

## NEW TESTAMENT <sup>1</sup>

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### A. **Methodology**

Despite much excellent work on countless individual texts (and even authors such as James and Luke), and innumerable general studies following the classical word-study methodology, we still lack a solid, thorough overview of NT teaching on the poor/poverty. The utter inadequacy of word-study approaches may be seen in the common omission of such theologically fundamental texts as Matt 25:31–46, where poverty is concretely described (“I was hungry . . . thirsty . . . naked”) but without a general word for poor/poverty. Sweeping theological conclusions drawn from highly selective word studies have tended to be misleading. While much of homiletical value can be found in existing works, the common tendency to systematize (with forced ideological harmonization) makes clear the need for further interdisciplinary and integrative study. Continual disagreement about socioeconomic background, date, and authorship of many NT documents makes any effort at comprehensive overview tentative, but growing sensitivity to NT diversity, ideological pitfalls, and new anthropological perspectives are making possible considerable advances on previous studies in an area that undoubtedly will involve much debate for years to come. In the Gospels, in addition to texts that refer explicitly to the poor, debate continues regarding the socioeconomic level of Jesus, his disciples, the author of each gospel, and the ecclesiastical situation addressed. Anthropological and feminist studies often broaden definitions and concerns to include groups socially weak, marginated, and despised: women, the sick and handicapped, tax collectors, sexual minorities, etc.

### B. **Terminology**

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<sup>1</sup>David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1996, c1992), 5:414.

Classic word-study approaches (*TDNT* 6:885–915; *NIDNTT* 2: 820–28) focused especially on *ptōchós* (“poor, oppressed,” lit. “beggar”), by far the most common term for the utterly destitute in the NT (34 times). However, in ancient Greece the most common term was *pénēs*, describing one who has little and must live frugally (used only in 2 Cor 8:9 in the NT). Other terms include *penichrós* (“poor,” Luke 21:2; cf. *hystérēmatos*, v 4, “want”) and *endeēs* (“needy,” Acts 4:34). Terms for need and want tend to be neglected in vocabulary surveys (see *chreia* 49 times in the NT; Acts 2:45; 4:35; Phil 4:16, 19; Titus 3:14; 1 John 3:17). The words for “poor” cannot be “defined” exhaustively and statically, but generally designate persons and groups lacking (totally or in some degree) the necessities of life: food, drink, clothing, shelter, health, land/employment, freedom, dignity and honor, etc. (cf. Job 24:1–12). While poverty may be concretely indicated by specific manifestations (hungry, thirsty, naked, homeless, unemployed, despised), the presence of specific manifestations cannot simply be equated with a socioeconomic condition of poverty (Peter became hungry, Acts 10:10). In addition, various texts speak of poor/poverty metaphorically (Rev 3:17), though in certain cases exegetes continue to debate whether the usage is literal or metaphorical (2 Cor 8:9; Stegemann 1984: 14–15).

Malina (1986: 156) has argued from anthropology that in biblical cultures (as in modern Latin America) economics, politics, and religion commonly are embedded in kinship institutions, with the result that “wealthy ‘sonless’ women whose husbands have died are referred to as ‘poor widows.’” Poverty in such contexts refers to “the inadequacy of life without honor, with consequent social and personal inability to participate in the activities of the community, the inability to maintain self-respect as defined by community social standards.” While this inclusion of dimensions of kinship and honor is helpful, the NT often is quite specific about the economic condition of “poor widows” (Luke 21:4–5) and those in need of healing (Hanks 1983: 111). The socioeconomic dimension of Pauline teaching on justification (as “good news to the poor”) is best understood against the kind of background described by Malina (Rom 5:1–11; Hanks 1986a: 14–16), and the Pauline preoccupation with empowering the weak (2 Cor 12:9–10) is closely related to the Synoptic concern for healing the sick, empowering the poor, and accepting the marginated and “unclean” (Countryman 1988).

### C. Epistle of James

James is the NT writing that stands closest to the OT prophets in its perspective on poverty and oppression (Hanks 1983: 45–50), not surprising if it be the earliest NT writing (45–50 A.D.?) and written by Jesus’ brother (Davids, *James* NIGTC, 21–22; Maynard–Reid 1987: 8). The Jewish-Christian recipients are not for the most part destitute beggars (2:2), but neither are they wealthy (2:6; 5:1–6). As a minority group (“Diaspora,” 1:1) they appear to consist mainly of small farmers and artisans—those who have little and must live frugally (Stegemann 1984: 40–41).

In addition to the term for the beggarly poor (4 times *ptōchós*, 2:2–5), related terms James employs include the “humble” (*tapeinós*, 1:9; cf. 4:6, 10); “orphans and widows” (1:27); “workers and harvesters . . . the just” (5:4, 6). The beggarly poor are characterized by shabby clothing (2:2); being naked or lacking in daily food (2:15–16); the weak,

needy, and margined also include women (2:15), sexual minorities (widows; the prostitute Rahab, 2:25), and the sick (5:14–15).

In continuity with the OT (Exodus paradigm; prophets) James never blames the victims (for sloth, vice, genetic inferiority, etc.); rather he focuses on oppression as the basic cause of poverty (cf. Luke 4:18–19; Hanks 1983: 38–39). The “affliction” (*thlipsis*) suffered by orphans and widows may refer explicitly to oppression (Hanks 1983: 47; Tamez 1989: 17).

The oppression of the poor and weak appears to function basically in three ways in James (Davids *James* NIGTC; Maynard-Reid 1987; Tamez 1989): (1) financial-legal mechanisms, especially against poor debtors (2:1–12); (2) greedy and boastful merchants (4:13–17; cf. “covet”); (3) wealthy landowners withholding wages, a common mechanism of oppression (5:4). The rich “oppress” (*katadynasteúo*, 2:6) James’ recipients, dragging them to court. Such “injustice/oppression” (*adikía*) is basically what characterizes the entire worldly system (2:6; Pons 1971: 166; cf. 4:4; “trials,” 1:2, 12).

James, like Jesus, seems not to know Paul’s doctrine of the fall; rather he espouses a more typical Jewish doctrine of creation (3:9) and individual sin (1:13–15; everyone is “Adam”; 2 *Bar.* 54:19). He appears to place little stress on evangelism as popularly defined. However, such limited categories may fail to recognize that the prophetic denunciation of oppression is an essential part of evangelism, conceived as the proclamation of good news—preferentially—to the poor (Luke 3:10–14; 4:18–19; 6:20–26; Hanks 1983: 109–19). James envisions a community of disciples whose new lifestyle (stressing above all a loving response to the destitute, weak, and margined) embodies the “word” proclaimed in a “world” characterized by greed, domination, and oppression of the poor and weak (1:18, 21; 4:6; 5:19–20; Tamez 1989: 56–69).

James is concerned especially with the kinds of sins of the tongue that create a false sense of importance and security for the affluent, but which deny dignity, honor, and justice to the poor and weak (2:6–7). His understanding of justification (cf. “condemnation,” 2:12–13; 3:8–9; 4:11–12; 5:6) dignifies the poor (Hanks 1986a: 14–16), focusing on the paired examples of Abraham, an immigrant (like James’ recipients), and Rahab, the woman who showed hospitality to Israel’s migrant ancestors. As elsewhere in the NT, becoming “doers of the word,” the performance of “good works,” involves above all responding in practical ways to the material needs of destitute brothers, sisters, and neighbors (1:22–25; 4:17; cf. “forgiveness” in 5:14–16). Failure to be a doer of the word in helping the poor, oppressed, and margined is to become guilty of murdering the poor (5:6) and committing “adultery” with the world (4:4–6; cf. 1 John 3:17).

Although James commends the peaceful nonresistance of oppressed harvesters, he is not passive in the face of such injustice and oppression. Rather, he vigorously denounces the cruel oppression and violence that impoverish and kill (2:11; 3:8; 5:5–6). For his recipients he commends a wise response (cf. Q and wisdom; Adamson 1989: 363–90) of “militant patience” (Tamez 1989: 52–56; James 1:3–4, 19; 5:7–11), nonresistance (5:6), peace (4:17–18), and prayer (1:5–7; 5:13–17; Tamez 1989: 69–72). The Parousia hope continues to function vigorously as the focus of an expectation of direct divine intervention (5:7–9), which consummates the promise of a kingdom characterized by liberation, justice, peace, and love (1:12, “life”; 2:5, “kingdom”; Tamez 1989: 33–50).

Although closest to the OT, James already is at a distance from the earliest NT traditions about poverty (see D below): the Jewish Christians addressed are in exile (1:1),

but are not itinerant prophets. They live in a settled community of “brothers” and “sisters” (2:6–7, 15; cf. 1:27; 2:25–26), but one which is racked with (class?) conflict (4:1–3). While James is one of the three NT authors explicitly said to be married (1 Cor 9:5; cf. Peter and Jude), his exaltation of a single woman and prostitute, and his neglect of specific family virtues and responsibilities, are closer to Q’s ideal (see below) than to the teaching of some later NT writings (1 Peter, Deutero-Pauline letters and pastorals). See also HAUSTAFELN; HOUSEHOLD CODES. James prophetically denounces oppression and abuse of wealth, but does not advocate total abandonment of home, family, possessions, and trade.

#### **D. Gospel Source “Q”**

Scholarly studies suggest that the very earliest NT traditions, which are reflected in the Q source (non-Markan material common to Luke and Matthew), also provide us with the most radical presentation of NT teaching on the poor and poverty (Lührmann 1989: 70). Q materials reflect the teaching of charismatic itinerant prophets who still took the instruction of Jesus’ mission discourse literally: homelessness (Luke 9:57–58 = Matt 8:19–20), and a radical separation from family (Luke 9:59–60 = Matt 8:21–22) and from property, possessions, and trade (Luke 10:2–12 = Matt 9:37–38; 10:7–16; Luke 12:33–34 = Matt 6:20–21; Luke 11:2–4 = Matt 6:9–14). This *Wanderradikalismus*, attributed by Gerd Thiessen to the Jesus movement in general, is now more commonly understood to reflect the teaching of Jesus as preserved by the Q group. For the Q group, Jesus is viewed primarily as the prophet, and his homeless followers are also prophets (Lührmann 1989: 64, 71). The final redaction of Q is commonly dated around 60 A.D., while Mark, writing around 69 A.D., speaks not of homelessness as an inalterable condition of discipleship, but of settled communities of Christians who are incorporated into social structures (Mark 10:29–30; cf. Stegemann in Schottroff and Stegemann 1984: 158). In Q the priority attention given to the poor and evangelism of the poor is evident from the first beatitude (Luke 6:20 = Matt 5:3; cf. Luke 7:22 = Matt 11:55; Luke 4:18–19).

In the history of NT studies the apostle Paul repeatedly has been portrayed as a kind of “conservative” who betrayed Jesus’ more radical teaching (on slavery, women, the poor, social outcasts, etc.). Surprisingly, however, Paul is “the only person really known to us from early Christianity who might be called a ‘wandering radical’ or a ‘radical wanderer’” (Lührmann 1989: 70). Paul was a homeless prophet who wandered through the world without wife or family ties (1 Cor 9:5). Contrary to Jesus’ mission instruction, Paul often earned his livelihood as a tentmaker (1 Cor 9:14–15). This need not be viewed, however, as “relativizing” Jesus’ more radical teaching (pace Lührmann 1989: 70–71) but as an alternative expression of radical Christian freedom not so dependent upon the hospitality and donations—and ideological control—of established communities (1 Cor 9:1). For in fact, the homeless prophets portrayed in Q could only exist in dependence upon communities already existing or established by them. Paul, with his synagogue contacts and church planting, only applied to the gentile world the dialectic between homeless prophets and hospitable Palestinian Jewish communities implicit in Q’s portrayal of the prophet Jesus and his homeless followers.

#### **E. Mark**

Mark employs *ptōchós* only five times in three contexts (10:21, the rich man; 12:42–43, the widow’s mite; 14:5, 7, the anointing in Bethany), but a careful reading reveals abundant indirect references to poverty: the lifestyle of John the Baptist (1:6; 6:17, 27) and of Jesus (6:3; 11:12; 14:65; 15:15, 19; Pallares 1986: 176); the voluntary deprivations of the disciples (1:18, 20; 2:23–25; 6:8–9, 36–37; 9:41; 10:28–31); the socioeconomic level of the “crowds” (Myers 1988: 120) and their environment as reflected in Jesus’ teaching (2:21, the use of old, mended clothes; 5:2–3, 5; 7:11–13; 8:1–2; 12:1–2).

Such evidence leads Stegemann (1984: 23) to conclude: “The movement within Judaism in Palestine associated with the name of Jesus was a movement *of the poor for the poor*.” Jesus’ identification as a “carpenter” (Mark 6:3) in an insignificant Galilean hamlet suggests the situation of a wage-earning day laborer: “Probably neither Jesus nor his first disciples were professed beggars, yet they shared the desperate situation of many of their fellow country folk—particularly in Galilee—barely avoiding utter poverty” (Stegemann 1984: 24; see Waetjen 1989: 10–11). Mark’s gospel may be directed to a similarly poor church in Roman-occupied Syria (Waetjen 1989: 4, 15) at a time of persecution (A.D. 67–70) and before significant numbers of more affluent members were added. The paucity of explicit references to the beggarly poor (*ptōchós*) in Mark (5 times; cf. 10 times in Luke) is quite compatible with the indications of pervasive poverty (in the broader sense of the classical term *pénēs*). Numerous comments about water need not be expected from the fish that swim therein (pace Bammel in *TDNT* 6:903).

If tradition is correct in ascribing the gospel to the unmarried young rebel (from a well-to-do Jerusalem family) who agreed to share the deprivations and rigors of Paul’s itinerant missionary lifestyle (Acts 12:13–14; 13:5, 13; 15:37–40; 2 Tim 4:11; 1 Pet 5:13), we can understand the proximity of his gospel to the Q source.

## F. Matthew

Paradoxically, Matthew begins his account of Jesus’ teaching with an apparent “spiritualizing” reference to the poor (5:3 = Luke 6:20); however, his version of Jesus’ final discourse closes with what may be the most radical text on poverty in the NT (certainly, along with Luke 4:18–19 it has served as one of two pillar texts for liberation theology (Gutiérrez 1973: 254–65; Pikaza 1984). Probably, then, we should not understand Matt 5:3 as a species of Neoplatonic “spiritualizing” long dominant in church tradition, but as a call to high-risk solidarity with poorer disciples at a time of persecution (Hanks 1986b; Pantelis 1989).

Despite the length of his gospel and his inclusion of five lengthy discourses of Jesus’ teaching, Matthew contains no more explicit references to the poor (*ptōchós*) than Mark (5 times each). Three of Matthew’s references (19:21; 26:9, 11) are taken from Mark (10:21; 14:5, 7); the other two (5:3; 11:5) are from Q (= Luke 6:20; 7:22). However, Matthew’s option for the poor is also evident in the importance he attaches to almsgiving (6:1–4) and in his fierce denunciation of oppression (23:1–36; cf. Luke 6:24–26). In 25:31–46, writing in a conflictive situation, Matthew sets forth this option (good works) for the poor, weak, and oppressed as the *only* criterion for the final judgment—a truly radical conclusion (Miranda 1974: 118; *NIDNTT* 2: 826; Hanks 1986a: 18).

If “Matthew” was in fact the unmarried tax collector of tradition, his inclusion of sexual minorities in his genealogy is consistent with his praxis (9:9–11; cf. 19:11–12), the option

he advocates not only for those poor economically, but also for despised, marginated classes (poor in terms of honor). His predominantly Jewish readership and the context of severe persecution may largely explain the necessity of his more subversive strategy (7:6).

### G. Luke–Acts

Uncritical readings and word-study approaches easily established Luke's special concern for the beggarly poor (*ptōchós* 10 times plus *penichrós*, 21:2; cf. *ptōchós* 5 times each in Mark and Matthew); however, the total absence of these words in Acts has raised questions. Of the six uses of *ptōchós* in Luke which are not dependent on Mark or Q, five occur in the travel narrative of 9:51–19:27: 14:13, 21; 16:20, 22; 19:8. Also unique to Luke is 4:18, which stands as a programmatic introduction to Jesus' ministry (Ringe 1985; Hanks 1983: 97–119; cf. 6:20 = Matt 5:3).

Within Acts another problem posed is the relative concentration on the needs of the poor in the first half of the book: having all things in common (2:42–47; 4:32–37), with the poor described as those having “need” (*chreia*, 2:45; 4:35); the appointment of seven deacons to correct injustice in the church's ministry to Hellenistic widows; the exemplary ministries of Dorcas (9:36–43) and Cornelius (10:2, 4, 31) in providing alms, etc. (Moxnes 1988: 159–62). Such explicit concern for the poor, however, is almost totally lacking in the narrative of Paul's missionary travels in Acts 13–28. Paul is characterized as exemplary in his freedom from love of money (20:33–34), but his strategic gift to the poor saints in Jerusalem (which looms so important in his epistles) receives the barest mention in Acts (24:17). What recent studies have tended to overlook is the anthropological perspective, according to which the gentiles in Acts 13–28—although traditionally Israel's oppressors—were excluded and marginated from Jewish life and worship because of their uncleanness (Countryman 1988). Acts 13–28 may be criticized for concentrating too much on the quantitative aspect of church growth, but the kind and quality of community life had already been amply established in Luke and Acts 1–12, and the purpose in Acts 13–28 involves concentration on the miraculous incorporation of gentiles who are “cleansed by faith” without submission to circumcision and the law.

While older studies tended to view Luke as the “social radical” among the gospel writers, recent studies tend to view the Q source and/or Mark as reflecting more radical perspectives on the poor. Little attention has been paid to Luke's concern for the “immoral minorities” commonly marginated from society: tax collectors, prostitutes, etc. (7:2, 34, 37, 39; Hanks 1986a: 12; Countryman 1988: 66–74). Luke's heavy concentration on the economic dimension of the gospel (only partly reflected in word-study data; cf. 1:51–53; 3:10–14; 6:34–36; 9:58; 11:41; 12:33; 14:12–14, 33) is now commonly understood to respond to a situation of a relatively poor church (Caesaria/Antioch?) ca. A.D. 70–85 faced with an unprecedented influx of more affluent members and in danger of succumbing to the “love of money” characteristic of certain Pharisees (16:14; Moxnes 1988: 1–21). Luke addresses such an economically upwardly-mobile Christian community, drawing on an extensive store of Jesus' teaching appropriate to the crisis. W. Pilgrim (1981) analyzed Luke's teaching on wealth and poverty as involving three basic categories: (1) total renunciation of wealth; (2) warnings against the dangers of wealth; and (3) right use of wealth. Zaccheus' example (“I give half of my possessions to the poor,” 19:8; cf. 3:10–14) is now commonly viewed as

Luke's preferred paradigm for the influx of recently converted "wealthy disciples" (a contradiction in terms for Q and Mark). Johnson (1977) argues that money in Luke often has a symbolic function linked to the acceptance or rejection of Jesus.

If the author of Luke–Acts is the traditional unmarried "beloved physician" and sometime companion of Paul in his apostolic deprivations, Luke's missionary praxis, culminating in his literary effort, undoubtedly has been correctly understood as an impressive testimony to solidarity with the poor, weak, and marginated—but perhaps a more moderate response than that epitomized by Jesus and his disciples according to Q and Mark.

## H. The Pauline Letters

The seven unquestioned letters of Paul constitute documents that largely predate Q and the four Gospels. Paul's proximity to Jesus' praxis and teaching on poverty is best perceived by attention to the apostolic praxis as reflected in the "catalogs of affliction/oppression" in 1 Cor 4:10–13a; 2 Cor 4:8–10; 6:4b–10; 11:23b–29; 12:10; Rom 8:35; Phil 4:12 (Hodgson 1983).

Linguistically, all seven uses of the more explicit vocabulary for poor/poverty occur in the unquestioned Paulines. In Gal 2:10 "continuing to remember the destitute" (*ptōchós*) is viewed as a nonnegotiable element in Christian praxis common to both Petrine and Pauline circles; cf. the weak elements (*stoicheia*), also metaphorically described as "beggarly" (*ptōchós*) in Gal 4:9. In 2 Cor 6:10 the apostle concludes the catalog of affliction, describing his own lifestyle as "poor [*ptōchós*] but enriching many; *having nothing*, and yet possessing all things." These seven "catalogs of affliction" might just as well be described as "catalogs of oppression" (Hanks 1983: 48–49). Concrete expressions of injustices suffered, with poverty and deprivation often consequent, dominate the lists.

The remaining four uses are to be found in Rom 15:26 (*ptōchós*) and 2 Corinthians 8–9, where Paul deals with the offering for the destitute among the saints in Jerusalem (Nickle 1966). The only NT use of *pénēs* (the more common word for "poor" in classical Greek) comes in 2 Cor 9:9 in the LXX-based citation of Ps 112:9 ("He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor; his justice endures forever"). Still greatly disputed is the interpretation of Paul's reference to the incarnational paradigm for the offering: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he *became poor* (verb *ptōchéo*, only here in NT), so that you through his *poverty* (*ptōcheia*) might become rich." Commentaries commonly have suggested Neoplatonic and metaphorical interpretations, but cf. Stegemann (1984: 15) and many liberation theologians; also the reference to the "poverty" (*ptōcheia*) of the Macedonian churches (2 Cor 8:2).

Much recent study has focused on the socioeconomic level of the Pauline churches (Theissen 1982; Meeks 1983). Stegemann (1984: 31–38) speaks of a new consensus according to which most of the early Christian communities were made up predominantly of "the little people" (*pénēs*), including neither the destitute (*ptōchós*) nor the wealthy. However, the interpretation of texts such as 1 Cor 1:26–29 (stressing lack of honor) continue to be disputed (Stegemann 1984: 35–36). Since more spacious houses and leadership for house churches tended to come from the more affluent and educated

sectors, situations arose (1 Cor 11:17–32) in which a kind of conflict could flare up between some who became drunk (11:21) and others who “hungered” and “had nothing” (11:22)—even in the Lord’s Supper. Theological elements so basic as the Eucharist (“*For I received . . .*”, 1 Cor 11:23–33; cf. 11:17–22), variations in spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12; 14) and the urgency of agape love (chap. 13) are best understood in the context of the socioeconomic conflict or “class struggle” between more affluent and poorer members.

However, despite such conflicts and Paul’s deprivations, a degree of accumulated wealth (capital) was to be expected in the house churches he founded: more affluent churches are expected to save up and share with poorer ones, and parents are expected to save for their children (2 Cor 12:14). Such provisions provide continuity with the teaching in the Deutero-Pauline letters.

## I. Deutero-Pauline Letters

Since 2 Thessalonians, Colossians, and Ephesians generally occupy a place between the seven unquestioned Pauline letters and the Pastorals (both stylistically and theologically), we may ask whether specifically this is true regarding their perspective on poverty.

Despite questions about authorship and date, 2 Thessalonians has much in common with 1 Thessalonians in perspectives on poverty. Both stress the Church’s experience of oppression in the form of persecution, which inevitably impoverished the artisan class and manual laborers addressed (Hanks 1983: 49; Meeks 1983: 64–65). In 2 Thessalonians particularly, distorted eschatological speculation, resulting in idleness, only augmented the problem (2:1–12; 3:3–12; cf. 1 Thess 4:13–5:11; 4:11–12 (“need,” *chreia*). Paul’s apocalyptic gospel, however, created viable community (Meeks 1983: 174) and instilled a more sober hope. Elitist Greek prejudices against manual labor were aggressively corrected by strong exhortation to work and by Church discipline (2 Thess 4:10, 14–15).

In Colossians no explicit language for poverty occurs. However, as in the unquestioned Paulines, oppression . . . and persecution directed against Paul and certain churches may be viewed as the basic cause of suffering, imprisonment, and poverty (*thlipsis*, 1:24; cf. 4:10, 18; Hanks 1983: 47–50; *adikia*, 3:25, Hanks 1983: 128).

In the *Haustafeln* (Col 3:18–4:1), the inclusion of husbands, fathers, and lords (3:19, 21; 4:1) may indicate an upward penetration of the gospel in the social structure (cf. 1 Peter), but the priority given to women (3:15) and children (3:20), plus the more detailed treatment of slaves (3:22–25) suggests that the weaker and poorer classes continue to dominate in the Church membership. Noteworthy is the explicit stress on “justice” for slaves, in the explicit sense of equality (*isótēs*), demanded of converted lords (4:1)—especially radical if lords and slaves together are regarded as “brothers” with equal rights (4:7, 9), and if the lords were formerly characterized by covetousness rationalized by idolatrous religion (3:5) and particularly oppressive practices (1:21; 3:8; 3:25 *adikéō*, 2 times).

Colossians places special emphasis on a false philosophical teaching (proto-Gnosticism?) that “robs” the church, and on the true “riches” and “treasures” (2:2–3) of Christ’s wisdom (undoubtedly metaphorical language), which may reflect certain literal economic effects of the authentic good news to the poor, contrasted with rapacious itinerant philosophers (2:8). Proper teaching on the positive goodness of creation (1:15–17) would counteract oppressive ideological tendencies in proto-Gnosticism.

In addition to authentic wisdom (2:2–3), which may reflect traditional Hebrew concerns for universal literacy, immediate solutions for poverty may be indicated in the kind of evangelization that implants a hope for radical social change (1:5, 12–13), in agape-love solidarity with the saints of all social classes (1:4; 2:2, 13; 3:12–14), forgiveness that probably includes debts (3:13), and good works to meet the needs of the more destitute members (1:6, 10; 4:10; cf. 1:7, 25; 4:2).

Analysis of Ephesians reveals a perspective that is similar to Colossians, but not identical. Direct reference to poorer classes may be seen in the former unemployed “thieves” and the one having “need” (*chreia*, 4:28) who is to be aided by “sharing” (*metadidōmi*). “Good works” directed to the needy are seen (as in Titus) as the immediate goal of “salvation” (2:8–10). Paul suffers imprisonment (3:1; 4:1; 6:20), a result of oppression-persecution (*thlipsis*, 3:13), producing deprivation. Slaves (6:5–8) precede lords (6:9) in the *Haustafeln*, but husbands (5:25–33a) now receive more attention than wives (5:22–24, 33b). The concern in the *Haustafeln* to strengthen the family structure (which included household servants) may reflect not only a shift in evangelistic strategy (husbands, lords) but an adaptation to bureaucratic realities in the churches’ ministry to the poor (cf. 1 Timothy 5). Evangelism is now directed aggressively toward the oppressive ruling classes (“boldness . . . ambassador”) and not just to the little people (6:19–20). Hence prophetic denunciation of oppression and injustice (“darkness,” 5:11), fervent intercession, and the practice of liberating justice (6:14; cf. Job 29:11–17; Isa 59:17) are advocated in the face of demonic structures of evil (6:1–18). Many perspectives similar to Colossians are repeated (love, inheritance, covetousness, God’s universal Fatherhood, deacon ministry, forgiveness).

## J. The Pastoral Letters

The focus of the Pastorals on the poor must take into account the socioeconomic status of the purported author (Paul), the recipients (Timothy and Titus) and the churches in Ephesus (1 Tim 1:3) and Crete (Tit 1:5) where they minister, as well as their explicit teaching about wealth and poverty.

Basically we find “Paul” in the same conflictive, oppressed, impoverished status of the apostle in the “tribulation lists” of 1–2 Corinthians and Romans. He who once persecuted the infant Church, even supporting violence (1 Tim 1:13) is now the victim of continual persecution and oppression (2 Tim 1:12; 4:14–15), unjust imprisonment (2 Tim 1:15–18; 2:9–13; 3:10–12), deserted by friends and colleagues (2 Tim 4:9–12, 16), facing the death penalty (though innocent of all wrongdoing; 2 Tim 4:6–8, 17–18), fearful of entering into a cold winter without his cloak (2 Tim 4:13, 21). Both Timothy and Titus are expected to continue the conflictive, impoverished apostolic lifestyle (1 Tim 1:18; 6:12; 2 Tim 1:6–8; 2:3–6; 3:10–14; 4:5) as originally exemplified by Jesus in the gospel (Tit 2:11–14; 1 Tim 1:11–12; 2:5–6; 2 Tim 1:10–12; 3:8–10, 13), who similarly suffered oppression and violence (2:5–6; 3:11–12), yet loved even his oppressors and persecutors (1 Tim 1:13–14, 16; 3:16–17), and was vindicated by his resurrection (3:16–17).

Analysis of the Pastorals’ controverted teaching (“bourgeois”? see below) to the churches in Ephesus and Crete should not be carried out in isolation from the above-mentioned elements of continuity with the Jesus of the Gospels and the Paul of the seven unquestioned Pauline letters. Significant elements of discontinuity are discernible, but many studies oversimplify or exaggerate them.

The lowly socioeconomic status of the churches in Ephesus is reflected in 1 Timothy, especially in the detailed instructions given to counteract ecclesiastical bureaucratic paternalism in the care for “real” (impoverished) widows (5:3–16) and the maintenance of social responsibility in the extended family; in the qualifications for deacons (and deaconesses? 3:8–13) who minister primarily to the poor; and in the instructions to slaves (household servants, 6:1–2; cf. Tit 2:9–10; note the omission of parallel instructions for slave owners; cf. Philemon).

Women of means are frequent converts, but exhorted to minimize socioeconomic differences by their simple dress style (1 Tim 2:9; cf. 1 Pet 3:3). The good works, so central in Titus (1:6; 2:7, 14; 3:1, 13–14; cf. 1 Tim 2:10; 5:25; 2 Tim 2:21), represent the chief aim of redemption (Tit 2:14) and the second great purpose of inspired Scripture (2 Tim 3:14–17; Hanks 1986a: 19). These are works particularly defined as undertaken on behalf of those who lack the essentials of life (Tit 3:14; cf. Matt 25:31–46; Miranda 1974: 18).

Often cited without reference to the above contexts and teaching are two texts in 1 Timothy commonly said to represent a bourgeois adjustment—or contradiction—of Jesus’ radical teaching in Luke. The first, 6:6–10, counsels those like Timothy, who have only the bare necessities of existence, to be content and avoid the love of money (“a root of all kinds of evil,” 6:10). The second, 6:17–19, instructs Timothy how to reform the lives of the rich. Whereas Jesus in Luke often called for total renunciation of wealth, the “Paul” of the Pastorals would have his emissary in Ephesus simply advocate generosity and good works. Undoubtedly a certain diversity of historical contexts and teaching is found here. However, the generosity and good works that would be demanded of the rich in an impoverished church undoubtedly would involve something far more stringent than in a modern affluent neighborhood—especially when backed up by the radical examples of Jesus and Paul (cf. Zaccheus under Luke). The “generosity” to be demanded (“*koinōnikós*,” 6:18) may involve a kind of solidarity or pooling of resources and sharing that really has no limits (cf. Acts 2; 4). Another factor is that the Jesus of Luke’s gospel often confronts the unconverted rich directly (6:20–23), while in the Pastorals, “Paul” speaks to wealthy converts—and then only indirectly through his emissary (“command them . . .,” 6:18).

Factors that produce poverty indicated in the Pastorals include especially persecution, oppression, and injustice (2 Tim 2:19; 1 Tim 1:19); idolatry and the false teaching of the pseudoprophets (2 Tim 2:16); and coveting (2 Tim 2:22; 3:6; 4:3; 1 Tim 3:3–8; 6:9; Tit 1:7–11; 2:12). As in the early Paulines, the consummation of God’s kingdom in the Parousia stands as the ultimate solution, but is no longer expected to occur within Paul’s lifetime (cf. 1 Tim 6:14; 2 Tim 4:8; Tit 2:13).

The evangelization of the world with the gospel remains (at least implicitly) as good news that gives special hope to the poor, as evidenced by the ready response of widows and slaves. Salvation is never limited to a Platonic heavenly sphere (2 Tim 4:18), but includes material relief in this life (2 Tim 4:18).

The church is the “pillar and ground of truth,” particularly because it represents the new alternative community where God’s just and loving purpose for all humanity begins to be realized. Prophetic denunciation of persecution and oppression may be seen in the remarks on Alexander the coppersmith (2 Tim 4:14; cf. 1 Tim 6:13), but the false teachers condemned held numerous tenets that would be detrimental especially to the

poorer members (see food prohibitions, 1 Tim 4:3). Thus, even proper church government (so central a concern in 1 Timothy and Titus) becomes a means for ensuring that the churches, like their apostle, “remember the poor” (Gal 2:10). It might even be argued that historically, these most “conservative” epistles have contributed most to economic development and the liberation of oppressed classes in those countries which early extended the Calvinistic interpretation of their teaching on church government to the national political level (López Michelson 1947).

#### **K. 1–2 Peter, Jude**

1 Peter, probably a baptismal homily/tract proceeding from the Petrine circle (1:1; 5:12–13) in Rome (ca. 80 A.D.?), addresses churches in five provinces of Asia Minor (1:1; modern Turkey). Although the general technical terms for poor/poverty are absent, the relatively impoverished situation of the churches is clearly represented in various ways.

First, the Jewish and gentile believers are described as homeless, either “visiting strangers” (1:1), “resident aliens” (1:17), or both (2:11), sharing the Diaspora exile experience of non-Christian Jews in Asia Minor (1:1). Whether these terms be limited to a literal sense (Elliott 1981), or begin to include the (neo)Platonic cosmology explicit in the book of Hebrews, a large measure of socioeconomic content is increasingly recognized.

Second, the paradigmatic and major subgroup within the churches addressed is that of “household servants” (2:18–25) working in mainly non-Christian manors. The second major subgroup is that of the wives of unbelieving husbands in households whose economic means (2:2) obviously exceed those of the house servants. Recent converts include especially younger men of uncertain economic means (5:7).

Analysis of the causes for poverty may begin by studying the socioeconomic situation of the five provinces, of Diaspora Jews in the area (Elliott), and of gentile converts (largely former God-fearing proselytes) in the new sect. Particularly, the Diaspora experience of homeless aliens and separation from official Judaism resulted in frequent oppression and persecution (1:6; 2:12, 18–21; 3:14–17; 4:1, 12–19; 5:8–10).

The suffering and deprivations of uprooted “homeless” is countered in 1 Peter by incorporation into the new community of the church as the “household of God” (2:5; 4:17). In this new home (cf. “heaven” in the book of Hebrews), God is the gracious Father (1:2–3). The few affluent male converts (3:7; 2:13–17) are encouraged not to withdraw from public life, but to set examples as public benefactors (2:14; cf. Rom 13:3), a function which often included political and structural economic measures in times of scarcity and famine (Winter 1988a; 1988b). The proclamation of the gospel as “good news to the homeless” (1:12, 25; 2:9–10) thus imparted to uprooted recipients a sense of dignity and status (1:5, 9; 2:9–10). Tendencies toward unhealthy paternalism (see 1 Timothy 5) were thus vigorously counteracted.

The identification of imperial Rome with the name “Babylon” (5:13) suggests not only the resort to pseudonymity common in times of persecution (cf. book of Daniel), but also the kind of prophetic denunciation against oppressors elaborated in Revelation and James. 1 Peter is realistic in recognizing that such oppression may continue to occur even within the household of God (5:2–3), where all such behavior is subjected to divine judgment (4:17).

The newly baptized converts were born again to a living hope (1:3, 21) that included life in the new people of God, which was to be consummated at the Parousia (2:12; 4:13), seen as the ultimate solution to all persecution, homelessness, oppression, poverty, and suffering.

Although Jude purports to be the brother of James (1), his undisguised fury against false teachers (4–19) seems far removed from James' indignation against the rich who oppress the poor. Conceivably Jude attacks the kind of ideology that evolves to rationalize injustice, oppression, and indifference to the material needs of the poor, whose needs should be ministered to in the "love feasts" (12, "feed themselves"; cf. "coveting" in 16, 18). The "impiety" (*asébeia* 6 times 4, 15, 18), which appears to be the keynote of the epistle (Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter* WBC, 37) commonly translates the Heb *ḥamas* ("violence") in the LXX (Pons 1971: 166), and may be understood as reflecting the kind of violence the poor suffer at the hands of the wealthy and powerful. Even the sexual excesses Jude so vigorously condemns (*asélgeia*, 4; cf. 8, 10) may also involve oppression and force against the weaker elements in society.

While Jude made no reference to the common cause of poverty signified by *adikia* (injustice, oppression), 2 Peter makes this concept basic to the epistle (2:9, 13, 15) and juxtaposes the injustice-oppression of the world (1:4; 2:20) with the justice of the kingdom of God and the promised new heavens and earth (1:1, 11, 13; 2:5, 7–8, 21; 3:13). As in Jer 22:16, "knowing God" involves doing justice (1:2, 8; 2:20–21; 3:18; Miranda 1974: 44–53). The use of *asébeia* strengthens the case for a reference to the violence commonly suffered by the poorer and weaker sectors of society (2:5; cf. *ḥamas* in Gen 6:11, 13). Traditional elitist Greek virtues (1:5b–6) are placed in a radical Christian framework, beginning with faith (1:5a) and culminating in the brotherly friendship and agape love that characteristically maintained the solidarity of the socioeconomically diverse Christian communities (1:7; cf. 18; 3:1, 8, 14–15, 17; cf. 2:13).

## L. Revelation

Word-study approaches on poverty gave rather meager results for the book of Revelation. The poverty (*ptocheia*) of the church in Smyrna is attributed to the oppression-persecution proceeding from certain "Jews" (2:9; Hanks 1983: 48). The reference (3:17) to the "poor" (*ptochós*) Laodicean church, although metaphorical, has been found particularly helpful in delineating the literal sense: having "need" (*chreia*) = wretched, pitiable . . . blind and naked . . . shame. Rich and "poor" alike succumb to the idolatrous economic demands of the second beast in 13:16 (*ptochós*, parallel to small and great . . . free and slaves; cf. the denunciation of the slave traffic in the "bodies and souls of men," 18:13; "slaves and small," 19:18). Such skimpy linguistic data, coupled with the current popular escapist eschatological "interpretations," ill prepare us to understand why F. Engels in 1883 should select Revelation as the subject of his only article on a biblical book (Engels 1974).

However, recent Latin American studies (Stamm 1978; Foulkes 1989) and sociological approaches (Schüssler Fiorenza 1985b) make clear the truly radical character of apocalyptic and utopian genres, which commonly proceed from poor, oppressed, and persecuted groups (see the exiled author's description of his situation, 1:9). Stamm called attention to the severe denunciation of imperial oppression and obscene luxury,

rationalized by idolatrous religious claims (1978, chaps. 13, 17–18). Schüssler Fiorenza writes: “To those who are poor, harassed, and persecuted, the promises to the ‘victor’ pledge the essentials of life for the eschatological future: food, clothing, house, citizenship, security, honor . . .” (1985b: 196; cf. 124–25).

The perspective on sexual minorities in Revelation is paradoxical. Prostitutes undoubtedly would have felt much more comfortable sitting at Jesus’ feet by the Sea of Galilee than in the seven churches in Asia Minor, listening to John’s description of imperial idolatry with all the lurid references to the “Great Harlot” (chaps. 17–18). On the other hand, the seer’s declaration that sexual relations with woman are “defiling” (14:4) brought unspeakable joy for centuries of medieval monks, who delighted to see themselves as the “virgins” espoused to the Lamb (Boswell 1980: 216–18). Post-Reformation heterosexist Protestant exegesis commonly confesses the text to be one of the most “difficult” in the NT (Schüssler Fiorenza 1985b: 181–92; Countryman 1988: 137–38).

## M. Gospel and Letters of John

The gospel and letters of John may appear singularly deficient in specific ethical content. Jesus reveals only that he is the Revealer and in another apparent tautology commands a love, which keeps his commandment, which is to “love one another.” The four references to the ever-present beggarly poor (*ptōchós*, John 12:5–6, 8; 13:29) hardly are such as to inspire great concern (*TDNT* 6:907). Hence First World Johannine scholarship has focused on other areas, largely ignoring significant questions raised by Miranda (1977; see below) and a few other liberation theologians (Herzog 1972) and Third World exegetes. However, a growing minority of theologians interpret the Johannine writings as representing a unique, radical perspective. Just as they have opposed traditional “feudalizing” of the kingdom in the Synoptics, so they reject the “Platonizing” of (eternal) life in the Johannine writings.

John’s prologue speaks of the Word become “flesh,” which if not explicitly designating an option for a humanity that is “intrinsically poor” (Pixley and Boff 1986: 69), at least points to characteristic weakness (6:63), of which human poverty was a dominant expression. The homelessness and margination of the incarnate Word (1:11, 46; cf. 14:2–3) is another Johannine motif that expresses a painful dimension of poverty (Pixley and Boff 1986: 72–74; Fraijo 1985: 62). Mainline scholarship stresses persecution and excommunication as dominant formative experiences in the history of the Johannine communities, but has not commonly recognized the deadly economic deprivation and violence involved. As in the Synoptics, Jesus’ healing miracles are usually directed toward the poor (e.g., John 9:8, “beggar”) and the weak (5:1–13; 4:43–54), and the same is true for the provision miracles (2:1–11; 6:1–15). The forward placement of the temple cleansing (2:13–22, following the provision of wine for an obviously poor family) gives prominence to John’s critique of the oppressive Jewish oligarchy, for “it is precisely in the limits of the Temple where Jesus opts for the margined: the sick, poor, publicans, women, children, foreigners” (Zorrilla 1988: 71).

Above all, the Johannine substitution of (eternal) life for the Synoptic stress on the kingdom must be understood dialectically (Barrett 1972) and polemically in the context of excommunication, persecution, and violence. Traditional Platonizing interpretations of John radically distort the original meaning and seek to elude the painful “bite” of the

polemic. The “abundant life” John offers (10:10) avoids extremes of nondialectical Pentecostal-charismatic “prosperity theology,” but is not limited to a Platonically spiritualized (nonmaterial) realm (3 John 2). Miranda (1977) may have erred by succumbing to Bultmann’s elimination of futuristic eschatology, but not in delineating the radical character of the Johannine perspective on the poor, justice, injustice/oppression (*adikia*, 1 John 1:9; 5:17), sacrificial love, and life.

In synthesis the gospel of John may be viewed as outlining the causes of poverty in the persecution, oppression, and violence suffered by the community; 1 John points explicitly to the poverty commonly resulting (1 John 2:17, “need”; cf. 3 John 5–8), and the appropriate response of agape love in the context of Christian communities characterized by *koinōnia* sharing. “John’s love is love of the deprived, the poor, the needy” (Miranda 1977: 95). Despised and marginated sexual minorities are treated with concern and given special honor (4:1–42; cf. 8:1–11).

## N. Hebrews

Paradoxically, Hebrews makes unprecedented use of the OT (particularly in the radical Exodus-Wilderness-Conquest traditions), yet also is commonly believed to represent an extreme in the NT writings in the degree of (neo)-Platonizing evident in its language and theology. In its perception of poverty and its causes, Hebrews is basically continuous with the Exodus paradigm. The question still debated is whether the solution is conceived of in (neo)Platonic terms: an Exodus-type escape, but to a spiritualized, nonmaterial heaven; or whether the eschatology of Hebrews is basically consistent with the apocalyptic-utopian perspective common to the rest of the NT. The author obviously represents an educational elite and addresses well-educated readers who seem more impoverished from persecution than originally poor (ca. 67–70 A.D.?). The two leading candidates, Apollos and Barnabas, each shared Paul’s itinerant lifestyle (cf. 13:2–3 on hospitality and imprisonment).

The key passages are few but eloquent and significant for the NT teaching on the poor. The most explicit text climaxes the great faith chapter, countering the militarism and political triumphalism of 11:32–34a with reference to “others . . . of whom the world was not worthy,” whose poverty (v 37, *hysterēomenoi*) is exemplified in their lack of adequate clothing (37a), and accompanied by brutal violence (35, 37a), ridicule and torture (36a), and unjust imprisonment (36b). Such impoverished, brutalized souls, like the elect in James (2:5), are particularly rich in faith (Heb 11:39–40). Related but less explicit references to impoverished saints may be observed in the mention of new converts whose possessions were plundered (10:32–34), and of the poor Israelite slaves in Egypt (11:24–26; cf. Exodus). Women and sexual minorities receive special attention (Rahab 11:31; Melchizedek 7:3 with Isa 56:3–5), but family integrity is defended against some who despised marriage (13:4).

Since Hebrews begins by stressing that God spoke through the prophets (1:1), it is not surprising that the prophetic emphasis on oppression and persecution as the fundamental cause of poverty dominates (10:33; 11:25, 37; Hanks 1983: 38–39). Such oppression impoverishes not only the original targets of persecution and discrimination but those who demonstrate solidarity with them as well (10:33, *koinōnia*; 11:25; cf. Matt 5:3; 25:31–46).

Hebrews shares with the rest of the NT an emphasis on the Church's ministry as a provisional and partial solution to the suffering of the poor. The "meeting together" is for providing for material needs as well as for spiritual edification (10:24–25). The Church's present ministry may be viewed theologically as the internalization of God's just law in the new covenant (8:8–12, note *adikia*, "oppression," v. 12; cf. 6:10; 10:17; Jer 22:16) or externally in the good works to the needy, agape solidarity, and ministry (*diakonéō*) to the saints (6:10). Brotherly love (*philadelphia*) is to be manifest in hospitality to homeless visitors (13:2, itinerant prophets and evangelists like Apollos?); ministry to those unjustly suffering imprisonment (13:3, 23), physical solidarity with the "excommunicated" (13:12–13), good works and sacrificial sharing (*koinōnia*; 13:15–16, 21). A life free from "the love of money" is prerequisite to such sacrificial external measures (13:5).

More "structural" approaches to the elimination of oppression and poverty may be seen in the new covenant provision (which internalizes Torah as a whole, not just its reformist and merciful elements; cf. the Exodus-Wilderness-Conquest traditions in 3:1–4:11) and in the military-political triumphalism of 11:32–35 (all of which are past, not contemporary realities). While not so explicit as Luke in presenting the gospel as good news to the poor, Hebrews does stress evangelism involving an integral salvation-liberation.

A more (neo)Platonist reading of the book would lead us to perceive a conflict between the utopian apocalyptic of other NT writings (Revelation 20–22; 2 Pet 3:13). However, despite some tendentious English translations, it is possible to read even the apparently (neo)Platonic texts in ways more consistent with materialist Hebrew thought and other NT books. Above all, "Mount Zion, the Heavenly Jerusalem" (12:22–24; cf. 11:10, 16) need not be interpreted as a nonmaterial realm eternally removed from the earthly scene, but as "coming" in space as well as time (13:14), like the new Jerusalem of Revelation, which finally descends to earth to consummate the kingdom of God (Heb 12:26–28 "receive"; Matt 6:10). Whichever reading is correct (neo-Platonic or materialist Hebrew), the consummation of the kingdom of God is viewed as elsewhere in the NT as the final glorious solution to the sufferings of the poor and oppressed. Certainly the book's teaching on creation (1:1–14) and resurrection (11:35; 13:20) is more consistent with a materialist reading. Even if an intermediate state and heavenly sphere receive more development and emphasis here than in other NT books, this reading need not contradict an ultimate apocalyptic, earthly-material resolution. The portrayal of Moses' decisive option for the poor and oppressed (11:24–26) is the most vivid and explicit NT paradigm of this element so basic to contemporary liberation theologies (strangely ignored by Boff and Pixley 1989, the Eng trans. of Pixley and Boff 1986). Hebrews' educated, eloquent author undoubtedly identifies with that picture.

## O. Conclusion

Just as the OT presents considerable diversity of perspectives regarding the poor/poverty (see the 8th-century prophets and Proverbs), so considerable diversity must be recognized in the NT. Attempts to synthesize and harmonize biblical teaching and to draw general theological conclusions tend not to pay sufficient attention to this diversity. Heavily ideological and propagandistic works exalting the "Christian virtues of

capitalism”—or socialism/communism—abound, usually highly selective in their use of “control texts” and often lacking in careful exegesis.

Liberation theology, with its emphasis on the Exodus paradigm of oppression and liberation, has planted fundamental challenges to traditional neo-Platonic interpretation of the NT. Certain liberation theologians and exegetes have made extreme statements regarding the poor/poverty in the NT. However, their perception that some kind of “option for the poor” is represented in most if not all the NT literature (far transcending occasional references to the “beggar poor”) marks a major advance in NT interpretation, as is now widely recognized (*ISBE* 3: 609–11, 905–8, 921–26; Sugden 1988; cf. Adie 1984). Socioeconomic and anthropological studies of the NT continue to debate and refine theological perceptions of the various documents regarding the poor.

However, Third World liberation theologians have only begun to take into account feminist perspectives, and feminist theology itself often has been somewhat elitist in its concerns. The socioeconomic polarization of women in the NT (poor widows or wealthy converts) has received little attention in studies on poverty and wealth. And liberation theologians have scarcely even raised any questions about NT perspectives on despised sexual minorities and uncleanness (Countryman 1988). Medieval monks assumed the NT to represent the perspective of continent bachelors; Protestantism has tended to assume that everyone except Paul must have had a wife and children. The failure to challenge sexual and family ideological assumptions has been a glaring weakness in theological efforts to delineate NT perspectives on oppression and poverty (Greenberg 1988).

Basic continuity between OT and NT perspectives on poverty and oppression is evident. However, for analysis of the factors in oppression, evaluation of the experience of poverty, and understanding of authentic liberation and integral salvation, the NT makes contributions of fundamental importance to biblical theology. Contemporary theological use of these perceptions, of course, must involve careful recourse to hermeneutics. The fact that poverty basically was caused by oppression at the time of the Exodus or in the NT does not prove that such is the case today, nor that biblical paradigms of liberation for the poor can now be slavishly imitated.

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