

EDUCATION AND THE BIBLE FOR
THE POOR AND THE NON-POOR
IN A SOCIETY

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In this paper, I would like to discuss three issues: firstly, Vincent Cosmao's view on today's world, secondly, the Old Testament and the New Testament, as they relate to the poor, and thirdly, Paulo Freire's view on education for the poor and the non-poor.

I Present Society

In his book, Changing the world¹, Vincent Cosmao² views this world as a sinful place which is "a world in contradiction with God, with the plan of God" (p. 91). Cosmao thinks that "the world structured in sin" (p. 91) should be converted to "God in Jesus Christ" (p. 91).

How can this sinful world be converted to God? Cosmao believes that it can be done by participating in the transformation of this world. He states that "...action for development, for structural transformation, for concientization is an integral part of the way that leads to God. It verifies conversion" (p. 93). He feels that the participation in transformation of this world is "a necessary condition for conversion to God" (p. 91). His way of thinking is not sin-conversation, but sin-action-conversion.

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Cosmao asks how this transformation of the world can be realized. He rejects the idea of changing this world by “explosive revolutions” (p. 96). He supports “revolution by negotiation” (p. 96). He says that “the transformations needed today are so broad and complex that only revolution by negotiation can succeed” (p. 96). It is my opinion that in the above-statements, one can distinguish Cosmao, who follows Jesus Christ, from a so-called revolutionary without Jesus Christ, who eventually will become an explosive revolutionary.

According to Cosmao, conversion to God means, concretely, “shaping a habitable world” “in line with the demands of justice and fellowship” (p. 99). Why does Cosmao think accordingly? The reasons are, according to Cosmao, “the oneness of human race, and the conviction that the goods of this earth are destined for all” (p.100). His explanation of the former reason is striking to me. He considers the oneness of the human race to be Adam. “The second creation account in the Book of Genesis (2:5-25)³ depicts the origin of the human race in the form of a single human being. Before any mention of male and female, God created Adam as a single, unique subject, called to a life in the divine image and likeness of God. The radical oneness of humanity is thus singled out as something prior to the personal destiny” (p. 98). His explanation of the latter reason reminds me that “the earth belong to everyone, not to the rich” (p. 75).

Cosmao opens one’s eyes to the necessity that one has to transform this society and one has to shape a habitable world.

II The Bible for the Poor

Cosmao tells us, in his book, Changing the World, that “the gospel is neither political nor social” (p. 61), nevertheless it is “a divine force” (p. 59) which can be a vehicle for transformation of the societal and political situations in this world. I agree with him. We can endorse social and political movements with either the gospel message or without it. These two methods can work in cooperation. Nevertheless, there is a big

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difference between the two. The difference is whether a person believes in “a divine force” (p. 59) or not. Even though there is a difference, we can and should transform a social and political situation in concert with the people who don’t have the gospel message.

Cosmao shows how the Biblical message relates to the poor. Two things that interested me were that in the Old Testament, the sabbatical year and the jubilee year were established to help the poor. Cosmao states that according to the Old Testament, “in the sabbatical year, the land was to lie fallow. Its fruits were to be left to the poor, slaves were to be freed, and debtors were to be released from their debts” (p. 64). The jubilee year was similar. During that time, debts were forgiven, the poor were taken care of, and food was provided for the hungry. Although we are not sure “whether the sabbatical year and the jubilee year ever took real effect in ancient Israel” (p. 71), we have to appreciate them because of the fact that there was evidence of concern for the poor. Conversely, in Japan, there too had been a sabbatical year. The reason, however, had not been for the poor but rather for the conservation of the soil. Another thing that interested me was that in the Old Testament, it is reported that the prophets Amos and Isaiah struggled for the poor. The sabbatical year and the jubilee year in the Old Testament “helped to shape the collective conscience of the nation” (p. 71), and its idea was realized by the coming of Jesus. Thus, we can observe one of the connections between the Old Testament (the sabbatical year and the jubilee year) and the New Testament (the coming of Jesus into this world).

Wolfgang Stegemann⁴ states in his book, The Gospel and the Poor,⁵ that “the Greek term most commonly used in the New Testament for the ‘poor’ is ‘ptōchos’ ” (p. 14). It is noted that the words for the poor ‘penēs,’ ‘apōros,’ and ‘endeēs’ are rarely used in the New Testament. The reason why the term for the poor, ‘ptōchos,’ is used is that this term illustrates “the real-life situation” (p. 14) of the poor of that day; it reflects their ‘socioeconomic’ (p. 15) situation. According to

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Stegemann's description, "the 'ptōchoi' are destitute, sick, poorly-clothed, and dependent on others for the basic necessities for which they must be g. This characterization of the destitute is common to all antiquity; it is not confined to Palestine" (p. 54). As an example, one can point out Acts 3:1-10,⁶ in which "there is the lame beggar in the Temple in Jerusalem whom Peter heals in the name of Jesus" (p. 18). The causes of the pauperization of large parts of the Palestinian population are "the radical reorganization of Palestine introduced by Pompey" (p.19), "Herod the Great's expropriation of enormous stretches of farmland" (p. 19), "the crushing burden of taxes" (p. 19) and "crop failure" (p. 19). It is, therefore, evident that "the first-and second-generation followers of Jesus in Palestine were destitute" (p. 55).

On the other hand, "the Christian communities in the urban regions of the Roman Empire, beyond Palestine," (p. 55) consisted of "the little people (penētes), including neither the destitute (ptōchoi) nor the wealthy (plousioi) " (p. 32). According to Stegemann, the little people (penētes) are "in contrast to the 'powerful' (dynatoi), who are perceived to be economically and socially powerful and who certainly must be portrayed as wealthy" (p. 37). There is an exception to the above statements, in that Luke's community might have included wealthy people. It is, therefore, interesting that Luke stresses the importance of the giving of alms and being charitable to the poor. He also states that "the gospel is preached to the poor (Luke 4:18, 7:22)"⁷ (p. 52). One can say Luke's theology is a "theology of the poor" (p. 51). At the end of the book, Stegemann cites Luke 16:1-13,⁸ and he notes that one should make friends for oneself by means of uprighteous mammon. This means that "there is a legitimate use of money for the disciples that is not service of mammon" (p. 62).

I would like to comment on certain characteristics which I found to be interesting and noteworthy. One such characteristics is Stegemann's use of the socio-historical approach to the gospel. He emphasizes the necessity of reading the gospel in the social, economic, political and

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cultural context. He states that the New Testament is not direct revelation of the word of God, nor is the Christian faith a “religion of the book” (p. 57). It is rather a historical movement whose origins are in Palestinian Judaism. I believe the second characteristic is related to the first. It seems to me that Stegemann is academically influenced by Rudolf Bultmann, especially his ‘demythologization.’ Stegemann’s ‘socio-historical’ approach is the approach of demythologization. He cites Rudolf Bultmann’s famous words of demythologization, “we live in the era of electric lights” (p. 58). He, therefore, emphasizes that because our existence is greatly influenced by the materialism of our society, it is possible to misunderstand the biblical texts unless one appreciates the historical significance of the gospel and society which they portray.

Additionally, I would like to comment on The Gospel and the Poor. Stegemann’s socio-historical approach is clear and persuasive. When the gospel is read in light of the social, historical, economic, political, cultural context of the day, its content is concrete and visual. This approach helps one to understand the gospel more vividly. Furthermore, although one tends to forget that Jesus and His followers had fought on behalf of the poor, and the gospel is for the poor, according to Stegemann, this book reminds one of one’s responsibility to struggle for the poor and to interpret the gospel not for the rich but for the poor. It is also interesting that Luke’s theology is a theology of the poor, different from the theology of Matthew and Mark.

In short, one can understand how the Old Testament and the New Testament, especially Luke’s theology relate to the poor and how they record the struggles for the poor.

III Education for the Poor and the Non-Poor

One can say that in Pedagogy of the Oppressed,⁹ Paulo Freire presents a theory and a method for the oppressed to “liberate and humanize themselves and their oppressors as well” (p. 28), through the transformation of the world.

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The oppressors, on the one hand, regard themselves only as human beings, and they see other people as things. They tend to dominate other people and things. On the other hand, the oppressed, very often, do not perceive themselves as the oppressed "by their submersion in the reality of oppression" (p. 30). Once they find themselves as oppressed, they often are driven into becoming the oppressors. Nevertheless, Paulo Freire stresses that the oppressed should not try to "become, in turn, oppressors of the oppressors" (p. 28) by the method of dehumanization. Rather, he emphasizes that the oppressed should become "restorers of humanity of both" (p. 28).

As a method for liberation and humanization, of both the oppressed and the oppressors, Freire feels that education is of the utmost importance. He presents two different types of education: banking education and problem-posing education. He defines banking education as follows:

Narration (with the teacher as narrator) leads the students to memorize mechanically the narrated content. Worse yet, it turns them into "containers", into "receptacles" to be "filled" by the teacher. The more completely he fills the receptacles, the better a teacher he is. The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are. Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher...makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. This is the "banking" concept of education, ... (p. 58).

On the other hand, he describes problem-posing education in the following manner:

Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teaches (p. 67).

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In short, in problem-posing education, both the teacher and the student equally face the problem or the task of the world. What does the problem or task mean according to Freire? It means that not only the oppressed but also the oppressors need to be liberated and humanized, through the transformation of reality. Needless to say, between banking education and problem-posing education, Freire promotes and endorses the latter one.

To perform the above task, Freire stresses dialogue as a principle of method of problem-posing education. He presents five requirements for dialogue: dialogue cannot exist...in the absence of a profound love for the world and for men; dialogue cannot exist without humility; dialogue further requires an intense faith in man, faith in his power to make and remake, to create and re-create, faith in his vocation to be more fully human; dialogue cannot exist without hope; true dialogue cannot exist unless those involved in dialogue engage in critical thinking (pp. 77-81).

Programs of problem-posing education should be the contents which are deeply related to the life of the oppressed. In addition, programs are not only the programs to be solved symptomatically by the oppressed, but the programs to be posed to the oppressed. By that, the oppressed can redesign and rewrite the structure of the world, beyond those problems involved with the daily tasks of living.

Including the activities of problem-posing education, all human activities consist of "action and reflection" (p. 119), that is, 'praxis' (p. 119). As praxis, human activity requires 'theory' (p. 119). Human activity is praxis and theory. It should be noted that "action and reflection occur simultaneously" (p. 123). As theory which leads to praxis, Freire presents two theories: the theory of antialogical action and the theory of dialogical action. The characteristics of the former are the necessity for conquest, divide and rule, manipulation and cultural invasion (pp. 133-66). On the contrary, the characteristics of the latter are cooperation, unity for liberation, organization of the people and cultural

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synthesis (pp. 167-86). Freire states that "in the antidiological theory of action, cultural invasion serves the ends of manipulation, which in turn serves the ends of conquest, and conquest the ends of domination. Cultural synthesis serves the ends of organization; organization serves the end of liberation" (p. 185).

I would like to discuss the characteristics of the book, Pedagogy of the Oppressed. The first characteristic is that although most of this book deals with the theory of liberation and humanization of people, Freire's theory is based on his many praxes. His theory of liberation and humanization of people is, therefore, concrete, intelligible and persuasive. In short, the first characteristic of this book lies in the combination of theory and praxis. The second characteristic of this book, political liberation and humanization and its relationship to education is clarified by Freire, the profound thinker, educator and liberationist. His ideas contribute significantly to the understanding of the connection between education and political tasks.

Furthermore, this book shows one that the oppressors should notice that "no one can be authentically human while he prevents others from being so" (p. 73). Freire indicates that the oppressed should not be, in turn, "oppressors of the oppressors" (p. 28). These ideas represent the depth of Freire's philosophy of man. In Japan, as the concept of banking education is prevalent, Japanese educators could benefit greatly from the problem-posing theory of education presented by Freire. It is not by violence but rather by dialogue, that liberation or humanization of people can be realized.

In the book, Pedagogies for the Non-Poor,¹⁰ 'non-poor' are defined as follows: "The non-poor are the middle class who, as a group, have low infant mortality, high life expectancy, and enough sustenance to be above the 'poverty line' " (p. xi). What should education be for these people, that is, for the non-poor? It should be 'transformative education', different from 'banking education' which "is an understanding of education as a process in which a teacher 'deposits' information into a

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student, an 'empty vessel', who receives, memorizes, and repeats" (p. 13). What is transformative education? Freire attempts to explain his definition of 'transformative education'. He states that "it is impossible to think of transformation, of education for transformation, without thinking of how to mobilize and how to organize political power" (p. 226). In this book, therefore, education, transformation of the world and political power are not independent of one another. According to Freire, not only to get power but also to reinvent power is a serious challenge for leaders "today in the end of this century" (p. 226).

What is transformative education combating? In Pedagogies for the Non-Poor, William B. Kennedy states nine items that represent problems for educators: (1) the middle-class cocoon (2) affluence (3) civil religion (4) the media (5) the educational system (6) the family (7) volunteer organizations (8) the workplace and (9) religious organizations and teachings. Kennedy says, "the so-called middle class in North America live in an ideological cocoon of which they are largely unaware" (p. 239). One of the characteristics of middle class is the 'relative affluence' (p. 240). In addition, Kennedy states that "another feature of the cocoon is its use of civil religion" (p. 240). Civil religion is "what will Herberg calls 'the operative faith of the American people'" (p. 241). Kennedy stresses that "a major force that forms and perpetuates the cocoon is the media, which dominates the interpretation of what is happening" (p. 241). The educational system can be an obstacle to transformative education, because application of learning does not always occur, regarding social issues. Kennedy suggests "how the reproductive and imaginative possibilities of the educational system need to be part of the analysis of the obstacles" (p. 242). The family is also a hindrance to transformative education, because in the 'First World', particularly in North American society, the idea that "our own children have rights above and beyond the rights of other children" (p. 243) is prevalent. Volunteer organizations "were routinized, nationalized, ... lay participation was finally reduced to fund-raising" (p. 243). The workplace is one of the

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challenging locations to transformative education. In the item of religious organization and teaching, Kennedy says, "the stress on Jesus as a personal savior is always linked ... to the defense of the political status quo" (p. 244). He states that "not sinful individuals, but sinful structures ... the sinful society" (p. 245) must be taught.

What is the purpose of transformative education? Kennedy presents four items: (1) new consciousness (2) lifestyle change (3) political/social action and (4) conversion. Regarding new consciousness, Kennedy quotes Baum's passage in which "utopian imagination makes people sensitive to the breaking points of the present system and nourishes in them a longing for a new kind of society" (p. 246). One of the goals of transformative education is to change lifestyles. Transformative education is also action-oriented, that is, of a political/social nature. In transformative education for the non-poor, 'continuing baptism' is, essentially, a goal.

What are the educational factors in the transformative process? Robert Evans states eight items: (1) encounter with the poor (2) experiential immersion that challenges assumptions (3) openness to vulnerability (4) community of support and accountability (5) vision and values (6) cycle of critical socioeconomic analysis (7) commitment, involvement, and leadership and (8) symbol, ritual and liturgy. He stresses not an indirect encounter with the poor but a direct one. Experiential immersion, according to Robert Evans, "forces one to confront the unjust suffering caused by current structures" (p. 276). Furthermore, he says that "the risk ... in vulnerable situations is an important component of transformation" (p. 277).

One of the educational factors in the transformative process is a supportive and accountable community. Christian-oriented vision and values for global justice and peace are essential to transformation. Robert Evans convinces the reader that "transformation is unlikely without serious, critical, systematic socioeconomic analysis" (p. 280). In addition, he states that "there is a strong connection between expected

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commitment, empowered involvement, and empowering shared leadership" (p. 281). "The outward journey of action for justice" (p. 282) parallels "the inward journey of spiritual nurture" (p. 282) such as symbol, ritual and liturgy.

I would like to comment on a characteristic which I found to be interesting and noteworthy. As the title illustrates, Pedagogies for the Non-Poor is directed, to the non-poor and for the non-poor. This book clearly carves, in relief, who, what, why and how the non-poor are. The non-poor are not allowed to be unconcerned with transformative education for global justice and peace.

Additionally, most of the Japanese people see themselves as the 'non-poor'. The explanations of the obstacles for transformative education, the purpose of its education and the educational factors in the transformative process can be, therefore, completely applied to the educational situation in Japan. This book is meaningful to all Japanese people, educators and learners, as well.

In conclusion, one can say that reading the texts of Cosmao, Freire, Evans and Kennedy causes the reader to ponder the following issues. First: how one can attempt to effect change in society from a sinful society into a world converted by God, that is, concretely, shaping a habitable world for both the non-poor and the poor. Second: how one can understand how the Bible is concerned about the poor. Third: how one can comprehend why education is important for the liberation and humanization of both the poor and the non-poor.

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ENDNOTES:

1. Cosmao, Vincent, Changer le monde, Trans. John Drury, Changing the World, (New York: Orbis Books, 1984).

2. Vincent Cosmao is a French Dominican priest. Since 1972 he has been the director of the Lebret Faith and Development Center in Paris.

3. When the Lord God made earth and heaven, there was neither shrub nor plant growing wild upon the earth, because the Lord God had sent no rain on the earth; nor was there any man to till the ground. A flood used to rise out of the earth and water all the surface of the ground. Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. Thus the man became a living creature. Then the Lord God planted a garden in Eden away to the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. The Lord God made trees spring from the ground, all trees pleasant to look at and good for food; and in the middle of the garden he set the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

There was a river flowing from Eden to water the garden, and when it left the garden it branched into four streams. The name of the first is Pishon; that is the river which encircles all the land of Havilah, where the gold is. The gold of that land is good; bdellium and cornelians are also to be found there. The name of the second river is Gihon; this is the one which encircles all the land of Cush. The name of the third is Tigris; this is the river which runs east of Asshur. The fourth river is the Euphrates.

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and care for it. He told the man, 'You may eat from every tree in the garden, but not from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; for on the day that you eat from it, you will certainly die.' Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will provide a partner for him.' So God formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds of heaven. He brought them to the man to see what he would call them, and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. Thus the man gave names to all cattle, to the birds of heaven, and to every wild animal, but the man himself no partner had yet been found. And so the Lord God put the man into a trance, and while he slept, he took one of his ribs and closed the flesh over the place. The Lord God then built up the rib, which he had taken out of the man, into a woman. He brought her to the man, and the man said:

'Now this, at last—bone from my bones, flesh from my flesh!

- this shall be called woman, for from man was this taken.'

That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and the two become one flesh. Now they were both naked, the man and his wife, but they had no feeling of shame towards one another (NEB Genesis 2: 5 - 25).

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4. Wolfgang Stegemann, of the University of Heiderberg, is the author of several major works on the social world of Jesus and the early Christians.

5. Stegemann, Wolfgang, Das Evangelium und die Armen, Trans. Dietlinde Elliott, The Gospel and the Poor, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

6. One day at three in the afternoon, the hour of prayer, Peter and John were on their way up to the temple. Now a man who had been a cripple from birth used to be carried there and laid every day by the gate of the temple called 'Beautiful Gate', to beg from people as they went in. When he saw Peter and John on their way into the temple he asked for charity. But Peter fixed his eyes on him, as John did also, and said, 'Look at us.' Expecting a gift from them, the man was all attention. And Peter said, 'I have no silver or gold; but what I have I give you: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.' Then he grasped him by the right hand and pulled him up; and at once his feet and ankles grew strong; he sprang up, stood on his feet, and started to walk. He entered the temple with them, leaping and praising God as he went. Everyone saw him walking and praising God, and when they recognized him as the man who used to sit begging at Beautiful Gate, they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him (NEB Acts 3 : 1-10).

7. 'The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has appointed me; he has sent me to announce good news to the poor, to proclaim release for prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind; to let the broken victims go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour' (NEB Luke 4 : 18 - 19).

Then he gave them his answer: 'Go', he said, 'and tell John what you have seen and heard; how the blind recover their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are made clean, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, the poor are hearing the good news-and happy is the man who does not find me a stumbling-block' (NEB Luke 7 : 22 - 23).

8. He said to his disciples, 'There was a rich man who had a steward, and he received complaints that this man was squandering the property. So he sent for him, and said, "What is this that I hear? Produce your accounts, for you cannot be manager here any longer." The steward said to himself, "What am I to do now that my employer is dismissing me? I am not strong enough to dig, and too proud to beg. I know what I must do, to make sure that, when I have to leave, there will be people to give me house and home." He summoned his master's debtors one by one. To the first he said, "How much do you owe my master?" He replied, "A thousand gallons of olive oil." He said, "Here is your account. Sit down and make it five hundred: and be quick about it." Then he said to another, "And you, how much do

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you owe? He said, "A thousand bushels of wheat", and was told, "Take your account and make it eight hundred." And the master applauded the dishonest steward for acting so astutely. For the worldly are more astute than the other-worldly in dealing with their own kind.

'So I say to you, use your worldly wealth to win friends for yourselves, so that when money is a thing of the past you may be received into an eternal home.'

'The man who can be trusted in little things can be trusted also in great; and the man who is dishonest in little things is dishonest also in great things. If, then, you have not proved trustworthy with the wealth of this world, who will trust you with the wealth that is real? And if you have proved untrustworthy with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own?'

'No servant can be the slave of two masters; for either he will hate the first and the second, or he will be devoted to the first and think nothing of the second. You cannot serve God and Money' (NEB Luke 16 : 1 - 13).

9. Freire, Paulo, Pedagogia do Oprimido, Trans. Myra Bergman Ramos, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, (New York: The Seabury Press, 1974).

10. Evans, Alice Franzer, Robert A. Evans, and William Bean Kennedy, eds. Pedagogies for the Non-Poor, (New York: Orbis Books, 1987).

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