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POVERTY AND RELIGION: THEOLOGICAL THEORIES OF PRAXIS

By

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to explore the divorce of theory and practice in academic life. Through this split, the richness of both have been greatly diminished. This thesis argues that classic Christian theology, coupled with modern theories, strengthen the bond and understanding between theory and practice. The way(s) in which historical figures and modern day people have and can enact change through acts of social justice by embodying the Beatitudes and the mission of Christ are integral to Christian theological praxis. In the Christian tradition, the idea of praxis—theory fused with action—is a natural ally with service learning and allows for people to actively engage in works in the community to better the lives of those in society.

Introduction

Social justice and social responsibility are fundamental cornerstones of the Christian faith. Christianity inherited these ethical principals from its parent religion, Judaism. Compassion for the poor and helpless is an integral part of the covenant that God established with Israel. With the emergence of Christianity, this covenant was adopted and incorporated into everyday Christian life. Drawing on the great moral precepts of the Jewish prophets, Jesus summoned his listeners to respond with acts of justice and kindness to the broken, injured, and oppressed.

As I hope to show in this study, expectations of action and devotion to others have always been a central theme in Christian theology. In modern times, however, theory has too often been divorced from praxis. This separation has led to an impoverishment of both theory and practice. In order to better understand the richness and complexity of Christian thought, I am arguing that we need to recover the integral union between theory and practice that was fundamental to Christian theology. In this way, we may better understand contemporary appeals of service learning as an ancient and valuable tradition rooted in ancient Judaism and Christianity.

Christian Theological Praxis

Lives that Christians are supposed to embody are firmly based in the biblical accounts and portrayals of Jesus. The miracles Jesus performed were not exclusively concerned with Israel, they were gifts bestowed upon Samaritans and other religious, or non-religious, peoples in communities around where Jesus lived and traveled. This is important because modern Christian praxis should not be limited to Christian circles; in fact, it should be aimed at helping everyone who needs help in the world at large.

In considering the nature of Christian praxis, we should begin with a certain passage of the New Testament. I will bring your attention to the Gospel of Matthew Chapter 5, verses 3-17:

3“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4 Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted. 5 Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land. 6 Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied. 7 Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. 8 Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God. 9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. 10 Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you [falsely] because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven. Thus they persecuted the prophets who were before you. 13 “You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned? It is no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. 14 You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. 15 Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lampstand, where it gives light to all in the house. 16 Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father. 17 Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.

The Beatitudes, verses 3-12, lay the foundation for the ministry of Jesus and for His followers. The Beatitudes shed light on the ideal portrait of Christian life. Under the expansive canopy of the Beatitudes, numerous issues are addressed: poverty, political injustice, war and violence, among others. Verses 13-16 are an important because they are open-ended and allusive, capable of many interpretations. The essence of these verses tell the reader to go into the world to act on the verses that precede them because if one does not go into the world and enact change one is not living a life devoted to God. The last verse is also of import insofar as it states that Jesus’ mission is the perfect complement to his Jewish identity and heritage, not at odds with it.

Industrial Revolution and Social Justice

Needless to say, the centuries between the inception of Christianity and the Industrial Revolution saw social ills and the need for social justice. It is difficult to say whether or not there was a regression of the mission of Jesus in Christianity in the millennia following Jesus' death, however, social reform stagnated as evidence by the existence of feudal societies and maltreatment of certain members of humanity throughout the world during that time. Such inhumane treatment included but was not limited to: slavery all across the world and colonization by large empires, which mistreated both environmental goods and non-European peoples.

The Catholic Church redirected the theme of social justice in large part due to the industrial revolutions that occurred in many countries from the 18th Century to modernity. "Catholic social doctrine concerning the rights of human beings has its roots in the New Testament and in the writings of the Church Fathers, as well as in the works of the great medieval theologians such as St. Thomas Aquinas. However, only when Pope Leo XIII wrote his encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (On the Condition of the Worker) in 1891 did Catholicism begin to enunciate in a conscious and systematic fashion a theology of social justice for the modern world."¹

Liberation Theology: a Theology of the Oppressed

For many, liberation theology has been a crucial voice for Catholic communities throughout South America, Africa, and in countries where marginalized, Third World, Catholics live. The Peruvian priest Gustavo Gutierrez, considered the father of liberation theology, was one of the first theologians to insist on the priority of ethical concerns for the poor and oppressed in theological reflection before all intellectual considerations. His famous adage, "Theology must

¹ Burns 1992, 189.

first address itself to the non-persons of history over the non-believers,” speaks to this priority. In essence, he argues that theology must, first and foremost, be part of the struggle in improving the conditions and lives of non-persons, those dehumanized by any inequality and oppressive acts, before it should address more existential questions like: is there a God present in the world? The assumption here is that devotion to the non-persons of history is the most powerful form of apologetics to non-believers. When Jesus performed miracles or assisted the outcasts of society, he never expected to receive acclaim and accolades for his work. Rather, he acted out of love of his neighbor and to promote and propel his followers to act justly and with charity.

The genesis of this movement stemmed from the oppression and inhumane treatment of others seen by Gutierrez. Due to this oppressive treatment Gutierrez discovered three things:

First, “poverty is destructive, something to be fought against and destroyed, not something to be accepted or condoned by occasional acts of charity, or justified on the basis of biblical passages like ‘the poor you have always with you.’”

Second, “poverty is not accidental but structural. This is why occasional handouts from the rich to the poor are not sufficient. The poor do not exist by a decree of fate, nor can their condition be dealt with by political neutrality or ethical indifference. On the contrary, the poor are the result of the system within which the rest of us live and for which we are responsible. The poor live on the margins of our social and cultural world, where they are oppressed, exploited, and have the fruits of their labor snatched away, so that their very humanity is degraded. That many are poor is not a matter of chance, but the inevitable result of sinful structures. For these reasons, the ‘poverty of the poor’ is not a call to intermittent generous actions to alleviate need temporarily, but a challenge to construct a new social order.”

Third, “the poor are a social class. The poor belong to those levels of culture that are not respected by others, to races against whom discrimination is practiced, and to a social class that, either subtly or openly, is exploited. Consequently, to opt for the poor is to opt for one social class and against other social cases, to become aware of the reality of ‘class struggle,’ and to side with the dispossessed, identifying with their concerns and their struggles.”²

All of these interpretations of poverty add up to one essential theme: this movement sought to affect a theological revolution in reversing the ill treatment of the broken, injured and oppressed. It draws on the tradition of Catholic social teaching and biblical passages like Matthew 25: 31-46 which deals with feeding the hungry, giving drink to those who thirst, welcoming strangers, clothing the naked, caring for the sick, and visiting the imprisoned. There is, however, one element of liberation theology that incorporates secular ideas outside of Christianity, specifically Marxist ideology and wealth redistribution.

Gutierrez and the Book of Job

Texts from the Hebrew bible also are key elements of liberation theology. Gutierrez, in his reflection on the Book of Job, discusses the life and contemplations of Job in relation to social justice. He states:

Two major shifts of viewpoint take place in Job’s way of speaking as he tormentedly rejects the doctrine of retribution in the light of his personal experience. The first occurs when, at the instigation of his friends, he broadens his perspective, abandons his initial narrow position, and realizes that the issue here is not simply the suffering of one individual. The real issue, he sees, is the suffering and injustice that mark the lives of the poor. Those who believe in God must therefore try to lighten the burden of the poor by helping them and practicing solidarity with them. The speeches of God occasion the second shift: Job now understands that the world of

² McAfee Brown 1990, 32.

justice must be located within the broad but demanding horizon of freedom that is formed by the gratuitousness of God's love.³

Jesus, Job, and Gutierrez are not saying that you must live exactly like an impoverished person, but rather, one must help others live a life that is at least humane and of equal treatment. The world, in this perspective, puts too much emphasis on materialistic issues. Gutierrez is not preaching anything radical, he lives a life that is exactly in the imitation and likeness of Jesus. He is living his life devoted to the same people Jesus devoted his life to, the disregarded, afflicted, and impoverished. To help the poor and suffering is not a novel idea, it should be second nature, but it is not so.

Consider this passage from Luke 21: 1-4:

1 When he looked up he saw some wealthy people putting their offerings into the treasury 2 and he noticed a poor widow putting in two small coins. 3 He said, "I tell you truly, this poor widow put in more than all the rest; 4 for those others have all made offerings from their surplus of wealth, but she, from her poverty, has offered her whole livelihood.

It is the generosity of this woman who has nothing that people should emulate. This selfless act is what Jesus wanted from his followers, an act which would benefit the aggregate of the community instead of a singular person.

Once a well to do man, Job finds himself in abject poverty and can more fully appreciate the affliction felt by the impoverished. Throughout the Book of Job, Job and his friends have debates about God's mercy, justice, and grace. Job criticizes theologies which lack "human compassion and contact with reality; the one-directional movement from theological principles to life really goes nowhere."⁴ Gutierrez states that the fundamental question in the Book of Job is "how to speak of God" and that Job departs from the view of his friends who equate suffering

³ Gutierrez 1987, 16.

⁴ Ibid, 30.

with sin. As foolhardy and blasphemous as Job's complaints to God sound, they actually help him, "penetrate more deeply into the experience of suffering humanity and into his own experience of God."⁵

Consider the following passage from the mouth of Job:

They end their lives in happiness and go down in peace to Sheol.
Yet these are the ones who say to God, "Go Away! We do not want to learn your ways. What is the point of our serving Shaddai? What should we gain from praying to him?..." Do we often see the light of the wicked put out, or disaster overtake him, or the retribution of God destroy his possessions, or the wind blow him away like a straw, or a whirlwind carrying him off like chaff?⁶

This passage is talking about the evil and wrongdoing done by those in Job's time. For a more modern interpretation, one can look at the current state of affairs in America. The comedian Chris Rock said, "I used to work at McDonald's making minimum wage. You know what that means when someone pays you minimum wage? You know what your boss was trying to say? 'Hey if I could pay you less, I would, but it's against the law.'" His blunt and succinct analysis critiques a widespread practice in the American society. Corporations are getting larger and posting some of the largest profits ever. Meanwhile, some workers are not seeing the same increase in wage as it relates to corporate profits. This parallels the passage from Job. Much like those turning their backs on God because in times of success, some do not believe they need God to maintain success in Job. Corporations sometimes do the same to their workers. They turn their

⁵ Gutierrez 1987, 30.

⁶ Ibid, 32.

back on them financially which ensures that they become part of the welfare system for the foreseeable future.

The epidemic of poverty is not easily fixed, however; major strides can be made by minor changes for compensation of workers. One can look at headlines in papers such as the New York Times and find articles about the reduction in governmental aid, like food stamps, and its affect on those who utilize such programs. Bloomberg News published an article about McDonalds and Wal-mart and the harm they do their employees by keeping their employees at or below the poverty line. The article points out that Wal-mart employees are, “the largest group of Medicaid recipients” and “the single biggest group of food stamp recipients.”⁷ A small step with major beneficial consequences would be to raise the minimum wage to ensure such a large group of workers are not only above the poverty line but to decrease the amount of federal and state aid they receive. This would be politically and theologically the correct response because it appeases political factions who want to reduce federal subsidies for the poor and it would be a major step forward in social reform for other political factions.

All too often it seems like in today’s society people are afraid to fight for justice, help the needy, or are just plain greedy and selfish. Large corporations and the wealthy elites of society perpetuate the divisive state of affairs in our world today through unfair wages and political abuse that serves solely their interests. This is not dissimilar to the socio-economic climate Gutierrez lived in during the tumultuous time in South America when he created liberation theology. Gutierrez finds solace and guidance in the Book of Job. Gutierrez illuminates these inequalities in his interpretation of Job, as in the following passage:

⁷ Ritholtz 2013.

The wicked move boundary-marks away, they carry off flock and shepard. They drive away the orphan's donkey, as security, they seize the widows ox. The needy have to keep out of the way, poor country people have to keep out of sight. Like wild desert donkeys, they go out to work, searching from dawn for food, and at evening for something on which to feed their children. They go harvesting in the field of some scoundrel, they go pilfering in the vineyards of the wicked. They go about naked, lacking clothes, and starving while they carry the sheaves. Two little walls, their shelter at high noon; parched with thirst, they have to tread the winepress. They spend the night naked, lacking clothes, with no covering against the cold. Mountain rainstorms cut them through, unsheltered, they hug the rocks. The orphan child is torn from the breast, the child of the poor is exacted as security. From the towns come the groans of the dying and the gasp of the wounded crying for help. Yet God remains deaf to prayer! In contrast, there are those who reject the light: who know nothing of its ways and who do not frequent its paths. When all is dark the murderer leaves his bed to kill the poor and needy. During the night the thief goes on the prowl, breaking into houses While the darkness lasts.⁸

“The poverty described is not the result of destiny or inexplicable causes...Job is describing a state of affairs caused by the wickedness of those who exploit and rob the poor.”⁹

This passage is reminiscent of the Beatitudes. The Beatitudes seem to be the fulfillment or the complement of this passage in Job. Gutierrez is quick to state that this injustice is

⁸ Gutierrez 1987, 33.

⁹ Ibid, 33.

“scandalous because the poor who lack everything and suffer hunger and thirst are the very ones who work to produce for others the food they cannot have for themselves. There is no respect for their basic right to life, though this is the foundation of all justice.”¹⁰

Both Job and Gutierrez point out the difficulty of sacrificing one’s interests on behalf of the poor. In Gutierrez’s view, any form of theology worthy of the name “Christian” must serve the weak and vulnerable as Job and Jesus did. The problem one faces with Christian theological praxis is seen in the dialogue between Job and his friends. Job has walked in the footsteps of poverty and thus, been a benevolent giver to the poor. “To give to the needy is therefore to give to God” because God aligns himself with the poor in their plight and is the “Father of the poor.”¹¹ Gutierrez utilizes the passage from Proverbs “he who oppresses a poor man insults his Maker” to illustrate that “Christ identifies himself with the poor of this world.”¹²

This identification has propelled Gutierrez to defend the poor; it requires “their liberation and resistance to those who oppress and exploit them.”¹³ He quotes Job “Yet have I ever laid a hand on the poor when they cried out for justice in calamity? Have I not wept for those whose life is hard, felt pity for the penniless?”¹⁴

After a lengthy time in the dialogue of Job and his friends, a young theologian named Elihu comes into the picture to offer a novel insight into the problem of evil and the existence of poverty. Elihu posits that misfortune can have a pedagogical origin stating “God saves the afflicted by his affliction, warning him of his misery.”¹⁵ Elihu’s point can be seen in scripture.

¹⁰ Gutierrez 1987, 34.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 40.

¹² *Ibid*, 40.

¹³ *Ibid*, 40.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 40.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 46.

One can look at the warning(s) God gave to many peoples in order to bring them back to him. It was up to the individual or the community to revert and reconcile with Him and be saved from his wrath. Gutierrez states that “God does justice to the poor; that is why those who oppress the poor turn their backs on God and understand so little of God’s ways...the Lord is ever watchful and ready to hear the voice of the poor, even though attentiveness to them may at times take unobtrusive forms.”¹⁶

One issue with liberation theology is the truncation of God’s sometimes seemingly mysterious plan(s). Man’s free will and pride alters the course of history. Job faced this predicament: choosing between God and himself; God tells Job, “Do you really want to reverse my judgment, put me in the wrong and yourself in the right?”¹⁷ Gutierrez has an implied ambivalence to this divine judgment stating, “God wants justice indeed, and desires that divine judgment reign in the world: but God cannot impose it, for the nature of created beings must be respected. God’s power is limited by human freedom; for without freedom God’s justice would not be present with history.”¹⁸ Gutierrez created liberation theology in order to reverse pauperism and injustice occurring in his country, and violence has been a by-product of this goal. Liberation theology, however, has often been caricatured as a violent revolutionary movement. In actual fact, this movement is rooted in scripture and seeks to be a fulfillment of Jesus’ mission of grace and reform.

Gutierrez speaks of the complement of justice and grace stating “grace is not opposed to the quest of justice nor does it play it down; on the contrary, it gives it its full meaning. God’s

¹⁶ Gutierrez 1987, 47.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 77.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 77.

love...operates in a world not of cause and effect but of freedom and gratuitousness.”¹⁹

Furthermore, Gutierrez states:

We saw earlier how in the debate with his friends Job came to see that he must transcend his own individual experience. The dialogue brought home to him that his situation was not exceptional but was shared by the poor of this world. This new awareness in turn showed him that solidarity with the poor was required by his faith in a God who has a special love for the disinherited, the exploited of human history...This preference for the poor- Job now realizes- is a key factor in authentic divine justice. Consequently there is no opposition between gratuitousness and justice, but there is indeed an opposition between gratuitousness and a conception of justice that can be translated into demands made of God by human beings and that renders God prisoner of our deeds or our cultic actions.²⁰

Job “bitterly criticized the theology of temporal retribution” which his friends preached; however, he would in certain instances uphold this same theology he excoriated.²¹ “The world of retribution – and not of temporal retribution only – is not where God dwells; at most God visits it. The Lord is not prisoner of the ‘give to me and I will give to you’ mentality. Nothing, no human work however valuable, merits grace, for if it did, grace would cease to be grace. This is the heart of the message of the Book of Job.”²² Moreover, Gutierrez states “God has a preferential love for the poor not because they are necessarily better than others, morally or

¹⁹ Gutierrez 1987, 87.

²⁰ Ibid, 88.

²¹ Ibid, 88.

²² Ibid, 89.

religiously, but simply because they are poor and living in an inhumane situation that is contrary to God's will."²³

It seems to me that Gutierrez's liberation theology mirrors the messages found in the Book of Job and in the New Testament. This scriptural basis is far more significant than any Marxist dimension of his work. As I suggested earlier, it is clear that there are echoes of the Beatitudes in Gutierrez's theology. The message Jesus gives in the Beatitudes is one of peace not political revolution. Gutierrez has seen the life of Christ and the Book of Job as the source of inspiration for a devotion to the disinherited.

Praxis and Service Learning in College.

Though service learning in a secular university is disengaged from religious ties, there is a lot that secular disciplines can learn from movements like liberation theology like where the pursuit of knowledge is intimately tied to the pursuit of justice. Service learning creates the opportunity outside of traditional pedagogy that enables faculty and students alike to deepen scholastic learning, nurture a sense of empathy and engagement with one's community, and break conventional teaching molds. Service learning enables students and faculty to undertake projects in the community to better the world in which they live.

Preceptors act as intermediaries, in and out of class, between the teaching faculty members and their peers. Like teaching assistants, preceptors can hold office hours, create study sessions and groups, and act as a teaching liaison. This connection with the faculty allows preceptors to work with the professor(s) of the class to revise course material and/or create new ways of learning that do not conform to the static ways of the past. The incorporation of service learning into the classroom is a primary way of breaking from the traditional learning models.

²³ Gutierrez 1987, 94.

One goal of utilizing preceptors and service learning is to make sure “undergraduates are actively engaged in their education.”²⁴ Moreover, it creates an opportunity for students to be “exposed to new points of view” they may not have been previously.²⁵

In classes that are larger in size, “preceptors provide the facilitation necessary for collaborative learning activities.”²⁶ This facilitation is crucial to the learning environment at various universities, especially those where the faculty to student ratio is high. Furthermore, preceptor facilitation aids universities that are more research oriented institutions rather than student oriented ones. Preceptors are instrumental in being able to break down the class size and engage students, who are willing, to help them with their scholastic needs. Moreover, it provides students another outlet, speaking with a peer, rather than the traditional professor office hours.

Preceptors can assist in service learning by not only working with teaching assistants (TAs) and faculty to create a project to work on, but also to oversee its progress from inception to completion. It enables the students to incorporate all three ways of learning (kinesthetic, auditory, and visual) by participating in a service project that pertains to their field of study. “Service learning is a form of pedagogy that engages students in community service and regular guided reflection on the service in order to deepen learning.”²⁷ This model of learning enables students to be well rounded, and to create an education model that combines critical thinking with a service oriented and humane commitment to society.

The “service learning pedagogy” can be altered to conform “to its primary emphasis: (a) skill-set practice and reflexivity, (b) civic values and critical citizenship, and (c) social justice

²⁴ Stover, 40.

²⁵ Stover, 42.

²⁶ Stover, 41.

²⁷ Britt 2012, 80-81.

activism.”²⁸ The skill-set practice and reflexivity aspect refers to the skill-set one has acquired over the course of one’s studies and the reflection on the ways in which those skills can be continuously used in service learning. The second part “engages students in communities...that enable them to be informed and committed citizens” in society.²⁹ The final approach, dealing with social justice, emphasizes the students need to speak out on behalf of the broken, injured and oppressed in their community, and society as a whole.

The ultimate goal of service learning is multi-faceted. It actively engages students in the community to foster a sense of social justice while teaching “civic responsibility”³⁰ and enriches and supplements one’s education. Moreover, it alters “the epistemological priorities and methodologies of the university,” enhancing the overall educational experience felt by its students and faculty.³¹ The departure from conventional pedagogy provides a new take on education that was lacking, with the goal of inspiring a new generation of scholars. The participation “in a project beneficial to the community...reinforces...the merging of theory and practice...placing emphasis on reflection and reciprocity.”³²

Besides written criteria, one can use multimedia to reflect on the service learning completed.³³ The discussion of the learning activity after the project has been completed is critical to the overall experience one receives by partaking in this form of education. Without analytically discussing and thinking of the course of action taken, the student may miss out on the meaning and importance of such exercises.

²⁸ Britt 2012, 82.

²⁹ Ibid, 84.

³⁰ MacFall 2012, 26.

³¹ Peterson 2009, 541.

³² Brzozowski 2011, 25.

³³ Magnum 2012, 9.

The projects created through service learning enrich the lives of everyone involved: students, faculty, and the community the project is connected with. Service learning enables the community to unite and creates opportunities for students to share the knowledge they have attained in their scholastic endeavors. Furthermore, it strengthens the faculty-student bond and betters not only their lives, but through community service, the lives of those around them.

Service learning benefits faculty and universities in a variety of ways. A primary way in which the aforementioned benefit from this type of learning is by “providing visibility for the school.”³⁴ One must also delve deeper, past superficial benefits of promoting the university, into the advantages for faculty who “benefit with their need to stay refreshed and connected to today’s work.”³⁵ The ability to create an environment in which not only students, but faculty, can be involved in allows for the potential for the development of “new professional relationships.”³⁶ Moreover, with the possibility for new associations within their disciplines, faculty can work together to stay current with teaching practices, and possibly revise course material.³⁷

Students who participate in service learning projects are benefitted in a variety of ways. A primary benefit is that students are able to break certain stigmas, “stereotypes and biases and develop a greater sense of sensitivity, empathy and insight about ...needs and concerns of” those in the community.³⁸ “Fundamentally, service learning challenges...students and calls on the on them not only to consume knowledge but also to produce it.”³⁹ Service learning is a catalyst for

³⁴ Trail Ross 2012, 60.

³⁵ Brzozowski 2011, 31.

³⁶ Ibid 36.

³⁷ Brzozowski 2011, 31.

³⁸ Trail Ross 2012, 60.

³⁹ Felten 2011, 82.

not only a deepened passion for learning, but “increased awareness of global issues.”⁴⁰ Moreover, it instills, or expands, one’s desire to participate in community projects in the future. Service learning, when completed in one’s course of study, enables the student to enrich their skills and knowledge within their discipline. Students, as studies have shown, develop better analytical skills, a “greater ability to apply” what they have learned “to real world situations,” and “identify and solve complex problems” through service learning.⁴¹ Similarly, they “can make book-learned concepts and theories real and tangible.”⁴² In fact, students who participated in service learning “demonstrated higher academic performance” than their peers who did not participate in service learning.⁴³ When reflecting on a service learning project, students are able to refine their writing and oratorical skills. Students who took part in service learning while in college are two times more likely to engage in community work after graduation.⁴⁴

I have had the opportunity to be both a preceptor and TA for Professor Alex Nava for the past two years. I have seen first hand the benefits of service learning not only for students, but for the community as well.

My work with the Poor in College

Since my youth, I have had an affinity toward the plight of the marginalized. I have done considerable work with charitable organizations such as St. Vincent De Paul and other food banks. Throughout my studies in college, I have continued to develop my sense of social justice and responsibility.

⁴⁰ Brzozowski 2011, 31.

⁴¹ Peters 2011, S182.

⁴² Banks 2010, 77.

⁴³ Ibid, 77.

⁴⁴ Bordelon 2006, 145.

I have strived the past three and a half years as a student and in my 22 years to live a life devoted to social responsibility. I have been blessed to travel to Mexico, Italy, Canada, and throughout the United States. During these travels, I have encountered the poverty, oppression, neglect, and lack of respect toward human life. I realized at a young age, my true vocation was to protect, and provide for, the marginalized within our society from the injustice of our culture and political system.

In association with this thesis, I have created a non-profit to combat hunger in Tucson called Communities Against Starvation Everywhere (C.A.S.E). I formulated the idea for this endeavor while taking a class taught by Dr. Alexander Nava in which he asked us to take part in an extracurricular activity to enact change in our community for extra credit towards our final grade. I took part in the Bear Down Against Hunger campaign that was spearheaded by Dr. Nava. This campaign focused on combating famine on a global level, specifically in African Countries such as Liberia, Kenya, and Zambia. Participation in this project propelled me to want to establish a philanthropic organization that would assist the impoverished on a more local basis. The hope is to then expand and move onto college campuses all over the country to decrease instances of poverty, hunger, and overall marginalization of the poor in the United States.

I have created a prototype nutrition bar that is comparable in size to most energy and protein bars in production. This bar is created with enough protein, vitamins, and minerals to sustain at-risk individuals for the day. I am in the process of obtaining manufacturing and distribution companies which will aid in the task of scaling this non-profit. My goal with C.A.S.E is to eventually spread from the Tucson Community to a larger market to help end hunger on a larger stage. I am also creating a business portion to this non-profit which will take

proceeds from sales to not only make more bars to give away, but will employ these same individuals that benefit from eating this product. My goal is to create a sustainable and scalable business that can truly be a bastion for communities across the country in order to help defeat the hunger epidemic, spread social responsibility, and give back to worthy individuals.

Conclusion

A lot of academia has separated theory and praxis from each other. The incorporation of service learning into the lives of students will provide the aforementioned benefits and will foster more empathetic and compassionate future generations. It has been through self-reflection and the study of world religions that I have come to the conclusion that social justice and social responsibility are essential themes for the survival and well being of the human family. All too often people are dehumanized in word and action; it is from the dissolution of the basic rights of people that inequality, vitriol, and oppression stem. To be selfless and put the needs of others before oneself is not only admirable but a necessity to promote the advancement of the human condition.

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