The Preferential Option for the Poor beyond Theology
The Preferential Option for the Poor beyond Theology

Edited by
DANIEL G. GROODY
and
GUSTAVO GUTIÉRREZ

University of Notre Dame Press  .  Notre Dame, Indiana

© 2014 University of Notre Dame
We dedicate this book to

MIKE AND LIZ LAFORTUNE

whose generosity, support, and witness to selfless service helped make this work possible.
Contents

Introduction
Gustavo Gutiérrez and Daniel G. Groody

ONE
On Professors and Poor People: A Jurisprudential Memoir
Robert E. Rodes, Jr.

TWO
The Option for the Poor and Business Ethics
Georges Enderle

THREE
The Multidimensionality of Poverty
Javier María Iguíñiz Echeverría

FOUR
Are the Poor Happier? Perspectives from Business Management
Matt Bloom

FIVE
The Option for the Poor and the Indigenous Peoples of Chile
Patricio A. Aylwin and José O. Aylwin

© 2014 University of Notre Dame
## Contents

1. **SIX**  
   Option for the Poor and Option for the Earth: Toward a Sustainable Solidarity  
   *Stephen Bede Scharper*  
   Page 97

2. **SEVEN**  
   Liberation Science and the Option for the Poor: Protecting Victims of Environmental Injustice  
   *Kristin Shrader-Frechette*  
   Page 120

3. **EIGHT**  
   Teaching and Transformation: Liberal Arts for the Homeless  
   *F. Clark Power and Stephen M. Fallon*  
   Page 149

4. **NINE**  
   A Hollywood Option for the Poor  
   *Gerard Thomas Straub*  
   Page 167

5. **TEN**  
   The Option for the Poor and Community-Based Education  
   *Mary Beckman*  
   Page 183

6. **ELEVEN**  
   Health, Healing, and Social Justice: Insights from Liberation Theology  
   *Paul Farmer*  
   Page 199

7. **TWELVE**  
   Closing Argument  
   *Pat Maloney, Sr.*  
   Page 229

8. **Afterword:** The Most Important Certainty  
   *Mary J. Miller*  
   Page 236

9. **Contributors**  
   Page 242

10. **Index**  
    Page 247

© 2014 University of Notre Dame
Introduction

GUSTAVO GUTIÉRREZ
& DANIEL G. GROODY

Poverty is a complex issue. While its roots are socioeconomic, it affects people on every level of their existence. Understanding its causes and its consequences requires serious and sustained thought across a wide variety of academic disciplines. The principle of the preferential option for the poor has had an enormous impact on the field of theology, but this same principle has had a ripple effect in other areas as well. The purpose of this volume is to begin to look at how this theological notion has influenced other disciplines and the ways scholars have woven the golden thread of this concept into their various walks of life.

Although this volume approaches poverty from a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds, we begin by grounding the discussion in the reality of the world as it is today, particularly for the poor, the vulnerable, and the insignificant of society. While globalization has helped improve the standard of living for some of the world, still 19 percent of the global population lives on less than one dollar per day, 48 percent lives on less than two dollars per day, and, according to the World Bank, fully two-thirds of the human population lives in poverty. But economic poverty is only one dimension of the problem. Transforming the world into a place that fosters the dignity of every person challenges all people to consider
in what ways they can help to promote justice and peace here and now. It will take economists, lawyers, medical technologists, plumbers, farmers, retailers, CEOs, clergy, scientists, construction workers—in short, those in every profession, occupation, and vocation—to make the refugee camps in Sudan obsolete, to continue the rebuilding efforts in tsunami-stricken south Asia and the hurricane-ravaged U.S. Gulf coast, to put an end to corrupt and oppressive governments wherever they exist, to assist struggling economies so that citizens are not forced by need to migrate, to stem the tide of preventable childhood deaths, to replace violence with peace, and to rectify all circumstances of global injustice.

In the 1960s the expression “the preferential option for the poor” emerged, little by little, as a message from numerous Christians from Latin America who were struggling to be in solidarity with those in great need. While this expression was rooted in Christian faith and praxis, because of its humanistic dimension it also appealed to others who shared similar social, although not always theological, convictions.

Instrumental in this process was bringing the insignificant and marginalized of society to the forefront of history. The poor have been, and continue to be, the biggest absentee's from the history of humanity, anonymous during their lives and in their deaths. Except sporadically, they pass through existence without leaving a footprint. Their struggles and suffering, as well as their cultural values, dreams, and joys, have forced them to take not the grand avenues but the side streets, the country roads, and the dead ends of the journey of our people. While they arrived with poverty on their back, as Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas would say, a visible germlike change in recent decades has been emerging, and there is a new consciousness of the poor and about the poor.

Various historical events have allowed us to become aware of the causes and contours of the reality of poverty. As a result many groups have started to rediscover the memory of events and tendencies of their own past and of diverse cultural values which, for many reasons, has been omitted from recorded history. When we speak about poverty, we are not merely referring to its economic aspect, although its importance is unquestionable; we must also keep in the forefront of any dialogue about poverty that it is an exceedingly complex reality. In addition to the economic aspect, poverty also has cultural, racial, religious, and gender dimensions. The preferential option for the poor seeks to acknowledge the
multifaceted scope of poverty while standing in solidarity with the socially insignificant and excluded.

This solidarity is at the heart of the biblical message and has therefore led to a rereading and deepening of the Christian message. While the expression “preferential option for the poor” is relatively recent, its content is as old as the Scriptures. In it we find a faith perspective but also a profound reflection on what it means to be human and to create a more humane world. Therefore, while poverty is complex, this humane sense of the option for the poor resonates with various disciplines whose research and reflection add a wealth of richness and depth to these initial and ongoing efforts.

This book has its origin in two international conferences held at the University of Notre Dame, one in 2002, the other in 2004. From the first emerged a book entitled *The Option for the Poor in Christian Theology*, and from the second, *A Promised Land, a Perilous Journey: Theological Perspectives on Migration*, both published by the University of Notre Dame Press. In 2012 we also published through Orbis Books *Gustavo Gutiérrez: Spiritual Writings*. This present book is a further contribution to our reflection on the topic of the option for the poor, but from a perspective different from that of previous works. It seeks to examine faith and justice, in light of the global challenges of the twenty-first century, from the platform of disciplines other than theology. In the stories they tell, we see how the contributors have discovered inventive and life-giving ways to live out their own ethics, ideals, and the call to justice.

This volume is about the option for the poor from an interdisciplinary perspective. While it has a reference point in theology, it also goes beyond theology into other ways in which scholars, activists, and practitioners have tried to highlight the needs of the poor in helping construct a better world. A collection of essays by economists, politicians, lawyers, teachers, a physician, and even a filmmaker, this volume contains their reflections on the option for the poor and how it has affected their lives and their work. It is a volume on how these particular people, each in his or her chosen profession, have used the option for the poor as a guiding principle, that golden thread, woven throughout their respective areas of expertise.

Beginning with an essay by a law professor and ending with one by a practicing litigator, this volume is framed by the legal profession, a vital
link in the process of identifying and either reforming or dismantling the unjust structures that perpetuate the cycle of poverty. Robert E. Rodes, Jr., writes a compelling essay on how he learned to instill in his law students the desire to prefer the poor as a possible alternative to moving into positions in corporate America and on Wall Street. He writes that when lawyers, at their best, advocate for the poor, they not only improve the situation of the poor in the existing legal landscape but change the landscape itself, and that lawyers committed to the preferential option for the poor must look steadily at the poor people affected by the landscape and keep their concerns always in the forefront of advocacy and negotiation.

Georges Enderle, a business ethics professor, writes that producing wealth is not only “not evil” but necessary and that the poor should be included in the production of wealth, rather than it being one more thing from which they are excluded. In his essay he seeks to bring business ethics into focus and to the forefront of the various responsibilities of business people and organizations. For Enderle, the option for the poor and business ethics need each other to ensure that globalization can eliminate rather than perpetuate poverty.

Javier María Iguiniz Echeverría writes from a sociological perspective and seeks to define the multidimensionality of poverty, who are the poor, and why are they poor. This is a complex topic including economic and noneconomic variables, capital, values, rights, and freedom. Development, defined as human flourishing and achievement of a good life, is the goal and the metric for measuring progress toward the elimination of poverty.

Matt Bloom takes up the question of poverty and happiness. At its core he invites us to examine some of the premises of a consumerist culture, especially those that equate wealth and status with well-being. At the same time, he dismantles romantic and naïve notions that see the poor as “happier” because they are unencumbered by the possessions that weigh down many of the well-to-do. Most notably he brings out the centrality of relationships in our search for better lives, and especially in light of the theme of this volume, he reminds us that the option for the poor has everything to do with connecting with those who are often socially, economically, and culturally excluded.

Patricio A. Aylwin, former president of the Republic of Chile, and his son, José O. Aylwin, contribute a chapter on the political process of
evaluating and changing laws that affect the indigenous peoples of Chile. The dispossession of tribal peoples from their ancestral lands, bankruptcy of their community economic structures, and displacement from rural to urban areas have resulted in situations of poverty and marginalization for the indigenous, and exclusion from participation in the political processes that result in decisions that affect them. Though this is a story of hope, and progress has been made in restoring cultural identity and some political leverage to tribal people, there is still much work to be done.

Stephen Bede Scharper helps us see that a part of opting for the poor is also opting for the earth, as it is the only home we have. He connects the option for the poor with the notion of sustainable development: meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Human poverty, a vulnerable population, ecological devastation, and an at risk ecosystem go hand in hand, and the poor are often excluded from conversations and projects about ecological sustainability.

Kristin Shrader-Frechette’s essay builds on Scharper’s perspective by looking at the relationship between the option for the poor and environmental justice. This essay chronicles the plight of a poor community with no leverage to exert in order to keep a corporate factory from locating nearby, resulting in contamination of air and water, various illnesses, and diminished quality of life. The option for the poor is exercised when college students with science expertise take up the cause of the community and show, through legal channels, why the factory cannot be built in this location. The story widens as we discover that the practice of locating dangerous factories and plants in poor communities is common, and usually the communities lack the resources to protest.

F. Clark Power and Stephen M. Fallon contribute a chapter fundamentally on the dignity of the poor. They tell the story of creating a curriculum based on the great classics of literature offered to homeless adults at a local shelter in an effort to give the poor an equitable share of society’s educational opportunities. If the poor are those who lack power and influence as much as they are those who lack material good, this course seeks to liberate those who participate by helping them find their breath and their voice.

Gerard Thomas Straub, a filmmaker, has contributed an essay on his own journey from Hollywood to documenting the life and struggles of
the poor around the world. In his efforts to chronicle the plight of those who live the daily grind of poverty and those who are forced to migrate in search of a better life, Straub reminds us that we are all beggars and all migrants in one way or another, and that we must continue to believe that we can make a difference as we live out the option for the poor.

Mary Beckman’s essay recalls the dual nature of the preferential option for the poor. She argues not only that institutions and systems must be transformed, but that direct service to the poor and marginalized must be carried out as well. This concept of acting with those who live in poverty as well as acting on their behalf is brought home to students in a practical way through community-based learning: making regular, meaningful contributions in off-campus communities part of formal academic course work. Students are able to enter the life experiences of those on the margins, integrate their experiences with course work, and come to see the multiple and root causes of social issues.

Paul Farmer, a practicing physician and medical anthropologist, provides a chapter that places medicine squarely within the purview of social justice work. He proposes that the poor be offered the highest quality medical care rather than care that is simply “cost-effective.” For Farmer the option for the poor invites an analysis of health systems that are “historically deep” enough to remind us of some of the systemic roots of poverty. And, as several other contributors have done, he challenges us to ask whether the benefits that profit us as people of privilege might just have equal and, sadly, opposite disadvantages that are injurious to people in poverty.

Litigator Pat Maloney, Sr., who spent his professional life advocating for those who did not have the resources to fight against large corporate structures in court, relates how he was able not only to win verdicts for disadvantaged individuals but to endeavor to change some of the oppressive structures that work against the poor as well. He concludes with a challenge to the next generation of lawyers to make living the option for the poor and caring for the least of our brothers and sisters their highest priority—to obtain justice for the powerless when they are oppressed by the privileged. He wrote this essay in the last weeks of his life, and walking with him in these last days was an inspiring journey that influenced many who had the privilege to be with him.
Throughout all four volumes on the option for the poor, Mary J. Miller has been a tireless collaborator with Gustavo and Daniel. She knows the material inside and out, and her detailed and refined skills have made significant contributions to these publications. She has reminded us again and again how closely tied the option for the poor is with magnanimity. Her dedication, generosity, and intelligence make her essay a fitting conclusion to this volume, and her afterword is, we hope, the first of many published words to come.

*The Option for the Poor Beyond Theology* is the fruit of a team of people and the support of many different co-workers, colleagues, and friends, particularly those at Notre Dame. We would like to thank in particular Matt Ashley and John Cavadini, current and past chairs, respectively, of the Department of Theology, for their invaluable contributions, and the Kellogg Institute for International Studies for its support of this project. We would also like to thank Gil Cárdenes, Allert Brown-Gort, and Doug Franson for their leadership at the Institute for Latino Studies. Terry Garza, Maribel Rodriguez, Elizabeth Station, Marisa Marquez, and Claudia Ramirez were enormously helpful in handling many of the details related to the conference that resulted in this book. We would also like to thank our great friends and colleagues Virgilio Elizondo and Tim Matovina for their friendship, steadfast support, and insight. And lastly, we would like to thank our confreres in the Dominican Order and the Congregation of Holy Cross who have helped inspire this work and bring it to fruition, and especially Mike and Liz LaFortune, whose generosity and unwavering support helped make this work possible.

**NOTES**

1. *Human Development Report 2005: International Cooperation at a Crossroads* (New York: United Nations, 2005), 3–4. The World Bank describes three degrees of poverty: extreme or absolute poverty, moderate poverty, and relative poverty. Extreme poverty means living on less than one dollar per day. People in this category do not have enough to survive and lack the basic necessities of life; extreme poverty is “poverty that kills.” More than 8 million people worldwide die each year, twenty thousand die each day, because they are too poor to survive. Moderate poverty is defined as living on one to two dollars per day. People in this
category have just barely the basic needs of life. Relative poverty, defined as a household income below the national average, means a living standard below the common middle class. See www.worldbank.org and Jeffrey Sachs, *The End of Poverty* (East Rutherford, N.J.: Penguin Press, 2005), 20–24.

2. More information about these books and accompanying films is available at www.nd.edu/~dgroody.