

Fr. Perozich comments —

As a priest who hear confessions, learn about the intimate difficulties with which people struggle, and who have eyes and ears to see my surroundings, I am moved with charity for the “poor sinner.”

Many such people claim they have not the sin that is so obvious because of what they say, do, promote in their rebellion to justify their feelings and conduct.

As Fr. John Perricone states, it is time to get back to the option for the poor sinner.

“the Law of Charity: which binds each and every Catholic to care for any need.”

Politicians like Joseph Biden, Nancy Pelosi, Ted Lieu, Pete Buttigieg, Maxine Waters, Dick Durbin;

Churchmen like John Claude Hollerich, Robert McElroy, James Martin, Georg Batzig, Daniel Horan;

Educators like Randy Weingarten’

NGO leaders of numerous stripes;

These deny the poverty in their spirit, demonstrate an arrogance of power, and show the poverty of spirit in the soul.

So many scream so loudly of their opinions, that it shows misery indeed does love company.

They, like all, need salvation. Unlike most of us, they do not know it.

Our charity must not keep people in the poverty of their self understanding against God’s creation and redemption.

The preferential option for the poor ideologues design a manipulable tribe called “the poor,” who are forbidden to thirst for the truth and beauty which is the patrimony and comfort of all human beings. These ideologues insist that all “the poor” must ever see is their misfortune. Misfortune defines them. Their lack of what others have becomes their identity. Their humanity is eviscerated as ideologues entomb them perpetually as “the poor.” This is the capital sin of Envy writ large.

The Catholic church has the mission to guide all to Jesus so that the poor, materially or spiritually, not remain in the attitude that this be their identity when actually it is much greater.

When holy church returns to its mission to save souls from sin rather than trying to spend other people’s money only for material needs, she will grow again. Christ’s charity will be on display. People will be set free.

Option for the *Poor Sinner*

Our Lord does not see rich or poor, privileged or unfortunate, low class or high. He sees only fallen men and women whom He loves.



- [Fr. John A. Perricone](#)

Any alert Catholic paying attention over the past 60 years well knows the familiar slogan of this article’s title. Well, almost. That last word in the title was never an original part of the slogan. Therein lies a story—and a lesson.

In the raucous wake of the ending of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) a significant number of the theological *bien pensant* executed a doctrinal *coup d’état*. Under the banner of *aggiornamento*, they masterminded a tectonic shift in the *raison d’être* of the Roman Catholic Church. No longer was the Church’s mission “saving souls”; respectable Catholics now spoke of “social justice.”

In fact, from the ’60s to this very day, a Catholic would be hard put to find mention of “saving souls” in any sermon or part of the voluminous Catholic mainstream academic literature (used in Catholic colleges, universities, seminaries and various houses of formation) accumulated since Vatican II. So thorough was the revolution that the mere mention of the phrase “saving souls”

today in well-heeled circles is met with arched eyebrows or awkward embarrassment.

Overnight, the Church was made to appear as though the plight of the poor was never her concern. Against her alleged callous indifference rose bands of “enlightened” priests and nuns who would show her a thing or two. This fifth column would spare no shock in proving their point; in fact, shock became a potent weapon in their arsenal. Breaking with the past was their driving passion—especially the despicable past of the Catholic Church before 1965.

Their cause exhibited the utopian furor of the Jacobins and Maoists. Destruction was necessary to soften the soil for the social justice/equity they would usher upon the face of the earth. In the twinkle of an eye, Catholics noticed the difference: St. Vincent de Paul Societies were replaced by “social justice” committees; Lenten Mite Boxes (touchingly depicted with the suffering Savior of Gethsemane) would be tossed for rice bowl boxes; St. Nicholas drives at Christmastime gave way to Giving Trees.

Add to this something even more troubling. The precious (and oftentimes artistically priceless) liturgical accoutrements used for Holy Mass and the Sacraments were tagged as signs of the oppression of the poor (as well as the detritus of a malign “triumphalism” that needed to be erased entirely, like the airbrushing of historical photos incommensurate with Communist Party orthodoxy).

With the fanaticism of Bolsheviks, organized bands ransacked sacristy after sacristy for every sacred vessel and vestment they could find. Everything was either sold or burned, lest their contagion ever infect the New Catholics aborning. Similar frenzies were unleashed upon the beloved interiors of churches across the globe. This was all done so that the poor could be served, and a new Reimagined Church could arise. You could not be accused of melodrama for calling to mind Rousseau, who calmly remarked, “man must be forced to be free.”

Scores of ancient religious orders toppled like dominoes before the force of this antinomian juggernaut. Tell-tale signs of these heady rebel groups can be seen in organizations like the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, still waging war against despised past centuries of traditional religious life. Though these religious are now greatly spent by age, one can still spot the revolutionary spark which created the fires that consumed Old Catholic culture. That spark still flickers in the many religious orders that traded “saving souls” for creating a “just society.”

Because of the Movement’s feral intensity, today’s Catholics are forced to walk amongst the scarred remains of a once glorious Catholic Church. Of course, a faithful remnant remains, but they are relegated to roam a spiritual wasteland resembling Berlin after World War II. Shakespeare expresses the tragedy of this cataclysm,

...those boughs which shake against the cold,

Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang. (Sonnet 73)

Emergent from this troubled period was the slogan, “preferential option for the poor.” One searches in vain for this new concept in the church’s treasury of dogma or piety, or in her long and soaring history. Instead of this novel and tendentious category, what one *does* find is the Law of Charity: which binds each and every Catholic to care for any need.

Our Lord is clear: “Whatever you do to the least of my brethren, you do to me” (Matthew 25:40). From this Divine Commission, the Church fashioned the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Legions of saints, over thousands of years, committed themselves to the selfless care of the poor, leaving the world stammering before their heroic generosity. In every Catholic Church, the Faithful are confronted by the poor box, begging for their supererogation. It could safely be said that the

Catholic Church *invented* active care for the poor. After all, our salvation depends upon it (cf. Matthew 25:32-46).

Attention to those in need is part of the Church's supernatural DNA. No Catholic will find a home in Heaven unless they face Christ the Judge marked with their love for those who cry out in need. But these obligations of charity are always discharged within an exquisite order, principally stamped by humility. Order means that everything and every action has its place situated in a carefully ranked hierarchy. That ranking comes from both a natural and supernatural reckoning. Each element not only has its *place*, but its very *place* is indispensable to the beauty of the whole.

Think of an artistic masterpiece in music or painting. So many elements conspire to create the spectacle of beauty. Every element is crucial; but it is crucial *precisely* in the place it occupies, no matter how small. St. Thomas teaches us that the three essential properties of beauty are: *integritas*, *consonantia*, and *claritas* (integrity, proportion, and radiance). This is order. To be clear, it pertains not only to art but to our sanctification.

The Church's teaching possesses order because our Lord's did. Take the woman's anointing of our Lord with precious perfume (Matthew 26:7-13). As Judas reproves the "waste" as better used for the poor, he receives the Savior's reprimand: "Why do you trouble this woman? For she hath wrought a good work upon me. For the poor you always have with you." His divine teaching bespeaks a marvelous order: while the plight of the poor demands relief, it does not obscure or preempt other more important obligations. However, when "the poor" become an *idée fixe*, it mutates into a political category usurping the place of God.

This is the problem with any ideology/heresy: it forgets its place in the natural and supernatural order of things. Rather than liberate the human person, it smothers him. Regarding the poor, the urgent point of St. Paul: "for the Kingdom of God is not meat and drink: but justice and

peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost (Romans 17:14). In the very prayer that falls from the lips of Our Savior, we find this luminous order. First, He teaches us to pray “Thy will be done,” and only then, we beg, “give us this day our daily bread.” Ecclesiastes, too, memorably enjoins the sacred order,

*All things have their season,
and in their time all things pass under heaven.*

A time to be born, and a time to die,

A time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted...

A time to love, and a time to hate; (Ecclesiastes 3:1-3)

T.S. Eliot echoes the same eternal theme in “Ash Wednesday,”

O Lord, teach us to love, and not to love.

Msgr. John Ryan, the indefatigable champion of the downtrodden, presciently lectured in 1920 to the New York School of Social Work,

There is grave danger that assistance to the neighbor for his own sake alone will be converted into the service of society as a whole, and the ignoring of the intrinsic worth of the individual... Supernatural charity is a much more effective motive than love of the neighbor for his own sake or for the sake of society: for the human being in distress assumes a much greater value when he is thought of a relation to God.

Blessed Antoine Frederick Ozanam (1813-1853), founder of the St. Vincent de Paul society, warned sharply,

The goal of the society was not to help the poor, this was only a means. Our object was by the practice of Charity to strengthen ourselves in the Faith, and to win others for it.... Personal perfection and not the eradication of poverty per se is the primary goal of the Society.

What could be chaotic is made harmonic with the impress of order. No Catholic stands exempt from the eleemosynary injunctions of Holy Charity. However, a natural and Divine order must be obeyed. **Each Catholic discharges the duty of charity according to his state, means, and prudently available opportunity: all beneath the hidden cloak of humility, which alone clothes it with merit.**

The “preferential option for the poor” ignored this rich and textured Catholic teaching, thus degenerating into a caricature of charity. It was minted in the desiccated university lecture halls of Western Europe (along with its umbrella term, “liberation theology”) and soon migrated across continents. It found its most congenial home in South America, where it became a battle cry for its priests and bishops.

Decades passed, and the preferential option for the poor ate away at the once robust foundations of South American Catholicism. Eventually, liberation theology was roundly condemned by the magisterium of Pope John Paul II and executed by his deputy, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger. However, it did not entirely disappear. It mutated into a more benign form but a form still bearing the theological genes of the preferential option for the poor.

Even those clerics who obeyed the Church, rejecting this reprobated ideology, still retained its spirit. To them, all the Church’s exterior forms of piety and Office became an embarrassment. Clerical attire became an obstacle to solidarity with the poor. The Church’s whole traditional ensemble of Redemption became, for them, an albatross.

Thus, the pedigree of the preferential option for the poor. Truth be told, it is still alive and well; and it has now burrowed into the theological cells of a formidable cross section of the Catholic intelligentsia. **It sees “the poor” through an ideological lens which not only makes the true poor invisible but hides their intrinsic human dignity as well.**

They are no longer men, like all other men. They are “the poor.” No longer do they possess the dignity of high aspiration but are relegated to being a permanent underclass feeding off the largesse of their betters

Rather than the Church’s rousing summons to strive mightily to *be more*, the ideologues sedulously teach them how to *take more*. It thus deafens them to the ancient Roman adage, (confirming the timeless Divine lessons), *ad astra per aspera* (reaching the heights always entails struggling mightily). In the ideologues’ credo, the poor ought to be pitied, never exhorted. They stagnate beneath the disguised soft discrimination of low expectations.

The preferential option for the poor ideologues design a manipulable tribe called “the poor,” who are forbidden to thirst for the truth and beauty which is the patrimony and comfort of all human beings. These ideologues insist that all “the poor” must ever see is their misfortune. Misfortune defines them. Their lack of what others have becomes their identity. Their humanity is eviscerated as ideologues entomb them perpetually as “the poor.” This is the capital sin of Envy writ large.

This is a tragedy of immeasurable proportions. The Church, in all her interior and exterior beauty, is a treasure from which “the poor” are banned. If the ideologues truly looked at the poor, they would see not *poor* men, just *men*. They would see not “the poor” but simply *poor sinners*, no different than the rest of the human race, all in need of the same merciful Christ. All they desire are the sweet beauties only the Catholic Church could supply.

For the poor are like the rest of us, the same as us—not a class apart. Our Lord does not see rich or poor, privileged or unfortunate, low class or high. He sees only fallen men and women whom He loves.

Christ's only preference is for *poor sinners*. Who dares improve upon that?



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