; their literary and existential dimension (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967) p. ix.

[7]Ibid., p. 93.

[8]John Dominic Crossan, In Parables: the challenge of the historical Jesus (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1973), p. 32.

[9]Kenneth Ewing Bailey, Poet and Peasant: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), pp. 29-37.

[10]Ibid., p. 42.

[11]Via, The Parables, p. 45.

[12]Crossan, In Parables, p. 55

[13]Clarence Jordan provides an exception to this weakness. See especially Clarence Jordan and Bill Lane Doulos, Cotton Patch Parables of Liberation (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1976); Clarence Jordan, The Cotton Patch Version of Luke and Acts: Jesus' Doings and the Happenings (New York: Association Press, 1969).

CHAPTER II:

THE PARABLES IN SOLENTINAME: A LIBERATION PERSPECTIVE

The biblical understandings of traditional European/North American theology and liberation theology are certainly not exclusive of each other. Parallels in methodology and themes can be found and are significant. Many Christian scholars and lay persons from within the European/North American tradition, such as Ronald Sider and Kenneth Ewing Bailey, reflect some of the visions and emphases of liberation theology in their biblical viewpoints.[1]

Liberation theology, itself, encompasses the understandings of a diverse group of people, within situations in all countries and cultures, and the oppressed as both majority and minority. Despite such diversity, however, there are strong unifying threads among the expressions of liberation theology--particularly that within Latin America, with which this study is concerned. Gustavo Gutierrez, a well-known and important liberation theologian, has formulated an in-depth Latin American approach to theology. His description of liberation theology sets the tone for much of the development of liberation theology (and its biblical understanding):

> Liberation theology . . . is a process of reflection which starts out from historical praxis. It attempts to ponder the faith from the standpoint

> of this historical praxis and the way that faith is actually lived in a commitment to liberation.[2]

The concept of "critical reflection on praxis" is certainly foundational for liberation theology. Gutierrez elaborates on this theme:

> For various reasons the existential and active aspects of the Christian life have recently been stressed in a different way than in the immediate past.
>
> In the first place, **charity** has been fruitfully rediscovered as the center of the Christian life. This has led to a more Biblical view of the faith as an act of trust, a going out of one's self, a commitment to God and neighbor, a relationship with others. It is in this sense that St. Paul tells us that faith works through charity: love is the nourishment and the fullness of faith, the gift of one's self to the Other, and invariably to others. This is the foundation of the **praxis** of the Christian, of his active presence in history. According to the Bible, faith is the total response of man to God, who saves through love. In this light, the understanding of the faith appears as the understanding not of the simple affirmation--almost memorization--of truths, but of a commitment, an overall attitude, a particular posture toward life.[3]

Thus, praxis is the Christian's "active presence in history,"[4] in the world, in daily life. Accordingly, "critical reflection" involves very deliberate commitment.

> Theology must be man's critical reflection on himself, on his own basic principles. Only with this approach will theology be a serious discourse, aware of itself, in full possession of its conceptual elements. But we are not referring exclusively to this epistemological aspect when we talk about theology as critical reflection. We also refer to a clear and critical attitude regarding economic and socio-cultural issues in the life and reflection of the Christian community. To disregard these is to deceive both oneself and others. But above all, we intend this term to express the theory of a definite practice. Theological reflection would then necessarily be a criticism of society and the Church insofar as they are called and addressed

> by the Word of God; it would be a critical theory, worked out in the light of the Word accepted in faith and inspired by a practical purpose--and therefore indisolubly linked to historal praxis.[5]

Because of this different emphasis on "critical reflection on praxis", liberation theology approaches biblical study in a different manner from traditional European/North American biblical interpretation. This unique understanding of scripture as directly relevant to every-day struggles has profound implications for Christian life, and although the parables have not been specifically discussed in the light of liberation theology, understandings of the Bible as a whole are quite relevant to study of the parables and the insights expressed by the people of Solentiname. What, then, is important to faithful biblical study, understanding and action (especially as regards the parables) within Latin American liberation theology? How does The Gospel in Solentiname, and the community that it represents, reflect the methodology and emphases of Latin American liberation theology's biblical approach?

For Gustavo Gutierrez, Latin American liberation theology necessitates "a re-reading of the gospel message from within the context of liberation praxis."[6] Thus, for Gutierrez and liberation theology as a movement, the deepest biblical meanings are found not in removing oneself from human history and daily living--praxis--but rather in immersing oneself in it and critically reflecting on experiences in light of the biblical message of liberation. These

foundations that were laid by Gutierrez are further expressed and developed (in varying degrees and with different emphases) into methodologies for renewed and vital biblical study and living. The writings of three Latin American liberation theologians merit particular attention at this point--José Míguez Bonino, J. Severino Croatto, and Raúl Vidales. These three are selected because of their clear and well-developed methodologies, their well-defined approaches to the Bible and their importance and influence in Latin American liberation theology today.

José Míguez Bonino, of Argentina, develops the approach to the Bible as necessarily grounded in the social, political and historical reality of oppressed people. Thus, the subjective nature of biblical and theological understanding cannot be avoided and is a part of all biblical interpretation:

> There is no direct route from divine revelation to theology; the mediation of some praxis is inevitable . . . . The area that defines this praxis, and hence the critical plane on which reflection is projected, is the socio-political one. This affirmation, too, can be supported by starting from the witness of the Bible and showing how it has been wrongly directed into excessively individualistic and spiritualistic channels.[7]

José Míguez Bonino reinforces and adds his own emphasis to Gustavo Gutierrez's stress on praxis as the beginning of liberation theology. Paralleling Gutierrez's call for critical reflection on praxis, Bonino asserts that Latin American Christians "must critically reread and repossess biblical and theological tradition and also the Christian community to which we belong." From this involvement in

liberating and repossessing biblical tradition, Latin Americans are then freed to live in witness to God's kingdom as it is present in history.[8]

J. Severino Croatto shares much of the perspectives of Bonino and Gutierrez, and he forms a well-developed model for biblical study and understanding. He also emphasizes the subjectivity of biblical understanding, in that "every theology has a point of departure. No theology is a 'deposit', even in the most dogmatic and fundamentalist traditions."[9] Croatto asserts that hermeneutics actually consists of producing meaning, and "any and every reading of a text is done **from and in a given situation.**"[10]

The method that Croatto proposes, then, is the "hermeneutic method", and it consists of three stages. The first stage is that of "preunderstanding", which provides a starting point that is valid and valuable--a context that is helpful in gaining biblical meaning. The second stage is the "speech event" or "word event" which actually took place and the meaning of which is recorded in the text. This "word event" carries with it the richness of biblical meaning. The third and final stage of the "hermeneutic method" is understanding the "Bible as language", and exploring the richness of the meaning that the language can convey, rather than just interpreting the text as an "individualistic reading".[11] Croatto's exploration of Exodus is worthy of special mention and merits attention, at this point, as a very rich employment of his method of biblical study.[12] In

this work, J. Severino Croatto's strong understanding of liberation as central to the biblical word (in the Exodus, in Christ and through Paul's witness) is evident. It is this aspect that sets his biblical method apart from those within the European/North American tradition.

Raúl Vidales puts forth a methodology for a liberation theology understanding of the Bible that parallels that of J. S. Croatto in some ways but employs a different focus of biblical study. Vidales sees that "scripture is once again becoming the vital and formal principle and wellspring of theology . . . ."[13] He describes the real commitment that is involved in faithful biblical study and that is important to liberation theology:

> The biblical concept of truth is characterized by the fact that truth is not simply something that can be known or talked about but something that must also be acted upon and realized in deeds.[14]

Raúl Vidales describes "the Methodological Process in Latin American Theology" as involving three stages: 1) "Praxis as the Starting Point", 2) developing "A Different Understanding of Faith" and 3) reaching out and "Proclaiming Christ Today". In this model he especially emphasizes the importance and relevance of scripture, the necessity of an understanding of historic reality, and the growth of a strong consciousness of the prophetic mission of the Christian community.[15]

Although the theologians discussed above describe biblical understanding in different language and styles, their

basic concerns are the same and are true for liberation theology as a whole. These concerns are well-summarized by the documents from the Medellín conference of Latin American bishops in 1968:

> It is the same God who, in the fullness of time, sends his Son in the flesh, so that he might come to liberate all men from the slavery to which sin has subjected them: hunger, misery, oppression, and ignorance, in a word, that injustice and hatred which have their origin in human selfishness.[16]

What does this mean to the Church in Latin America, in daily Christian life? Gustavo Gutierrez noted some trends within Latin American church and community life that continue to grow today as expressions of new biblical and faith understandings. He calls this "a new presence of the Church in Latin America."[17]

The community in Solentiname certainly reveals this new church presence in a very visible way. The new and growing characteristics of Latin American Christian presence are 1) "prophetic denunciation" of injustice, 2) "conscientizing evangelization", 3) truly being a church of the poor, 4) realizing the inadequacy of the structures of the Church" and 5) the "changing lifestyle of the clergy".[18] The Christian community in Solentiname and Ernesto Cardenal, as priest and member of the community, engaged strongly in each of these new manifestations of Christian understanding and life within the daily struggles in Nicaragua, and the Bible was important in their community life in the way expressed by liberation theologians--for critical reflection

on praxis, new understandings of God's word and daily life, and vital witness to Christ.

At this point, the differences between European/North American biblical interpretation and Latin American biblical interpretation are fairly obvious. Table 1 provides a summary of the two approaches as they understand their own methods.

How are the Latin American biblical understandings and methodologies actually employed in an approach to the parables of Jesus? What specific approaches are important to gain insights into the meaning of the parables? Three emphases of biblical understanding are necessary. First of all, God is understood as the God of the poor and oppressed. For Gustavo Gutierrez the meaning of the poor in the Bible cannot be spiritualized.

> . . . it is impossible to avoid the concrete and "material" meaning which the term poor has for this evangelist. It refers first of all to those who live in a social situation characterized by a lack of the goods of this world and even by misery and indigence. Even further, it refers to a marginated social group, with connotations of oppression and lack of liberty.[22]

"Yahweh is the God who breaks into human history to liberate the oppressed."[23] Jesus, then, in the parables expresses God's concern for liberation, especially as He speaks of and envisions the "Kingdom of God".[24] Therefore, we can expect that the parables--and especially those in Luke's gospel--will say something very important to liberation theologians and the community in Solentiname about oppression

TABLE 1

METHODOLOGY IN BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

	European/ North American	Liberation Theology
1.	Starting Point: detaching oneself from life and the text (to gain a neutral starting point)[19]	1. Starting Point: engaging & immersing oneself in praxis
2.	Goal: understanding the text and gaining insights into biblical faith and life	2. Goal: understanding the dynamics of life & liberation
3.	Value: neutral	3. Value: oppressed as the people of God[20]
4.	Importance of education/ the sciences: psychological literary, individual	4. Importance of education/ the sciences: sociological, relational, political
5.	Agent of theology: biblical scholar/ preacher[21]	5. Agent of theology: peasant, gathering of Christians/ common people/crowds

and liberation as they reflect on their own lives and the lives of the oppressors.

Secondly, and deriving from God's special concern for the poor, God's word in the parables will be seen to carry a strong prophetic power, bringing profound meaning and change to lives and culture. The prophetic word is one of hope to the poor/oppressed and of accusation to the rich/oppressors. The prophetic word is understood as primarily collective rather than directed to the individual. Jon Sobrino "emphasizes the targets of Jesus' denunciations. If Jesus does not speak in contemporary terms of unjust structures or institutions, his denunciations are almost always collective."[25] A word of judgment, then, will be found in the parables--judgment upon the structures of violence and oppression by the rich.

Thirdly, and finally, the liberation theology view of the parables emphasizes the importance of "conversion to the neighbor".[26] This involvement with and concern for others is shown in very active and crucial engagement on behalf of one's neighbor and, more specifically, on behalf of and with one's oppressed and hurting fellow humans. Enrique Düssel puts this very strongly as he asserts that:

> If I do not listen to my fellow man in bondage, then I am not listening to God either. If I do not commit myself to the liberation of my fellow man, then I am an atheist. Not only do I not love God, I am actually fighting against God because I am affirming my own divinity.[27]

In this way, the social and political context of the parables

is of great importance to liberation theologians, as the only true, effective way to work for 'the other' necessarily involves working with political and social structures that are liberative and working against systems that are oppressive.

The Solentiname community's background is now important to explore, so that an understanding of its values and purpose can be grasped. With the influence of Thomas Merton, the priest Ernesto Cardenal and two companions founded the community of Our Lady of Solentiname on February 13, 1966. Solentiname was located in an archipelago at the south end of Lake Nicaragua, and it included in more deliberate community life a diverse group of people--farmers and fisherpeople, single people and families, adults and young people, who already lived in the lake area. In the mornings, the people would paint, sculpt or compose, and the remainder of the day was spent in basic survival, such as clearing brush and planting. An important part of community life was prayer and study, out of which came the group sermons included in The Gospel in Solentiname.[29] As a reporter describes it,

> The atmosphere of Solentiname, of Father Cardenal and of the people was one of vitality, trust and freedom. I sensed the Gospel of Jesus Christ in their lives, hard and painful, but creative and content.[30]

Thus, this vibrant community grew and developed in commitment to the gospel.

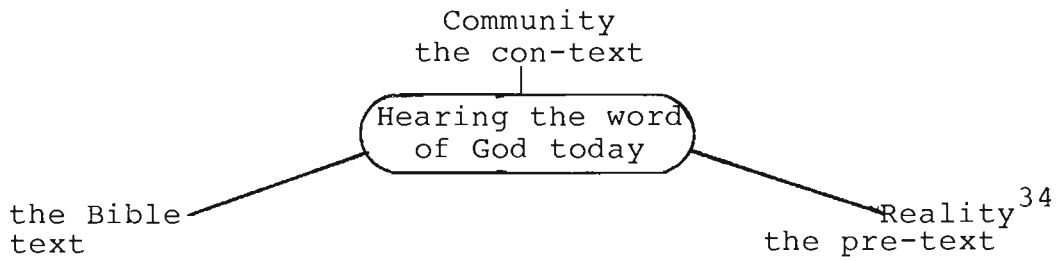
Cardenal and the people of Solentiname struggled with their relation to the Nicaraguan revolution against the Somoza regime. Their commitment to liberation and the gospel

message, and the very basis of their community, led them to involvement with the Sandinista National Liberation Front by 1976.[31] Thus, after ten years as the thriving and stable Solentiname community, their inherent threat to the status quo put them in danger. Before the victory of the revolution in 1979, Solentiname was destroyed by Somoza forces, Cardenal was exiled, and some of the Solentiname community members were killed.[32] Thus, although it was an isolated community, geographically, the people of Solentiname were certainly very much in touch with their own struggles for liberation and how these interacted with the larger community.

The community in Solentiname was one of many grass-roots communities--'basic christian communities'--that have a very deep understanding of liberation as the heart of the biblical message and their daily lives. According to Carlos Mesters, of Brazil, "The Bible is very important in the life and growth of grassroots communities."[33] The role that the Bible has in these communities certainly is compatible with the views of the Bible expressed by liberation theologians. Mesters formulates the basic picture of God's word in a community such as Solentiname:

Figure 1

THE BIBLE IN LIBERATION THEOLOGY



[34]

Liberation theology and its manifestation in Basic Christian Communities succeeds in overcoming some of the obstacles that have tended to keep the common people from engaging in biblical study and understanding. For instance, community reading and study of the Bible helps in overcoming the barrier of illiteracy, and 'pastoral agents' have learned patience and respect and to grow with the people rather than to impose their own understandings on them.[35] Mesters goes on to say that the method of biblical study in which the common people engage is a very solid and good one.

> When the people get together to interpret the Bible, they do not proceed by logical reasoning but by the association of ideas. One person says one thing; somebody else says another thing. We tend to think this approach has little value, but actually it is just as scientific as our approach! What approach do psychoanalysts use when they settle their patients into a chair or couch? They use the free association of ideas. And this method is actually better than our "logical" method. Our method is one for teaching information; the other is one for helping people to discover things themselves.[36]

Thus, the community in Solentiname experienced the word of God in the context of a dialogue rather than a traditional sermon or by being "taught" the gospel message.

Out of the above method of biblical study many important insights are gained by the people. Antonio Pascal, a tinker in Brazil, believes that "'the church is us exchanging ideas with each other to discover the idea of the Holy Spirit in the people.'" And God's word is seen as more comprehensive than the text of the Bible and the words of "the expert" or scholar as "'God speaks, mixed into things.'"[37]

A representation of this view is spoken by a farmworker, in Goias, Brazil: "Many priests concern themselves only with material things, such as building a church or decorating it. They forget spiritual things, such as food for the people!"[38] Profound truths are expressed simply by the common people. The richness of understanding is expressed in Ernesto Cardenal's words as he describes The Gospel In Solentiname and the community in which the dialogues took place.

> The true author is the Spirit that has inspired these commentaries (the Solentiname campesinos know very well that it is the Spirit who makes them speak) and that it was the Spirit who inspired the Gospels. The Holy Spirit, who is the spirit of God instilled in the community, and whom Oscar would call the spirit of community unity, and Alejandro the spirit of service to others, and Elvis the spirit of the society of the future, and Felipe the spirit of proletarian struggle, and Julio the spirit of equality and the community of wealth, and Laureano the spirit of the Revolution, and Rebeca the spirit of Love.[39]

Discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of liberation theology interpretation of the Bible are important at this point. Weaknesses and areas deserving further clarification have been pointed out by European/North American scholars and liberation theologians alike. A major difficulty in liberation theology's methods of biblical interpretation (which is not unique to liberation theology) is the danger of subjective, non-critical, and/or ideologically dominated interpretation of the Bible. This is especially a possibility and risk for a grassroots community such as Solentiname. For this reason, Carlos Mesters points to the importance of community reading and study of the Bible and the "necessary

function of scientific exegesis."[40] This is certainly an area that needs further attention.

The strengths of liberation theology approach to the Bible are crucial and show the great effort at faithful understanding that has been made in recent decades. One strength lies in the idea that liberation is based upon the understanding that no theology or human understanding, even though the Spirit works through it, is objective. All theology is based upon pre-understanding and certain assumptions. Probably the most important strength of liberation theology, however, is that it restores the centrality of the poor and common people and outcasts within the community of faith. The reading of the Bible by the oppressed, and the crucial insights that they bring, has an important place in any faithful biblical understanding.

[1]Ronald J. Sider, Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1977); Kenneth Ewing Bailey, Poet and Peasant. See also Norman K. Gottwald, ed. The Bible and Liberation: Political and Social Hermeneutics (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1983) for further examples and information on this subject.

[2]Gustavo Gutierrez, "Liberation Praxis and Christian Faith," Frontiers of Theology in Latin America, ed. Rosino Gibellini, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1975), p. 22.

[3]Gustavo Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1973), pp. 6-7.

[4]Ibid., p. 7.

[5]Ibid., p. 11; See also Hugo Assmann, Theology for a Nomad Church Paul Burns, trans. (London: Search Press, 1975), pp. 71-74 in regard to praxis and history.

[6]Gutierrez, "Liberation Praxis...", p. 25.

[7]José Míguez Bonino, "Historical Praxis and Christian Identity" Frontiers of Theology in Latin America, p. 262.

[8]Ibid., pp. 262 & 266.

[9]J. Severino Croatto, "Biblical Hermeneutics in the Theologies of Liberation," Irruption of the Third World: Challenge to Theology, eds. Virginia Fabella, M.M. and Sergio Torres (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1983) p. 140.

[10]Ibid., p. 146.

[11]Ibid., p. 142.

[12]J. Severino Croatto, Exodus: A Hermeneutics of Freedom, trans. Salvator Attanasio (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1981).

[13]Raúl Vidales, "Methodological Issues in Liberation Theology," Frontiers of Theology in Latin America, p. 37.

[14]Ibid., p. 38.

[15]Ibid., pp. 43-57.

[16]Enrique Dussel, History and the Theology of Liberation: A Latin American Perspective, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll: Orbison Books, 1976) p. 114.

[17]Gutierrez, A Theology, p. 114.

[18]Ibid., pp. 114-119.

[19]Whether or not this neutral starting point is even possible is questionable. There is some risk to faithful biblical interpretation in assuming that one can truly have neutrality.

[20]The danger of Christianity being tied to an ideology is certainly present at this point. If critical reflection is not truly employed or adequate, the gospel may be manipulated. (This is true for the supposedly neutral value of European/North American methodology of biblical understanding, as well. The gospel has been tied to the "west", capitalism and free-enterprise for too long and must be liberated from this ideological bond.)

[21]European/North American biblical understanding seems to show a larger, more important split between the biblical scholar and lay person than does liberation theology.

[22]Gutierrez, A Theology, p. 298.

[23]José Porfirio Miranda, Marx and the Bible: Acritique of the Philosophy of Oppression, trans. John Eagleson. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1974), p. 77.

[24]Arthur F. McGovern, "The Bible in Latin American Liberation Theology," The Bible and Liberation: Political and Social Hermeneutics, p. 464.

[25]Ibid., p. 466.

[26]Gutierrez, A Theology, p. 194ff.

[27]Düssel, History, p. 7.

[28]Teofilo Cabestrero, "Ernesto Cardenal--Ministro de Cultura," Ministros de Dios; Ministrol del Pueblo: Testimonio de 3 Sacerdotes en el Gobierno Revolucionario de Nicaragua (Bildao, Spain: Brower, 1983), p. 20.

[29]Harvey Cox, "Who is Ernesto Cardenal?" Christianity and Crisis 43 (4 April 1983), p. 109.

[30]T. Wright, "Ernesto Cardenal and the Humane Revolution in Nicaragua," America 141 (15 December 1979), p. 388.

[31]Cabestrero, p. 20.

[32]Ibid.

[33]Carlos Mesters, "Use of the Bible in Christian Communities of the Common People," The Challenge of Basic Christian Communities, eds. Sergio Torres and John Eagleson, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1981), p. 197.

[34]Ibid., p. 199.

[35]Ibid.,pp. 201-204.

[36]Ibid., p. 203.

[37]Ibid., p. 205.

[38]Ibid., p. 209.

[39]Ernesto Cardenal, The Gospel, pp. ix-x.

[40]Mesters, p. 210.

CHAPTER III

FOUR PARABLES:
THE PEASANT, THE PREACHER AND THE SCHOLAR

Until this point, in this study, the methods and patterns of biblical interpretation of the parables have been discussed. However, the most important aspect, to which we will now turn attention, is the contrast of the meaning of the parables in Luke to those in European and North American scholarship and to the community in Solentiname. In light of the foregoing chapters, one would expect European/North American views on the Lukan parables to emphasize the historical background and literary analysis of the parables. In the conventional exercise of the historical-critical method by European/North American scholars, the claim of the text on contemporary life is seldom stated.

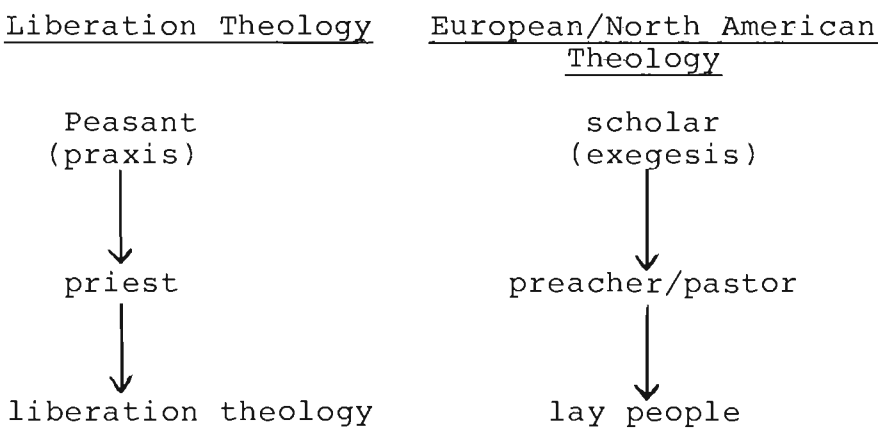
The contemporary claim of the parables on the lives of North American/European Christians today, however, is most often within the realm of the local preacher. Thus, within collections of sermons, one encounters more specifically the extent and way in which the parables speak to contemporary life.[1] The focus of attention within the parables is not drastically different for the local preacher, from that of the scholar. However, a more extensive relation to daily life makes the preacher's view of the parable more relevant to

the Christian and rounds out the European/North American understanding of the parables to a greater extent.

The direction of biblical understanding, then, is radically different in European/North American tradition and liberation theology. Within liberation theology biblical understanding begins among the common people, within the daily situations in life, and develops through the priest/pastor and scholars into formation of liberation theology itself. In the European/North American tradition, however, biblical understanding develops with scholarly work, which comes to the pastor--and eventually to the lay person. Thus, the movement of biblical understanding flows in this way:

Figure 2

MOVEMENT OF BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDINGS



A major difference between these two systems lies in the distance between the scholars and the people, in the European/North American theology, as compared with the solidarity of the people and priests/leaders within liberation theology.

We would expect the community of Solentiname, as a liberation community, to emphasize the social and political implications of the parables for the Christian life, while pointing to the importance of loving and relating to one's neighbor in a concrete, specific way. We now explore the directions in which Solentiname and European/North American views point, to ascertain the differences and similarities between the two.

The Good Samaritan: Luke 10:25-37

The first parable to be explored is that of the Good Samaritan. Certainly a well-known and widely-cited parable, both European/North American and Solentiname views on this parable, in particular, are well-formulated. There are two important similarities between the insights of European/North American understandings and those of Solentiname. First, in a general way, both European/North American and Solentiname perspectives are quite concerned with the meaning of the setting in which Jesus originally told the parable. Among European/North American scholars this is often referred to as ascertaining the **Sitz im Leben** or setting in life in which Jesus told the parable or passage in question. In this way, Joachim Jeremias explores the situation of the parable of the Good Samaritan--especially the motives of the lawyer and the meaning of the Samaritan.[2] Similarly, Eric E. F. Bishop[3] tries to reconstruct the happenings and possibilities surrounding the parable of the

Good Samaritan, paying particular attention to the historical background. J. Duncan M. Derrett[4] also reflects the European/North American approach as he emphasizes placing oneself in the position of the original hearers of the parable and views the meaning of the law in this setting, historically. Most European/North American theologians would find these elements to be very important in study of the Good Samaritan.

The community in Solentiname also places importance on understanding the parable in its historical setting. Those studying this gospel passage expressed much interest in ascertaining the motivation of the teacher of the law who laid a trap for Jesus and in learning what the parable had to say to the hearers in Jesus' time about relating to one's neighbor.[5] In this way they point out the problem of religious rules and the law:

> Manuelito: "They believed in a heap of religious rules, and they wanted to see if Jesus said they had to follow them; if he said they didn't, he set himself against the law."[6]

This discussion of the law in relation to the parable is also discussed in depth by J. D. M. Derrett[7] and is important to both Solentiname and European/North American approaches to the Good Samaritan.

A second similarity between traditional European/North American and Solentiname understandings of the Good Samaritan is the attention that both give to the meaning of the neighbor. Solentiname insights into the meaning of one's neighbor are central to their discussion of the Good Samaritan,

and loving one's neighbor is seen to be intimately tied with loving God. It involves a very radical reality that transforms a Christian's life. Although the European/North American interpretation of the Good Samaritan is not generally as strongly stated, the importance of responding to the need of one's neighbor is emphasized.[8]

Despite the above similarities of Solentiname and European/North American approaches to the Good Samaritan, the heart of their understandings are in contrast. Primarily this is seen in the detached way in which European/North American scholars study the Good Samaritan in contrast with the involved way in which the Solentiname and community views the parable. In relation to the setting in life of the Good Samaritan, European/North American scholars tend to explore its meaning in first century Palestine but do not extend that to life specifically in our twentieth century world. C. H. Dodd's discussion of the Good Samaritan focuses attention on the importance of the "climactic series of three" travelers along the road, as this ties into other parables and folk-tales, and he does not move beyond historical and literary aspects of the parable.[9]

Dan Otto Via and Joachim Jeremias go further in expressing the meaning of the Good Samaritan, although they do not finally explore its twentieth-century significance. Via, concerned with literary analysis of the parables, sees the Good Samaritan as an example story, and explains its significance in that manner.

> The behavior and attitude sketched in the Good Samaritan and the Rich Fool (example stories) are not comparable to or analogous to what a man should do or avoid but are exactly what he should do or avoid.[10]

Joachim Jeremias stresses the comprehensiveness of love for others in a general way.

> The example of the despised half-breed was intended to teach him that no human being was beyond the range of his charity. The law of love called him to be ready at any time to give his life for another's need.[11]

Jeremias and most European/North American biblical scholars point to the radical nature of the parable of the Good Samaritan. However, its meaning in the modern day is usually not specifically explored. In this way, the insights of European/North American Christians into the Good Samaritan often take the form of "being kind to others" without further specific reflection on the meaning of the Good Samaritan for their lives.

European/North American preachers carry many of the scholars' attitudes and insights to the lay people, especially within their sermons. Within sermons, the Good Samaritan's meaning for Christians today is a little more directly addressed. However, the same distance from specific indictments and demands of the parable exists for the preachers as for the scholars. Helmut Thielicke sees the parable as a general indictment of our selfishness and a call to committed action.

> . . . for the point of the parable is that we should identify ourselves with the priest and Levite and repent. It would have us remove the blinders from our eyes. It would teach us simply to get to work and do something. For the parable closes with the same words as the first part of the conversation: "Go and do likewise!"[12]

Although not specific, Helnut Thielicke's call to a changed life is strong, as in his sermon he emphasized our sinfulness in not seeing and not actively responding to our neighbor, and in having even "good reasons" not to respond and reach out.[13]

Two other preachers also express the European/North American view of the Good Samaritan. Gerald Kennedy asserts that "the test of religion is service".[14] He expresses the heart of Christian life. "A Christian institution must be judged not by its external qualities but by its service to the needs of living men."[15] Again, however, the sermon does not point to specific understandings for the twentieth century, but generally faithful Christian response to those in need. The second preacher, Charles Crowe, emphasizes an approach to the Good Samaritan as a call for "human kindness". This seems to involve both an emphasis on individual efforts of kindness and a de-emphasis on collective kindness and efforts to relieve suffering. The indictment of selfishness is not evident in his sermon on the Good Samaritan.[16] Thus, both Crowe and Kennedy express a deep understanding of the call for action, in the Good Samaritan, but do not specifically relate this to twentieth century concerns and needs.[17]

The community in Solentiname, on the other hand, understands the setting in life of the Good Samaritan to speak directly to their own situation. The insights of Manuelito into the motives of the teacher of the law, cited earlier, lead to the following insights into their own situation of oppression as the community discusses the Good Samaritan:

> ALEJANDRO: "It seems to me that what was happening then with the law is happening how with the Gospel: The law was extremely clear, but they didn't understand it, and according to them, they were following it. And they hope that Jesus will speak against the law, as they understand it, so they can condemn him."
>
> I: "I see. It's as if a supporter of this regime should ask us what we think of the Gospels. That could be a dangerous question, couldn't it?"
>
> ALEJANDRO: "It's all alike, it's the very same thing. Besides, they ask the question, they're always asking it."
>
> LAUREANO: "He could have said: 'Take from the rich what they have and distribute it among the poor,' but that would have been dangerous."[18]

In this way, the Good Samaritan is quickly and radically identified with the daily struggles of those in Solentiname. This approach and that of European/North American Christians are obviously very different, even as the setting of the parable is important to both.

Similarly, although both the Solentiname community and European/North American biblical scholars agree in the importance of the neighbor in the Good Samaritan, the meaning of "neighbor" takes somewhat different forms in their discussions of the parable. North American/European scholars tend to explore and discuss the literary and historical

background of the idea of "neighbor" as it relates to the Samaritan in the parable. N. Perrin understands the parable as

> an 'exemplary story' and as such concerned to teach by example, in this instance the example of true neighborliness. . .to teach that the crucial aspect of human relationships is response to the neighbor's need.[19]

In this way, Perrin expresses the widely-accepted European/North American view of the Good Samaritan as an example to follow in loving one's neighbor.

In his sermon, Helmut Thielicke points to the idea that "the person who is appealed to for help and the person who needs help sometimes have quite different ideas about the meaning of the word 'neighbor'."[20] Thus, the concept of one's neighbor is important to grasp within the parable of the Good Samaritan. Joachim Jeremias stresses the use of the word "companion" as helpful in thinking of the neighbor.

> In this parable Jesus tells his questioner that although 'companion' is certainly, in the first place, his fellow-countryman, the term includes more than that--everyone, in fact, who needs his help.[21]

Kenneth Ewing Bailey communicates what Jesus wants the lawyer to gain from the parable.

> The lawyer is pressed to understand: I must **become** a neighbor to anyone in need. To fulfill the law means that I must reach out in costly compassion to all people, even to my enemies. The standard remains even though I can never fully achieve it. I cannot justify myself and earn eternal life.[22]

Understanding the meaning of one's neighbor is explored as the key to the parable.

Select European/North American biblical scholars do make specific and challenging statements concerning the Good Samaritan today.

> G. V. Jones interprets the Samaritan with: "The parable is not a pleasant tale about the Traveller Who Did His Good Deed: it is a damning indictment of social, racial, and religious superiority." He later describes it as "a memorable illustrative story," which "issues the challenge to decide between the life of involvement or non-involvement," so that a man "understands and does what is actually required of him in his situation."[23]

This strong type of statement about the Good Samaritan is not representative of European/North American parabolic interpretation, in general, but is important for some scholars.

Solentiname understanding of the neighbor does differ, then, from that of European/North American theologians, in that it is much more specific and radical. The people of Solentiname focus on three aspects of the idea of one's neighbor, in this parable: 1) condemnation of those who treat as neighbor only their friends, 2) the unity of loving one's neighbor and loving God, and 3) loving one's neighbor as "comradeship" (as defined below in the words of those in Solentiname). At this point, the words of those in Solentiname are important.

Specific condemnation of the rich and selfish today can be seen in the sharing of four of the Solentiname people:

> I said that "neighbor," the nearby person, was applied in the Bible to all who were from Israel. Why would he ask who is his neighbor "trying to defend himself"?
>
> ALEJANDRO: "Maybe because he realizes that he had never loved his neighbor. He could pray to God all he wanted and tell him that he loved him;

but neighbor, shit, up to then he didn't even know who he was."

OLIVIA: "He didn't know his neighbor because he didn't have love. He did like they do nowadays: give a little alms, a bit of bread to a few poor children."

REBECA: "Maybe he loved his children, his close friends, but that was a selfish love; you can't call that love, because if you love just a tiny few, when there's all that enormous crowd of people, you're not loving anything."

FELIPE: "He knew very well who his neighbor was, but he didn't want Jesus to realize that he had asked the question to catch him in a trap."

OLIVIA: "Your neighbors are all of humanity, that's what that fellow didn't know, that his neighbors were everybody."

ALEJANDRO: "He thought they were the people who lived across the street, who surely were well-to-do like him."[24]

Secondly, the people of Solentiname do see loving God and loving one's neighbor as inseparable.

OLIVIA: "He gave him as an example a person of another race and another religion so we can know that everybody is a neighbor. He gave as an example one who wasn't a neighbor but just the opposite, an enemy."

FELIPE: "The man's question was what did you have to do to win eternal life, true life, and Jesus' answer is: love. Love is life."

An old man from San Miguelito: "But the law talks about love of God and love of neighbors, not just of neighbors."

FELIPE: "But love of neighbors is the same as the other love, and that's the only example he gives."

MANUEL: "It seems to me according to this example of the religious and the heretic, that love of neighbors is more important, because some take care of the temple but not of neighbors, and so they are evil, and the other one didn't take care of the temple; he was a heretic, and he was the good one."

I: "It seems to me that you could say it this way: those who love God without loving their neighbor are not carrying out the law, but they are carrying out the law if they love their neighbor without loving God. Jesus tells the teacher of the law to do as the Samaritan does."

> Another: "Those people in the temple really didn't love God because they didn't love their neighbor, and as we see, the law of the two loves is a single law. . . ."
>
> I: "But we're accustomed to thinking that this parable is to make us see that the Samaritan is the one who loved his neighbor, and what Jesus asks at the end of the parable is which of the three who passed by on the road **was the neighbor** of the wounded man. . . ."
>
> FELIPE: "It seems that instead it's the one who serves that's the neighbor."
>
> LAUREANO: "O.K., but notice that if somebody serves me and I serve him, we're neighbors."[25]

Later, Elvis summarizes this understanding:

> The fact is that in your neighbor there's God. It's not that love of God gets left out, it's that those who love their neighbor are right there loving God.[26]

Finally, in perceiving misuse and lack of clarity of the meaning of the concept "neighbor," the Good Samaritan is better understood by the people of Solentiname as talking about "comradeship". This word has a clearer and deeper meaning for them.

> I said there's been so much talk of neighborly love that we no longer know clearly what the phrase means. Among us there's a more up-to-date word for "neighbor" that means the same thing. It's "comrade." The law spoke of loving your comrade as you loved yourself, and the scribe asks who the comrade is. And at the end of the parable, when Jesus asked who was the comrade of the wounded man, he had to admit that it was "the one who took pity on him."
>
> "It's clearer that way, saying comrade instead of neighbor."
>
> And I said the truth was that the two are comrades, the Samaritan and the wounded man, for comrades have to be two. The term "neighbor" we must then understand as a mutual relation: he is neighbor to me and I am neighbor to him.
>
> "Yes, because being charitable to the poor, giving them wornout clothes, isn't loving your neighbor. Love of your neighbor is comradeship. Because that man not only cared for the wounded man but he took him to a hotel and paid for his room and said he'd pay for anything extra when

> he came back and, of course, from then on they remained friends; they were already comrades."
>
> LAUREANO: "The people are the wounded man who's bleeding to death on the highway. The religious people who are not impressed by the people's problems are those two that were going to the temple to pray. The atheists who are revolutionaries are the good Samaritan of the parable, the good companion, the good comrade."
>
> "The lesson is that everybody must be our neighbor, our companion, and that there should be no barriers between us."[27]

It is crucial to notice how specifically the Solentiname peasants see this parable in their daily struggles, as in the previous quote Laureano uses allegory to see how the parable speaks to the unjust situation in which the people find themselves. He further emphasizes this point at the close of the discussion, as he asserts

> LAUREANO: "And while religion went along that road without looking at the wounded man, communism, which didn't believe in God, has been the good companion that took up the wounded man and took him to a shelter where he could have food and a roof and clothing and medicine, all free."[28]

Before moving on to the next parable, two aspects of Solentiname and European/North American approach to biblical understanding and the message of the Good Samaritan merit further mention. First, a visiting "South American hippie" emphasizes loving the enemy, and Ernesto Cardenal ties this in with freeing the oppressors, as well as the oppressed, from the injustice which they commit.

> A South American hippie: "But our enemies are also part of God, because they're also human beings. If they do evil it's maybe because they're mistaken, and we must love them."
>
> I said we must love them and fight them to free them from the injustice they are committing. God

> is not in the one who is being selfish; it's the devil who's in him, as Laureano says. God is only in the one who loves. God is probably in the exploiters when they aren't exploiting any more and are united with us. There are some people in the parable we haven't spoken about: the assailants. These are the exploiters, who have legally assaulted the people, with the laws that they themselves have made, and they have left the people naked and covered with wounds, bleeding to death at the wayside of history.[29]

Finally, it is important to see the role of the biblical scholar in European/North American understandings of the parables, as compared with the role of the priest, Ernesto Cardenal, in the Solentiname reflections on the parables. Ernesto Cardenal certainly guides the people in their exploration of the Bible's meaning for their lives, and he has their respect and trust in a sharing of basic life struggles. European/North American biblical scholars, on the other hand, are respected and held in authority by the lay people but often in a more distant, and sometimes hostile, way. The local preacher in Europe/North America bridges some of this gap, but these differences are very important to keep in mind as we move further in exploration of the parables.

Riches or The Rich Fool: Luke 12:13-21

Concerning the parable of the rich fool, the main focus of both Solentiname and European/North American comments is the meaning of riches. In this parable the condemnation of the Rich Fool is apparent to both understandings. However, as in the Good Samaritan, the understanding of the

Solentiname peasants is more specific and requires more drastic change on the part of the listener than does that of European/North American scholars and preachers.

The first important aspect of Jesus' parable, for the people in Solentiname, is found in Jesus' role in relation to the brother who was asking for his share of the inheritance. The people of Solentiname see Jesus' role--in dealing with this situation, and in coming to earth as God's son--to be primarily one of justice.

> FELIPE: "He was coming to teach us love. If people carried out his teaching, the brother wouldn't steal the inheritance of the brother."
>
> WILLIAM: "He didn't come to distribute the riches; it's up to society to do that. And the sharing ought to be done among everybody, not just between two. In that sharing they asked Jesus to do, the rest were left out. They ask him to sanction private property, the inheritance laws, the status quo. He refuses, he hasn't come for that. On the contrary, he's come to destroy that social order."
>
> . . .LAUREANO: "He didn't come to divide up wealth, to create capital. Many rich people think religion is for that, to defend their private property, their inheritances. It seems to me that in a Christian society, that's to say, in a socialist or communist society, there shouldn't be any inheritance." . . . .
>
> "He hasn't come to earth to divide inheritance, because who said that inheritors have a right to receive their inheritance?"
>
> "The man saw that Jesus was just and that's why he wants to set him up as a judge. But he didn't know that Jesus' justice was another kind of justice, revolutionary justice. Even now there are Christians who think that Christ's justice is the justice of capitalism. The Chilean military junta says it's restoring Christianity, because it's restoring private property."
>
> FELIPE: "Jesus was coming to divide all the wealth of the world among all the people."[30]

Jesus' role becomes strongly stated as that of anti-capitalism.

European/North American biblical scholars and preachers do not seem to emphasize Jesus' role in relation to the two brothers, as much as do the people of Solentiname. However, Kenneth Ewing Bailey comments most strongly on this situation, from amidst his concern with Middle Eastern literature and customs. He points out that it is common to encounter the "dwelling together of brothers on an estate after the death of the father. (Thus Luke 12:13 is considered a deplorable request and indeed is so treated in the Lucan account.)"[31] Bailey goes on to explain that "we are here dealing with the East's most sensitive problem, both then and now, namely a cry for justice over the division of land."[32] Thus,

> The real problem is not the division of inheritance, but a will to serve self rather than to serve God (by serving others, including the brother). . . . Jesus' parables often reflect a profound concern for justice for the poor. For him justice includes a concern for needs and not simply earnings. . . . But here a self-centered cry for justice is understood by Jesus as a symptom of sickness.[33]

Bailey, then, points out here the importance of the motive in the cry for justice, and Jesus is seen to respond harshly to the selfish desires of the brother.

Bailey's view of his parable is, however, somewhat more intense than that of other European/North American scholars and preachers. Most do not explore in any detail the situation of the brother who asks Jesus to settle the question of inheritance. J. Duncan M. Derrett, however, does deal with Jesus' attitude toward the brothers. He sees

Jesus in a different way than Bailey does--as the peacemaker in this situation--with little attention to the meaning of justice as a factor in true peacemaking.[34] Thus, although the biblical scholars would not necessarily deny the justice-making role of Jesus, and the Solentiname community would not necessarily reject His peacemaking role, European/North American understandings tend to focus on Jesus resolving conflict, and the people of Solentiname emphasize His promotion of justice and opposing the wealth of a few.

What do the Solentiname and European/North American communities perceive this parable's attitude toward possessions to be? Both see the possessions of the Rich Fool to be a central theme within Jesus' intentions for the parable, and riches are seen to be not important. However, there are clear differences between the meaning of this parable to European/North American biblical scholars and the Solentiname community. European/North American understandings of the Rich Fool tend to concentrate on one point--that possessions are not helpful and not important.[35] The sense here seems to be that if possessions are used well, they are of positive value, but if they are hoarded, then wealth can be a disadvantage.[36] Charles Crowe expresses this sense in a sermon. He asserts that Jesus "is saying that the self-centered, hoarding life that ignores God is self-defeating. But the God-centered, outflowing life, whether it has much goods or not, is enriched and successful."[37] European/North American

interpreters of this parable see its role as a general warning against the dangers of trusting in wealth.

The danger of reliance on possessions is especially well-described by Joachim Jeremias and Kenneth Ewing Bailey. Jeremias relates:

> Luke 12:16-20 is an eschatological parable, whose conclusion Jesus expected his hearers to apply to their own situation: we are just as foolish as the rich fool under the threat of death, if we heap up possessions when the deluge is threatening.[38]

Jeremias' reference to "the deluge" gives this interpretation of the Rich Fool's meaning a less obvious impact to one who feels unthreatened by death of eschatological considerations, but conveys the uselessness of storing up wealth in the face of life and death concerns. Kenneth Ewing Bailey asserts most strongly that:

> Jesus' cryptic answer warns the reader in two ways. First, with these presuppositions the desire for material things will prove insatiable. Second, the dreams of the abundant life will never be achieved through such an accumulation of surpluses.[39]

Of the European/North American scholars, Bailey most strongly warns against the dangers and futility of wealth.

Two European/North American preachers express important understandings of possessions in the Rich Fool, and these relate closely to the understandings of the biblical scholars, as well. Gerald Kennedy, in a sermon on this parable, asserts that "Ours is the danger of the Rich Fool--to center our attention on our possessions and ignore what is happening to our souls."[40] Throughout the sermon, his theme is that possessions are not most essential to life--people and human dignity are most important.[41]

Charles M. Crowe has a very specific understanding of Christ's attitude toward possessions. "Jesus has no

notion that wealth should be equally divided. But Jesus was opposed to the grasping life, outwardly a success but actually a failure."[42] The rich man, as Crowe expresses it, was foolish, not bad. "Jesus was not opposed to men owning money. He was opposed to money owning men. Jesus had good friends among the well-to-do. He did not require his followers to be poor".[43]

It is interesting and important to note, at this point, that Crowe and Kennedy both take a strong, specific stand ideologically, concerning possessions and this parable. Crowe asserts

> It is important to see that the teaching of the parable is not directed against the ownership and possession of goods as such. Neither does it seek to exalt poverty as a condition of human well-being. It is not an attack on the free-enterprise economic order. Those who attach the Christian faith to the support of such ideas are misrepresenting Jesus. The Master at no time made any over-all condemnation of material wealth. Indeed, the Christian faith has always held that a reasonable degree of this world's goods can be desirable for the highest development of human personality and for successful living. But the parable does issue a warning that is clear and sharp. In all your getting, Jesus is saying, beware the subtle and deadly lure of covetousness! In spite of your best intentions it will kill your soul and ruin your life![44]

Gerald Kennedy takes this ideological stand further in equating communism with denial of human dignity: "We may deny the Communist claim with our lips and yield to its denial of human dignity in our hearts."[45] At no other point in the comparison between Solentiname and European/North American understandings of the parables do they become so specifically opposed to one another. It is important to

note the strong anti-communist feeling within the time that this sermon was written. Today the anti-communist feeling is not as strong but still implicit in a particularly anti-Soviet perspective.

Exceptions to the general warnings, among European/North American understandings of the rich fool, concerning the dangers of trusting in possessions, present stronger challenges to the twentieth century economic and social systems. John Crossan points to the "overthrowing ethics"[46] of this parable as it was meant in Jesus' day and as it speaks to us today. Also, Kenneth Ewing Bailey exposes the systemic, structural issues in relation to possessions.

> For us the text relates to the very important modern questions of excess profits in a capitalistic society and surplus value theories in Marxism. According to Paul, the Christian should work for two reasons. The first is so that he will not be burden on others (II Thess. 2:7-12). The second is "so that he may be able to give to those in need" (Eph. 4:28). To explore the meaning of all this for a Christian in a capitalistic society would go well beyond the intent and scope of this study. We would only observe in passing that this parable, with its presuppositions, speaks clearly to crucial questions of our own day.[47]

The people of Solentiname have a very forceful interpretation of Jesus' indictment of the Rich Fool--and the rich of the twentieth century. They emphasize the importance of possessing the necessities of life while understanding the parable to condemn having <u>many</u> possessions. Not only is the abundance of possessions not important, it is not life and it destroys life. In contrast to the predominant European/North American understanding discussed above, those in

Solentiname understand the abundance of possessions themselves--and not just covetousness in particular--to be destructive.

> OLIVIA: "Happiness doesn't depend on riches. There are many rich people that are unhappy."
> MARIITA: "It's the riches that make them unhappy. They have worries we don't have."
> I: "According to Jesus, it's not just happiness; it's life itself that doesn't depend on the things one may have."
> TOMAS: "A selfish person is dead in the midst of life."
> MARCELINO: Life depends on food, clothing, also housing medicine. But he says not 'on the many things they may have': that is "to be rich."
> FELIPE: "The many things (having too much), that's what kills life."
> REBECA, Marcelino's wife: "The fact that some people have too much of a lot of things, that makes for law suits, wars, that also kill life."
> WILLIAM: "He's also saying that life doesn't depend on <u>having</u>; it depends on <u>being</u>."
> TERESITA: "So that's why he didn't want to give that man the riches he was fighting for, they aren't any good."
> LAUREANO: "As I understand it, he says that having riches isn't living, it's being isolated, it's death."
> OLIVIA: "He shows that riches are the same as greed. Because he talks about riches and before he said 'beward of greed.' Because the richer you are the greedier you have to be. And then it's death, not happiness; so riches are a curse."
> ALEJANDRO: "Riches that are shared unevenly."[48]

The people of Solentiname go further to say that the rich only appear to be truly rich, and they are really poor, because material wealth gets in the way of the "greatest wealth"--other people.[49]

> OSCAR: "That man was asking for money, which was going to isolate him from the other brothers and sisters. In fighting for <u>his</u> inheritance, only thinking about himself, he was getting separated from other people. That money was going to make him poor, because true wealth isn't money, it's love. That man didn't know that riches are other people."

> And I said that this reminded me of a phrase of Marx: The greatest wealth is the other person, and that it's poverty that makes one feel that need for the greater wealth.[50]

These strong interpretations of the rich fool lead Alejandro to some specific indictments of the system of riches in his own experiences.

> ALEJANDRO: "What the man in the parable did is what rich people do now: Keep the money in the bank and take it easy. They eat and drink and have fun like that man. They live in an endless fiesta. And they go on accumulating more, they go on exploiting and living happily off the work of the others. Like that man in the Gospel: because that man by himself couldn't have gathered all those harvests that wouldn't fit into his barns, he did it with the labor of others."[51]

Thus, the people of Solentiname understand Jesus' words in the Rich Fool to speak directly to structural injustice--to how the Rich Fool may have gotten so much, from the labor of others--as well as to how he then deals with his wealth. European/North American parabolic interpretation, on the other hand, tends to emphasize only what the Rich Fool does with his wealth--and looks at his selfishness with his riches and not at any structural indictment of the parable.

The final important theme of the parable, both to European/North American biblical scholars and the community in Solentiname, is that of selfishness in contrast to sharing. Dan Otto Via expresses the depth of selfishness, its enslaving nature.

> When the parable's understanding of existence is seen as a pointer to the divine-human relationship, the refusal to risk and the concomitant inability to hold oneself responsible become

> unfaith. The man who retreats from risking his life wants to provide his own security, whether it be in material goods (Matt. 6:25-34; Luke 12:16-20) or in a sense of religious achievement (Luke 18:10-14). Such seeking for security is death, for in it one becomes the slave of the very realities which he hopes will give him security.[52]

J. D. M. Derrett, in a more concrete way, explains the utter selfishness of the Rich Fool--and the kinds of things he could have done with his wealth, in modern, free-enterprise terms, that with the right attitude would have been helpful and good.

> Whereas the owner, by outright gifts, by interest-free loans, and by investment in partnerships could have done, even in a selfish way, a good deal of good for deserving people (taking a tip from Tobit to avoid encouraging rogues), he preferred to plan an accumulation which could at any time leave a burden and a trap for the undeserving heirs.[53]

On the other hand, Olivia and Felipe express their expectations of the Rich Fool--and the rich in any age--in regard to overcoming selfishness and sharing with the people.

> OLIVIA: "Well, it seems to me he comes to share material things too, but not just to two people. Because notice that just with spiritual things, forgetting material things, you can't live. And the spiritual and the material can't be separated; it has to be one single united thing, but not shared just between two people. Because notice that if the only thing shared is spiritual, then the people starve to death."
>
> FELIPE: "If you want to achieve a spiritual life, you have to achieve it through material things. Because if I love God ('I'm on the side of God!'), to prove it I have to do something for my comrades and share what I have, be brothers and sisters with everyone. If I don't achieve it in material things, I'm not loving; it's more like I'm hating."[54]

It is important to note that while European/North American expectations demand change and true sharing, J. D. M. Derrett

assumes this change to take place within the capitalist system, not drastically altering our status quo, while Olivia and Felipe--and the Solentiname community, in general--assume a communist, or at least Marxist, society and a revolutionary change in the status quo. Thus, the parable of the Rich Fool is understood by both European/North American scholars and the Solentiname community to involve change in people's lives--but the perceptions of the necessary changes are very different. For the community in Solentiname, this change seems to be more comprehensive in a socio-political way.

The Rich Man and Lazarus: Luke 16:19-31

The parable of The Rich Man (Dives) and Lazarus certainly provides a stark contrast between rich and poor, and this provides for diverse interpretations by both European/North American scholars and the people of Solentiname. The European/North American understandings of this parable are quite varied. Many of the writings on Dives and Lazarus discuss themes and background such as the parable's original meaning, the literary and historical background of Palestine of that day, the meanings of "Dives" and "Lazarus", the pictures of heaven and hell and the afterlife. An important theme for Kenneth Ewing Bailey is that of humility.[55]

European/North American scholars and certainly the people of Solentiname see strong condemnation of the rich

man in the parable. For John Dominic Crossan, this condemnation can been seen in the literary structure. "It is clear that the positioning of 16:19-31 within this larger literary complex places the emphasis on the proper use of worldly goods and on the failure of the rich man to do so."[56] In a similar way, Thorwald Lorenzen points to the rich man's sin as his "lovelessness"--his ignoring of Lazarus and, thereby, ignoring of God.[57] Thus, for both Crossan and Lorenzen, the rich man's sin lies not in his richness, per se, but in how he uses his riches and treats others.

Within the Solentiname community, Gloria expresses the reason for the rich man's condemnation in a parallel way to that of Crossan and Lorenzen, and Julio and Ernesto Cardenal further elaborate on this meaning.

> GLORIA: "The rich man's sin was that he had no compassion. Poverty was at his door and that didn't disturb him at his parties."
> JULIO: "Now there are lots of Lazaruses that the rich have at the doors of their parties."
> I: "And the poor man is badly off because the rich man is well off, or the rich man is well off because the poor man is badly off. There are poor people because there are rich people, and there are rich people because there are poor people. And rich people's parties are at the cost of the poor people."[58]

The relevance of this to their own situation is important to those in Solentiname.

> FELIPE: "I think the poor man here stands for all the poor, and the rich man for all the rich. The poor man is saved and the rich man is damned. That's the story, a very simple one, that Jesus tells."
> I: "Christians usually believe that the good rich man is saved and only the bad rich man is condemned. But that's not what is said here. The

> rich man isn't called evil, he's just called rich. And why is he damned?"
> LITTLE ADAN: "Because he was happy."
> ELVIS: "While the other was screwed."[59]

Although they may not agree on how radical the change must be, the Solentiname community and European/North American scholars do seem to agree on the fact that neither the rich nor poor should suffer in the ways that the parable describes. Felipe expresses it in this way:

> "What I think is that neither the rich nor the poor ought to suffer the fate of those two guys in the Gospel. The rich man damned for having squandered selfishly, and the poor man screwed all his life even though afterwards he's saved. Which means there shouldn't be rich or poor, nobody should be screwed in this life, nobody should be damned in the next life. All people ought to share the riches in this life and share the glory in the next one."[60]

Wade P. Huie, Jr., in "The Poverty of Abundance" explains that Dives and Lazarus shows that "The rich need the poor and the poor need the rich."[61] Both Huie and the people of Solentiname seem to see that the rich have created the Abyss, but the Abyss must be destroyed.

> ELVIS: "The message is also, it seems to me, that humanity should not go on like that with those two classes: the one of the guy that throws parties every day, and the one of the guy that's at the door covered with sores."
> WILLIAM: "Abraham has told the rich man who is being damned that there is an 'abyss' between him and the other man. There is an impassible, total separation. And it's the rich man who has placed that abyss of separation between the two of them."[62]

Huie points out to the brothers of Dives--and to the rich Christians of today--as those in whose lives compassion must grow if suffering is really going to be relieved.[63]

Joachim Jeremias seems to combine much of the importance of European/North American views of the parables in a unique way. In an understanding that makes use of literary and historical study, he asserts that:

> quite apart from the contradiction in the context (vv. 14f.), where has Jesus ever suggested that wealth in itself merits hell, and that poverty in itself is rewarded by paradise? What v. 25 really means is that piety and humility are rewarded; this is clearly shown by a comparison with the folk-material that Jesus used.[64]

Thus, the importance of humility, the literary and historical background and the discussion of heaven and hell within the parable are given attention. The central significance of the parable, though, is expressed strongly by Jeremias:

> Jesus does not want to comment on a social problem, or intend to give teaching about life after death--he tells the parable to warn people like the rich man and his brothers of the impending fate. Lazarus is therefore only a secondary figure, introduced by way of contrast; the parable is about the six brothers, and it should not be called the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, but the parable of the Six Brothers.[65]

The immediacy and relevance of the parable to contemporary Christians--and especially those in Europe and North America is emphasized in this way by Jeremias.[66]

The people of Solentiname, however, point to two specific manifestations of the lack of compassion and awareness of the rich today who call themselves Christians. First of all, those in Solentiname see the abuse of the parable of Dives and Lazarus.

> WILLIAM: "I've been thinking what to do to give an interpretation to this passage that wouldn't be the one that's traditionally given to it, and that

> seems to me wrong, and that has been used for exploitation: because the poor man has been led to believe that he must patiently endure because after death he's going to be better off and that the rich will get their punishment."
>
> FELIPE: "As I see it, this passage was rather to threaten the rich so they wouldn't go on exploiting; but it seems it turned out the opposite; it served to pacify the people."
>
> ALEJANDRO: "You don't want to see either of them screwed. If we were selfish we'd say: let the rich continue with their scheme and let the poor man get saved. But that would be kind of bad, wouldn't it? To want the rich man to get screwed because of his wealth."
>
> PANCHO: "This Gospel is for the rich, and they ought to listen to it."[67]

Secondly, there is indictment of churches that do not take seriously their responsibility for their neighbors--by failing to respond and to live in compassion.

> LAUREANO: "In the churches in the big cities you see exactly the same picture that's painted here; inside are the bourgeois at Mass, and maybe outside in the courtyard there are some beggars."
>
> I: "And surrounding the quarters of the rich are those miserable quarters covered with sores. Now in the bourgeoisie there is a Pentecostal Movement, which is above all lots of reading of the Bible, but they don't believe what Moses and the Prophets say, that is, the message of liberation in the Bible."[68]

A final European/North American understanding of the parable of Dives and Lazarus must be noted, in contrast to the Solentiname interpretation. While Jeremias sees Lazarus as a secondary figure in the parable, the preacher Helmut Thielicke understands the poor person in a very general way, in which Lazarus and biblical reference to the poor is placed in a non-material realm.

> Now, the Bible when it speaks of the "poor" always means a special kind of poverty, which does not necessarily have anything to do with lack of money. It is thinking of the publicans and the harlots, and therefore of the people who have no merits and no accomplishments to boast of, people who live on the fringe and fag end of life and in this sense are poor. All of us at some time in our life have been at this end and thus have been utterly poor and helpless.[69]

Thus, while challenging contemporary European/North American Christians to personal transformation, the material dynamic of this parable is negated in Thielicke's understanding. In this way, the Rich Man and Lazarus again takes on a more radical call for social transformation, politically, in the eyes of the people of Solentiname than it does for European/North American scholars and preachers.

The Wedding Guests: Luke 14:7-14

The parable of the Wedding Feast or Great Supper is found in Luke 14:16-24, Matthew 22:1-10 and also in the Gospel of Thomas. Although the community in Solentiname did not discuss this parable directly, their understanding of Luke 14:7-14, as Jesus talks of Wedding Guests, is quite important and merits attention in this study, along with the three specific parables with which we have dealt. In looking at Jesus' words recorded in Luke concerning Wedding Guests, and at the parable which follows, Solentiname and European/North American perceptions seem to be more different from each other than was seen in the previous parables. What are these differences, and how are they expressed? In this

section it may be helpful to summarize Solentiname and European/North American understandings of the Wedding Guests in order to point to their similarities and differences.

First, the people of Solentiname comment on Luke 14:7-11. In keeping with their daily concerns and struggles, they see a very strong message in this passage in support of revolution and the overturning of worldly, selfish values. In this way, the kingdom of heaven is perceived in an immediate but not fulfilled sense. The ideas of service and sharing are quite crucial to their understanding.

> One of the young men of the commune (slyly): "It seems he's saying you mustn't be an exploiter but one of the exploited."
>
> I: "The opposite of the exploiter isn't the exploited one but the revolutionary. He says we must be revolutionaries, and the revolutionary must take the place of the exploited, as long as society is divided into exploiters and exploited. And it's precisely from the exploited that freedom will come. And they will then occupy the first seats."
>
> FELIPE: "He advises equality; everybody alike."
>
> OSCAR: "He doesn't say equality; he says take the last seats."
>
> LAUREANO: "It's the same as that other thing that Jesus said, when they asked him who was the most important, and he said the one who served. The one in the first place isn't most important."
>
> I: "If everyone has a spirit of service to the others, there aren't any firsts or lasts and you reach the equality that Felipe is talking about."
>
> CESAR: "In Cuba the millionaire sugar cutters have a very special place on the platform on the July 26 rallies. They're near Fidel because they're the ones that have worked the hardest. They're called 'millionaires' not because they have millions of pesos that they've taken from others but because they've cut more than a million arrobas of sugar cane; they're the ones who've given most to society. Just as in capitalist society the rich are in the first place, there the most selfless workers are the ones in the place of honor."

. . . .FELIPE: "That's exactly what the revolution is: to flip the tortilla."

I: "And that is the subversion of the kingdom of heaven. 'Subvert' comes from the Latin **subvertere,** which means to put down what is up and up what is down."

ALEJANDRO: "It seems to me very important what the Gospel says here. I realized that everybody always wants to be the leader and to dominate. They want to be more important that others, and that's always a reason for division in the left: that everybody wants to be on top. And that's a selfish attitude. You think you're a revolutionary and you're really not being one. What you want is to dominate. What you want is power. Jesus saw that at that dinner, when he saw that everybody wanted the first seats."[70]

It is important to note that at worship with the Solentiname community and joining in this discussion are some wealthy people from Managua. This adds a deep and sometimes tense dynamic to their comments on the meaning of Jesus' words. This is especially evident in comments about Luke 14:12-13.

I: "He's talking to the rich. Because he says this to the one who invited him, and according to the Gospel, he was an important Pharisee. And he speaks to him of his 'rich neighbors.' And only a rich person can invite the rich."

"But a party with poor people, lame people, would that be joyful?"

MARCELINO: "It ought to be joyful."

TOMAS: "He advises this because then that rich man would be with God, because God is with the humble, and if he invites those people God is at his party, and that party is joyful."

I: "And the parties of the rich aren't joyful?"

OSCAR: "They're joyful for them, but they're not really joyful, because they're only among themselves. It's a selfish joy."

One of those who came on the yacht, a lawyer: "Let's not fall into demagoguery. If anyone gives a party it's to be joyful, to have a good time. And Christianity isn't opposed to joy. And let's be realistic: if I give a party and don't invite my friends but invite some beggars, that could be a work of charity but it's not fun, not a party. You mustn't take this literally."

> MARCELINO: "And I'm not going to have fun at a party with other people that are not of my class, because they can't be my friends."
> The lawyer: "Exactly."
> MARCELINO: "But then he means there shouldn't be social classes, so that all of us can be capable of being friends and of being able to enjoy ourselves at the same party."[71]

While the lawyer from Managua appears ready to discredit Jesus' words because they are not practical, the people of Solentiname perceive a comprehensive and revolutionary meaning in Jesus' words. They also see an indictment of their own living, and the importance of the spiritual nature of a party--to refelct and to bring social transformation.

> OLIVIA: "It's about the distribution of everything. The rich really do share their things with others, in their parties, their clubs, all the life they lead. They spend a lot of money among themselves, and they give each other gifts, and the money never leaves their group. And then Jesus tells them they ought to share with the poor, not share with the rich."
> PANCHO: "Unfortunately we act that way, too. When we have a meeting, a lunch, anything, we also invite our closest friends, our best friends, and not others that maybe need that food more. That's very common among us."
> ALEJANDRO: "We have to understand what a party is, what's the meaning. Because a party's not charity. To feed people I can simply cook a pile of food and give it to people that are hungry. But a party's something more than that, it's not just giving food, like we were saying. It's also something spiritual. There are elegant people and rich people that you can't get together with at a party because they don't have anything intelligent to say to you. I'd rather be in the midst of thinking, poor people like here--right?--than in the middle of elegant people, mental cripples, with shitty ideas, as we say, because you can't understand them. On the other hand, you can be in a very agreeable party spirit with drinks and food, with your people, with worthy people spiritually and ideologically. But parties shouldn't be charity. Those rich people that give a party from time to time for poor people,

> they're not doing anything, just putting a band-aid on misery. Some of them, on their birthday, they give a party for prisoners or old folks, but afterwards they go home to their houses to have a ball, the real party with other people."
>
> I: "Jesus advises them to break with their families, with their circle of rich people, with their class. And the fact that they invite the poor to the party means that the poor stop being poor, and that in society everything is shared equally: health, clothing, culture. Because a party with crippled, sick, ignorant people isn't a very good party."[72]

The radical, exciting and hopeful nature of this kind of change is expressed simply by Thomas: "When there's no poor people, that's a party."[73]

The people of Solentiname focus upon two further questions: 1) Who are the just and 2) What is their recompense? Cardenal, himself, talks about these two questions at the end of the sermon-time, and pulls together the thoughts and perceptions of the community into an understanding of justice and being alive with the people and with God that seems to be crucial to and very descriptive of the life of those in Solentiname.

As mentioned earlier, European/North American biblical scholarship delves into Luke 14:7-14, and the parable that follows, in a very different way from the people in Solentiname. Much of European/North American study concentrates on the historical, form-content, symbolic and interpretive aspects of the passage, as well as the Matthean version of the parable.[74] An emphasis on the eschatological dimension of Jesus' words, as a mainly future happening, places these biblical scholars at a different vantage point from those

in Solentiname.

C. H. Dodd and Kenneth Ewing Bailey stress the future aspects of the kingdom, without much reference to the kingdom as already present.[75] Bailey expresses the essence of the parable:

> God's Messiah is here. He is inviting you to the messianic banquet of the day of salvation. The banquet is now ready. Do not refuse! For if you do (with your ridiculous excuses) others will fill your places from among the outcasts of Israel, and (in the future) an invitation will go out to the gentiles. The banquet will proceed without you. It will not be cancelled or postponed. The eschatological age has dawned. Respond to the invitation or opt out of participation in God's salvation.[76]

John Dominic Crossan specifically emphasizes the eschatological judgment of God, in pointing to the reversal of the exalted and the humble in Luke 14:7-11. He, however, does see verses 12-14 as a call to action and not just as idealistic words. In looking at the parable of the Great Supper, itself, Crossan states that Luke moralizes the parable of reversal. But Luke has added to its meaning. Thus, Crossan employs both historical and literary analysis to this passage in interpreting its meaning.[77]

In general, European/North American scholars point to Luke's unique perspective as gospel-writer as a reason to modify understanding of this entire passage concerning the Wedding Guests. Robert Stein is very concerned with the source, historical setting and setting life of the parable of the Great Supper itself. He points to the purpose of Jesus, in telling the parable, as "eschatological proclamation."[78] Luke 14:7-14 is looked upon as Luke's

unique perspective, since it is only found in his gospel, and his special concern for the poor and outcasts, is for Stein the setting in which Luke uses Luke 14:7-14 in "an inspired application of this parable to the situation which Luke faced in his day."[79] Stein and many European/North American biblical scholars certainly respect Luke's employment of Luke 14:7-14, but they see its direct relevance to situations today as very tenuous because of the uniqueness of Luke's situation.[80]

While European/North American biblical scholars, then emphasize Luke's perspective and moralization of this passage, the people of Solentiname directly interpret Luke's insights as relevant to their own experiences and situation. Gerald Kennedy emphasizes our tendancy to make excuses concerning being faithful to God's invitation as less important things take our attention today.[81] The eschatological judgment of God seems to be more immediate for the people of Solentiname and more distant to those of Europe/North America. Overall, the people of Solentiname more readily get directly involved in the meaning of Luke 14:7-24, for their daily lives and future hope, while European/North American scholars and preachers deeply explore the relation of this parable to Luke's perspective and Jesus' larger ministry among the Gentiles and Jews of His day.

It is certainly evident from the discussion of each of the four Lukan parables, that the methods of biblical

understanding set forth by J. Severino Croatto, Raul Vidales and Jose Miguez Bonino are very closely reflective of and reflected by the understandings of the Solentiname people. The Solentiname peasants base their biblical insights in their own social, political and historical reality, as Bonino suggests that this is crucial in truly understanding the Bible in the context of the oppressed. Secondly, the Solentiname community reflects a repossession of biblical and theological tradition as its own and not as a tradition that is handed over to them or forced on them from outside of their community and understanding. This is also of great importance to José Míguez Bonino. J. Severino Croatto's "hermeneutical method" also is seen as active in the Solentiname community. As well as the valid "pre-understanding" within which the people see the gospel message, they also become deeply involved with the continuing "speech event" of the parable in question. The vividness of their imagery and specific nature of their understanding of each parable reveal the Solentiname community's sense of each parable as an event that continues to be present and speak to them. Finally, Raúl Vidales shares the deep understanding of the people of Solentiname that stresses the importance of truly acting upon one's insights gained in faithful biblical study. This type of prophetic and active witness to the gospel is crucial. Thus, the methodologies of Vidales, Croatto and Bonino are truly active within the parabolic understandings of the Solentiname people.

As we have seen, the perspectives of both Solentiname and European/North American communities on these four parables have both similarities and differences. These are summarized in Table 2.

TABLE 2

SOLENTINAME & EUROPEAN/NORTH AMERICAN UNDERSTANDINGS--FOUR LUKAN PARABLES

Similarities and Agreements

1. The parables (biblical message) are relevant to us today.
2. Selfishness is condemned.
3. Suffering--spiritual and material--should not happen.
4. Jesus calls for important changes.
5. It is important truly to love God and truly to love one's neighbor.

Differences

		Solentiname	Europe/North America
1.	Daily relevance:	direct, immediate	indirect, some distance
2.	Ideological stance:		
	Claimed:	on the side of the oppressed	neutral
	Practical, specific:	anti-capitalism, pro-socialism	pro-capitalism, anti-communism
3.	Luke's perspective:	not an issue, accepted	unique, modified by other gospels
4.	Indictments (of rich):	systemic, lifestyle	individual
5.	Support, praise of poor:	central	incidental
6.	Great commandment:	love God and neighbor--at the same time (or not true)	love God first, then love neighbor
7.	Christian called to:	justice	kindness
8.	God's will for all people, materially:	equality	right use of possessions

[1]See, especially, Helmut Thielicke, The Waiting Father: Sermons on the Parables of Jesus, trans. John W. Doberstein (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959); Charles M. Crowe, Sermons on the Parables of Jesus, (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1953); and Gerald Hamilton Kennedy, The Parables: sermons on the stories Jesus told (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960) for in-depth look at sermons on the parables.

[2]Joachim Jeremias, Rediscovering the Parables (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1966), pp. 158-161; and Jeremias, In Parables, pp. 23 & 87.

[3]Eric E. F. Bishop, "People on the Road to Jericho: The Good Samaritan--and the Others," Evangelical Quarterly, 42, 1970, pp. 2-6.

[4]J. Duncan M. Derrett, "Law in the New Testament: Fresh Light on the Parable of the Good Samaritan," New Testament Studies, 11, (1964-1965), pp. 22-37.

[5]Cardenal, vol. 3,pp. 94-97.

[6]Ibid., p. 94.

[7]Derrett, "Law", pp. 24-27.

[8]See Jeremias, Rediscovering, p. 161 and compare with the Solentiname discussion of the Good Samaritan.

[9]Dodd, pp. 129 & 11-12.

[10]Via, The Parables, p. 12.

[11]Jeremias, The Parables, p. 205.

[12]Thielicke, p. 167.

[13]Ibid., pp. 165-167.

[14]Kennedy, The Parables.

[15]Ibid., p. 113.

[16]Crowe, p. 109.

[17]The works of Helmut Thielicke, Gerald Kennedy and Charles Crowe are somewhat dated and are not altogether representative of European/North American parish preaching. However, they do provide an illustration of how three recognized preachers have approached the parables in the modern era. While not exhaustive, their works are still current.

[18]Cardenal, pp. 94-95. Note that the "I" within these quotes refers to Ernesto Cardenal himself.

[19]N. Perrin, Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus (London: SCM Press, 1967), pp. 123-124.

[20]Thielicke, p. 165.

[21]Jeremias, Rediscovering, p. 161.

[22]Kenneth Ewing Bailey, Through Peasant Eyes: More Lucan Parables, Their Culture and Style, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), p. 55.

[23]Crossan, In Parables, p. 57.

[24]Cardenal, p. 96.

[25]Ibid., pp. 97-98.

[26]Ibid., p. 101.

[27]Ibid., pp. 98-99.

[28]Ibid., p. 104.

[29]Ibid.

[30]Cardenal, pp. 112-114.

[31]Bailey, Poet, p. 169.

[32]Bailey, Peasant Eyes, p. 59.

[33]Ibid., p. 70.

[34]J. Duncan M. Derrett, "The Rich Fool: A Parable of Jesus Concerning Inheritance," Heythrop Journal, 18 (1977), p. 133.

[35]John Reid, "The Poor Rich Fool," Expository Times, 13 (1901-1902), 567-568; and Derrett, "Fool", p. 136.

[36]Derrett, "Fool", p. 150.

[37]Crowe, p. 127.

[38]Jeremias, Rediscovering, p. 130.

[39]Bailey, Peasant Eyes, p. 63.

[40]Kennedy, p. 103.

[41]Ibid., pp. 101-103.

[42]Crowe, p. 118.

[43]Ibid., p. 122.

[44]Ibid., p. 121.

[45]Kennedy, p. 103.

[46]Crossan, In Parables, p. 82.

[47]Bailey, Peasant Eyes, p. 64.

[48]Cardenal, pp. 115-116; compare with Crowe, p. 16 (or footnote number 43).

[49]European/North American scholars and preachers also assert that the rich fool missed the true values of life. See especially Crowe, p.123 & Kennedy, pp. 101-102.

[50]Cardenal, pp. 113-114.

[51]Ibid., p. 119.

[52]Via, p. 120.

[53]Derrett, "Fool", p. 147.

[54]Cardenal, p. 115.

[55]Bailey, Poet, p. 83.

[56]Crossan, In Parables, p. 66.

[57]Thorwald Lorenzen, "A Biblical Meditation on Luke 16:19-31" Expository Times, 87 (1975), p. 42.

[58]Cardenal. p. 252.

[59]Ibid., p. 251.

[60]Ibid., p. 252.

[61]Wade P. Huie, "The Poverty of Abundance," Interpretation, 22 (1968), p. 407.

[62]Cardenal, pp. 255-256.

[63]Huie, p. 408.

[64]Jeremias, Rediscovering, p. 146.

[65]Ibid., p. 147.

[66]See also Thielicke, pp. 42 & 49.

[67]Cardenal, pp. 252-253.

[68]Ibid., p. 255.

[69]Thielicke, p. 47.

[70]Cardenal, pp. 127-129.

[71]Ibid., pp. 129-130.

[72]Ibid., pp. 131-132.

[73]Ibid., p. 133.

[74]Thielicke, pp. 182-187.

[75]Dodd, p. 121.

[76]Bailey, Peasant Eyes, p. 111.

[77]Crossan, In Parables, pp. 69-73.

[78]Robert H. Stein, An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1981), p. 88.

[79]Ibid., pp. 90-91.

[80]See also John Navone, "The Great Supper: Luke 14, 16-24," Homiletic and Pastoral Review, 39 (1938-1939), pp. 926-928.

[81]Kennedy, pp. 196-202.

CHAPTER IV:

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

At this point, several observations must be made concerning the conclusions/assertions made by both scholars and preachers, and peasants and priest. How adequate are each of these understandings of the four Lukan parables? Both Solentiname and European/North American communities display strengths and weaknesses that, although in most cases already mentioned, are important to summarize.

European/North American scholarship and preaching on these four parables has some strong points that are important to acknowledge. First of all, it tends to involve careful scrutiny of the historical and literary background to the parables. The scholars' cautiousness in applying the parables directly to European/North American understandings of the world is important, because the parables are then intended to be heard in their own terms. The great care taken to understand as much of the background of the parables as possible can provide a solid basis for understanding the four Lukan parables. Amidst this careful approach I found more impetus for social transformation than expected, but the specific program or direction of change is left unspecified, in keeping with the intent to be faithful to the parabolic message. Thus, the meaning of the text within its historical

context is emphasized in guarding against the interpreter too quickly co-opting the text for his/her own personal use.

Despite the strengths of European/North American parabolic scholarship and preaching, glaring weaknesses inhibit its effectiveness and faithfulness to the gospel message. While cautiousness is a strength of scholarship, European/North American understandings of the parables tend to stay in the realm of the theoretical. Thus, the detached nature of biblical understanding often does not become specific enough to truly affect the daily lives of most European/North American Christians. It must be noted, however, that the intent of the biblical scholar is not necessarily to make the parable--or other passage--relevant to contemporary life, but truly to understand the text in its original setting and meaning. Thus, the exegesis done by the scholar is in some contrast to hermeneutics, which intends to discover the claim of the biblical text on the listener. The biblical scholar, then, expects the more relevant hermeneutical work to be done by the preacher, and finally by the lay people. Part of the difficulty of this understanding of exegesis and hermeneutics, though, is that the biblical scholar is often removed from the lay person, as illustrated in figure 2. With difficulty in communication--and sometimes trust--biblical exegesis, then, does not often become translated into relevant, specific understandings and actions in the daily lives of many European/North American Christians.

A second weakness of European/North American understanding of the parables is the failure to see the idealogical bias out of which we live, while claiming neutrality. Eisegesis is often done--most dangerously--without one's being aware if it. This can be seen especially clearly within the preachers who easily point to communist denial of human dignity while supporting (perhaps unconsciously) capitalism and free-enterprise as good. This pro-capitalist, anti-communist bias seems not to be so strongly cast among European/North American preachers today, but it is still an implicit bias within the lives of many European/North American Christians today.

Thirdly, European/North American scholars and preachers do not seem to take seriously enough the transformation for which the parables call. In concentrating upon the personal virtue and kindness that are commanded, the more comprehensive transformation of the Christian community--and therefore reaching into the world--is taken too lightly and needs more attention. Finally, part of the difficulty of a truly transforming understanding of the Lukan parables--and what it is to be Christian, in general--lies in the gap between the scholar, the preacher, and the lay person in European/North American Christian life. More genuine interaction and deep understanding among these people could help to direct a more faithful, strong biblical understanding for contemporary life.

The Solentiname community expresses both strengths

and weaknesses within its approach to the four Lukan parables, as well. First, the danger of tying the gospel message to a specific ideology is obvious. If true critical reflection breaks down the possibilities of being entrapped in the support of an economic-political-social system can be as real for the Solentiname peasant as for the European/North American who claims to be able to begin from neutrality. Secondly, this can lead, in a more general way, to deliberate eisegesis, which hinders faithful understanding of the parables. Thirdly, in contrast to the often over-cautious historical analysis of European/North American scholars, the Solentiname community tends to place meanings of its own situation directly into the parable being discussed. While their insights and experiences will be much valuable in discovering the socio-political life of Jesus' day differences of twenty centuries still need to be addressed adequately and insights modified accordingly. Finally, the fact that twentieth century liberation theology is still in developmental and defining stages, indicates that many loose ends need to be brought together. (This is not unique to liberation theology, however.) Specifically, a comprehensive view of the parables--and what is relevant to understanding them--needs to be addressed by Liberation Theology's biblical methodology.

The strengths of the Solentiname understanding of the four Lukan parables can certainly not be over-estimated. The first strength is a biblically important one--understanding

the parables from the perspective of the poor. Throughout the Bible, God is shown to have a special concern for the poor and oppressed--within the Exodus, the sabbatical and gleaning laws, the prophets, Christ's ministry and concern for the poor and outcast, the early community's sharing, and Paul's collections. From the perspective of the people in Solentiname, Luke's parables then have deep and fresh meaning. Secondly, the peasants quickly and openly relate to and allow the parables to speak to their lives, specifically. Both in seeing their own oppression and realizing ways in which they do not respond fully to the gospel message on behalf of others, the Solentiname peasants are willing to risk for their faith. Thirdly, their dynamic biblical method of interpretation--by association of ideas--although not as careful as European/North American methodology--seems to be quite faithful to biblical meaning and call to action. It encourages continuing critical reflection and vibrant, faithful Christian living. Fourth, the honest, direct and simple thoughts expressed by the Solentiname people carry very profound understandings of the gospel message as it speaks to Christians' continued life in the world. There is a depth to their insights that is very arresting and demands attention from all Christians--especially European/North American Christians. Finally, the solidarity of the lay people with the priest and liberation theologian is generally a great strength, also. Although this could be a factor of stagnation, it has seemed to serve to help dynamic interaction and reflection to continue.

APPENDIX

MY LAY MINISTRY AMONG MIDDLE-CLASS NORTH AMERICANS: LIFESTYLE, CARE AND CHALLENGE

While writing in the scholastic tradition, I have directly struggled with the call to transformation from the Solentiname community. Throughout this study, my increased awareness and acceptance of Solentiname biblical methods and parabolic insights are held in tension with writing a thesis within the European/North American scholastic and biblical tradition. The culmination of this lies in including this chapter as an appendix. I am convinced, in light of the Solentiname understandings, that the following insights and commitments, from within my own praxis, are central to this study and not merely to be added in an appendix. Therefore, I suggest that European/North American scholastic understandings should be broadened to include such explorations and statements of commitment, along with traditional "objective" scholastic expression.

In light of this conviction, what do the issues raised by the Solentiname peasants and European/North American scholars and preachers concerning the four Lukan parables mean for my ministry within the Church today? What can I learn from the concerns, insights and challenges that are presented? In what ways can I better serve the Church

and fellow human beings in reflecting upon important insights expressed in this study? Before turning to the contribution these four Lukan parables make to my understanding, it is important to understand the setting of my ministry.

The scope of my ministry is important to specify, as I assimilate the understandings of this study into my ministry in a practical and critical way. At this point, I see my ministry to be mainly among middle-class, North American Christians--and specifically within the Lutheran Church in America. It will be specifically in the area of social justice and hunger concerns--in both raising awareness of and response to these important issues and situations. I expect to work within a church agency or program. A further dynamic of this ministry will be its setting in Northern Appalachia, which will add special concerns of justice--whether or not my ministry deals specifically with problems unique to Appalachia. The focus on hunger in my local community, in the United States or at the global level is not certain at this point, but my basic ministry understandings should be fairly constant in either of these cases.

As in the Good Samaritan, the final point--and key point--for my ministry must be to take seriously the call to "Go and do likewise". (Luke 10:37b) As Jeremias points out, an important consideration in viewing the parables today, is that in the Rich Man and Lazarus we must see ourselves as one of the remaining brothers.[1] Thus, first of all I am challenged to look at my own lifestyle and response to

God and my neighbor, and secondly I need to commit myself to a more faithful vision of ministry within the middle-class North American setting in which I expect to live and serve.

My personal involvements, values and lifestyle must focus on God's redemptive action in Christ and through the Holy Spirit and response to the needs of others--if I am to truly be faithful to God's grace and my responsibility to the neighbor. Three aspects of this active response are especially important. First of all, a sense or understanding of God's transforming sacrifice and will for creation is critical. Romans 8 especially presents a powerful image of this transforming reality of God. Secondly, I come to terms with a deep repentance as I acknowledge my own sinfulness--and dominance over others, against God's intentions for us. As the Solentiname peasants,[2] I confess my desire for dominance and control even as I am involved in seemingly selfless, good activities, thoughts and communities. Thirdly, I am challenged to respond to God and the neighbor in need in truly faithful ways--trusting in God's strength and guidance. An openness to God's will and calling will necessarily involve commitment on behalf of others.

I see the discussion of the four Lukan parables to speak to my lifestyle, commitments and involvements in four specific ways, then. First of all, the necessity of strong, dynamic devotional life is important. This certainly involves Bible reading and study, prayer, and

understanding of the historical and contemporary Christian community. This study points to two critical aspects of study and prayer, as well--truly critical reflection on praxis, and a community-involved (and not simply individualistic) devotional worship life and understanding. The dynamic sermons of the peasants provide an example of intimate Christian sharing that should be more at the heart of biblical study. And the insights of Christians throughout the world can broaden the sharing among and with European/North American Christians.

A second effect of this study on my lifestyle involves a new understanding of commitment to and solidarity with the poor and oppressed. Here Gustavo Gutierrez' concept of "Evangelical poverty" and the bonded nature of spiritual life and experience is important.[3] I feel a strong call to a simplified lifestyle that more strongly and openly reflects solidarity with the poor--an "evangelical poverty". Solidarity with the poor also seems important in a close involvement with the poor--in our U.S. communities and throughout the world. Whether or not I am ever physically among the poor and working with them, I want to be listening to what they say their needs are (not just what I want or perceive their needs to be). This certainly involves deliberate education and awareness--and responding to messages such as in The Gospel in Solentiname.

Thirdly, I see that my commitments and involvements must reflect a general life of response to others. Doris

Janzen Longacre stated in her Living More With Less five guidelines for living a more faithful Christian life, and among the five guidelines, that of "nurturing people" especially caught my attention.[4] In Living More With Less she brings together the experiences and suggestions of Christians throughout the world with the unifying theme of growing in more faithful, materially simple and spiritually abundant lifestyles. A paragraph in this book, by Wendell Berry, a Kentucky farmer, contrasts the roles of nurturer and exploiter in ways that speak to me strongly as both an exploiter and nurturer--in the hope of becoming a true nurturer.

> The standard of the exploiter is efficiency; the standard of the nurturer is care. The exploiter's goal is money, profit; the nurturer's goal is health--his land's health, his own, his family's, his community's, his country's . . . . The exploiter wishes to earn as much as possible by as little work as possible; the nurturer expects, certainly, to have a decent living from his work, but his characteristic wish is to work as well as possible. The competence of the exploiter is in organization; that of the nurturer is in order . . . . The exploiter typically serves an institution or organization; the nurturer serves land, household, community, place. The exploiter thinks in terms of numbers, quantities, "hard facts"; the nurturer in terms of character, condition, quality, kind . . . . The exploitive always involves the abuse or the perversion of nurture.[5]

Along this line, the people in Solentiname speak of people as the "greater wealth",[6] and this challenges me truly to value people in this way--and to develop a lifestyle that is nurturing rather than exploitive. A nurturing response to others, then, involves both personal and systemic aspects. Speaking out and acting for systemic and cultural justice

must be important parts of lifestyle in ministry, along with more personal response to others. Thus, a lifestyle of nurturing challenges me in many ways, both from Solentiname and European/North American understandings.

Finally, my commitments, lifestyle and involvements in the context of Christian ministry necessitate a supportive Christian community. A group of people with whom I can share intimately understandings and concerns of life and ministry will be very important. As a supportive group, I envision trust, growth and challenge to be active parts of Christian fellowship and learning together. This is the kind of support and challenge that I see active in the Solentiname community's discussions of the parables. Whether this support group is large or includes two or three people is not crucial, but the importance of commitment to Jesus Christ and to helping each other grow--in both loving and challenging ways--will be important to my faithful ministry as a lay professional. Now I turn to that broader scope of my ministry with others.

Charles Crowe asserts that "the greatest danger from covetousness comes to those who are in between poverty and wealth."[7] Certainly middle-class North Americans do see themselves as in-between poverty and wealth, and Charles Crowe points to a danger that fuels North American advertising and fast-paced life--covetousness, the desire for "more" and "improved" possessions and activities. Although we perceive ourselves as in between rich and poor, in

relation to people throughout the world we are truly rich in terms of material wealth. This underlies my basic view of ministry--as a middle-class North American among middle-class North Americans. Within this ministry, I see myself in three intertwining roles--the pastoral/caring role, supportive/sharing role and--most importantly-- prophetic/ challenging role.

Even though I will not be in ordained ministry as a pastor, I definitely see part of my ministry with others to involve pastoring and caring. This involves the kind of nurturing about which Doris Janzen Longacre writes. First of all, then, this involves supporting others in their own struggles with faith within daily life by willingness to actively listen and help them to see new possibilities in faithful Christian living. And secondly I see an importance in recognizing the oppression of those with whom I am in ministry. For instance, within middle-class North America, despite our being an important part of the oppression of others, there are persons and groups who are oppressed in many ways. Blacks, women, those who are illiterate or less educated, and also those who are poor face oppression within and/or on the fringe of middle-class U.S. communities. These needs for justice must be addressed. At the same time, though, I see this pastoral and caring role to involve being attentive to when a cry for justice is not legitimate. This would happen when, as Kenneth Ewing Bailey points out,

just like the brother in the Rich Fool we cry out for justice in relation to those whose needs are greater than our own.[8] An example of this might be the middle-class cry for lower taxes, while the lower-income person carries a proportionately larger tax burden. Or another important example would be the push for the "justice" of free-enterprise in exporting more grain to third-world countries, while land in those countries is taken up with growing tea, coffee, and cocoa for export to the United States and Europe, thus preventing the basic food needs of the people from being met and self-sufficiency from being gained. Thus, a self-centered cry for justice needs to be confronted in a firm, pastoral way.

The second role in which I see myself is in being supportive and sharing. This is, again, not blind support but a support which is involved enough to be honest and to challenge, as well. First of all, I see this as a confirmation of the priesthood of all believers--as being in ministry together, as pastors, lay professionals and volunteer lay persons. Secondly, this supportive, sharing role would involve my open and honest sharing of fears, concerns, joys and frustrations with those with whom I interact. Finally, in ministry my concern for justice must ideally be a wholistic part of my biblical and theological understanding. Thus, support and sharing can be a deliberate and important part of ministry.

Finally, my ministry will involve a prophetic and challenging role. Initially, this would be a call to recognize our guilt, our sinfulness, and the ways in which we exploit others. In a related way, and just a step further, the call to take responsibility for guilt in not responding to others' needs is important. The Managua lawyer who was involved in the Solentiname community when they commented on the passage concerning the wedding guests, reflected the excuses for not taking responsibility that are also heard within many middle-class North American Christian communities. Rather than admitting and taking responsibility for guilt, he excuses himself with the call "let's be realistic".[9] The North American Christian call to be "realistic" or "practical" often seems to be made from the fear of risking, and I see the prophetic role to be involved in challenging those with whom I am involved to take responsibility and use that positively on behalf of others.

A third part of the prophetic role, then, is in helping and supporting Christians in responding both personally and systemically to the needs of neighbors. Wade P. Huie, Jr. describes this aspect of the prophetic and challenging nature of the gospel very well:

> The more we look at the five brothers in the picture the more clearly they come into focus. We can respond to the call of Lazarus at our gate, and the many of his kindred across our land and around the world. The call comes in many ways. The call comes to grapple with the issues of welfare and unemployment and to consider the public programs that can deal most constructively with

> these urgent needs. The call comes to us to join other citizens in attacking the cause of poverty and trying to break the vicious cycle that moves from father to son to grandson. The call comes to us in our place of daily work where we can train the poor and engage them in meaningful employment. The call comes to teach those who cannot read to read. The call comes to share with others in the church family our concern for the needy on a large scale as well as through individual contact, and to give ourselves in trying to personalize every service to the poor so that their sense of worth is increased and their opportunity to contribute to our needs is enlarged. The call is sounded through Moses and the prophets, and through Jesus Christ in whom Moses and the prophets are fulfilled. The call comes ringing through the sights and sounds of this parable.[10]

A call to be free from ideological domination of Christian values is an important part of this prophetic role as well.

Finally, the prophetic and challenging role has a liberating aspect for middle-class North Americans as well as for the poor and oppressed. As Cardenal expresses, the rich need to be freed from the injustice that they commit,[11] and middle-class North Americans take part in an unjust system--and usually get entrapped in its values. The energy spent in taking care of, buying and using material possessions, while making more and more money to buy more things--and the hectic activity for our lives--indicate an enslavement and wasteful lifestyle. And as Doris Janzen Longacre's book understands both the commitment and the liberating nature of developing a lifestyle that responds to the needs of others, at the same time freeing one from enslaving standards of value that are not nurturing. In this way, we might all grasp the beauty of simple, deliberate

lifestyle. Thus, liberation from cultural standards of wealth and lifestyle can be full of new awareness and meaning.

As both Solentiname peasants and European/North American scholars and preachers understand the parables, neither rich nor poor should suffer as they do. As the gospel calls the rich to repentance and new involvement, the people of Solentiname saw themselves in a position to fight for the end of injustice. Thus, with God's active spirit in the church, our ministry together may be one that will grow in greater understanding and fulfillment of true justice within the community and world.

[1]Jeremias, Rediscovering, p. 147.

[2]Cardenal, pp. 127-129.

[3]Gutierrez, "Liberation Praxis", pp. 14-16.

[4]Doris Janzen Longacre, Living More With Less (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1980), pp. 37-42. The other four guidelines are also crucial to a transformed lifestyle, and are important for me--to do justice, learn from the world community, cherish the natural order and nonconform freely.

[5]Wendell Berry, The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture (New York: Avon Books, 1978), pp. 7-8; or Longacre, p. 38.

[6]Cardenal. pp. 113-114.

[7]Crowe, p. 120.

[8]Bailey, Peasant Eyes, p. 59.

[9]Cardenal, pp. 129-130.

[10]Huie, pp. 408-409.

[11]Cardenal, p. 104.

[12]Longacre, pp. 15-18.

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