

Preferred Option For The Poor
How do we free ourselves from the Bondage To Debt
How
That - Option For The Poor.
from Man
DISTINCTION

Navigating life: Views on Health, Ethics, and Society
Saturday, 13 May 2006

“Options for the Poor – Options for the Earth”

Father C. Brandt

ST. Paul has a sense of To Sahel - a -
Paradise

Thomas Berry tells us that only a sense of the sacred will save us: He is speaking of our relationship with the non-human creatures of the earth. His statement, of course, applies to humans as well.

I am making a special plea for the poor non-human creatures of the earth that to a certain extent have lost their dignity through our doing, through our disparagement of them - a plea to reaffirm their dignity so as to liberate their special powers so that they can promote the common good. Sound far-fetched?

Preferential option for the Poor People of the earth is by now almost universally accepted as an option in the Church, something we take now for granted even if we do not fully understand its implications.

This notion of the option for the poor has been developed with the focus on material privation. For example, what is the family yearly income?

Thomas Clarke, dialoguing with Thomas Berry suggests that the heart of poverty is not necessarily material privation, but what he calls “cultural disparagement.” By this, he means one human group saying to another human

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group, "You have no worth, you have not dignity." This idea can be applied to race, sex, sexual orientation, It can be the status of the laity in the church, as it has traditionally existed, our dealings with First Nations people. We say to these groups: you have no value, no dignity.

So, if cultural disparagement as the denial of dignity constitutes the heart of poverty, therefore God's option for the poor consists in the REAFFIRMATION OF THE DIGNITY OF THE POOR, THE DIGNITY OF THE DISPARAGED

Beyond that, there is the recognition that there is a special power in the poor to promote the common good. I think that is part of the biblical insight. It is not just that we are called to be compassionate towards the poor. There is also the recognition that, in a very mysterious way, the power for the redemption of humanity has been placed within the poor

Our call is to enlist all of our energies to liberate that power so that the disparaged and the despised of the earth now become the ones who carry God's power for the common good of all people. We wish to liberate the power of women, of first nations so that they become the ones, among others, to carry God's power for the common good of all people.

NOW, the point here is that the notion, which has been limited to the human species, is now coming into contact with the ecological movement, the new cosmology and

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helps us look at the cultural disparagement which we have been directing to other species of the earth. For example, when we allow oil drilling in the far north on prime caribou habitat we are disparaging the caribou, saying you have no worth. When we allow the Tsolum River to be poisoned by copper destroying life in the river, we are saying to the Tsolum River, to the steelhead, and salmon in the river - you have no worth, no dignity. We say that to our atmosphere when we allow global warming. You have no worth, no dignity. We say that to our forests, when we allow them to be clear-cut out along Comox Lake or the Oyster River. We are losing our wild salmon, species of life are being extinguished...as we lose these life forms we suffer soul-loss. Without the forests, the soaring birds, the music of the rivers, we become less than human.

These are the poor of the earth, and just like the human poor, we should reaffirm their dignity, because there is a special power in the poor of the earth to promote the common good. They are not just a collection of objects but a communion^{ITV} of subjects to be communed with. But to realize that these creatures are not simply objects for our consumption and benefit, we have to see differently. We have to undergo a transformation of consciousness. We have to change. *See like a mountain*

That is what Christianity is all about, change, metanoia. Our Society has to change from having a disruptive influence on the earth to one of having a BENIGN PRESENCE. And that, as Thomas Berry tells us, IS OUR

GREAT WORK, which we are all called to. We may be a teacher, scientist, fisherman, etc. but in addition we have this Great Work to carry out. And so we undergo transformation,

We make this transformation by experiencing creation with a sense of wonder and delight instead of a commodity for our own personal benefit.

We experience creation with a sense of wonder and delight when we fall in love with the natural world. It is only when we love someone or something that we will save them. And we can only love someone when we consider that someone or something sacred.

Benedict XVI: recently our Holy Father stated: "A theologian who does not love art, poetry, music and nature can be dangerous,"

Without a love for nature, the natural world, we will find it difficult navigating life. We will be a danger to all.

Only the sense of the sacred will save us.

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