



**Food for Life Campaign
Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance
Sermon Competition 2010-2011
www.e-alliance.ch**

**LANGUAGE OF THE POOR
Food: Charity or communication**

“Life (of the person) does not consist in an abundance of possessions.”

Jesus Christ - Luke. 12:15¹

Can we presume to analyze the poor, in one way or another, only from an economic – food perspective? What is currently available to carry out a non economic-food based analysis of the poor?

These are questions that allow us to search for a discourse that is not economic or food based. I will do this based on knowledge² that is not conceptual or highly elaborated, knowledge which is ingenuous, disqualified, knowledge that is below scientific knowledge.

Wisdom from below, not qualified by scientific methodology, is knowledge of a people, a particular wisdom, incapable of unanimity or a single voice. It is from this impossibility that our discourse will have a voice because its place is in every day life, there where the poor and food have a language. Wisdom that from daily life invites us to listen to it, to live it. I present myself as an observer of this aspect.

Who are the poor?

To speak of the poor is to understand that they are and always will be human beings. This is a determinant for a coherent discourse. The human being always interprets things from a place, and this interpretation becomes legalized in language. For this reason, language, as an arbitrary system of representatives and not the spontaneous development of a concrete situation, will be what makes it possible to have a representation of the poor.

Now, a poor person is someone who lacks what is necessary to live. By person I understand someone who has language and I consider lack to be a continuous need. Lack also has the sense of being at a disadvantage. The poor person finds himself with an imposed impairment, given to him or her by a consumer society. The continuous need the poor have is primarily related to food.

This situation of being at a disadvantage unsettles them, does not allow them to be because something is lacking. Just as in psychoanalysis, everything speaks of lost objects that need to be symbolically found, lost objects they lack. The poor person is that person who has not found what they lack.

In this sermon I want to introduce the biological and sociological context of life, that is where the discourse of FOOD can be justifiably analyzed and theologized.

¹ The English translation uses the New International Version.

² FOUCAULT, Michel. *Defender la Sociedad*. 2001 2da Reimpresión.

In the 24th general assembly of the Reformed Church held in Ghana, Africa (July – August 2004) I asked the speaker (African), who was speaking about poverty – wealth – emphasizing the negative effect of imperialism on third world nations: what is the ideal life of an African? He didn't have an appropriate response because he himself did not have an ideal life. The speaker responded that the ideal life (for the African people) had not been analyzed. He answered: "My ideal, as an African, is that my children have education and food." His response was focused on family ties, related to food and knowledge.

Now, allow me to refer to an example of a "first world" citizen. In Cochabamba – Bolivia I knew some Japanese citizens for nearly three years, and had the opportunity to visit Japan at the end of 1997 and the beginning of 1998. Satoshi Hayabara is a young man who told me "I want to be Bolivian and Latin America." I was intrigued by this and asked him why he wants to be Bolivia and he told me his story that I call "LATCH KEY KID."

Satoshi is from the middle class, he is economically stable, his parents work but he lacks an affectionate relationship with his parents. His mother left for work at 5:00 (a.m.) and his father 30 minutes later. His mother left Satoshi's dinner in the dining room. He went to school at 6:30 (a.m.) after having breakfast. After school he went home and his lunch was ready in the computerized pot because his mother programmed the approximate cooking time. Satoshi warmed up his fish or meat in the microwave and got his prepared and seasoned vegetables that he ate every day out of the fridge. After lunch, he went to sports class and ate something at a restaurant. When he got home he watched television or played Nintendo. His mother got home around 20:00 and greeted him and then Satoshi went to bed and his mother made supper for his father who came home around 23:00 after going out for a beer with friends. Later they had dinner and went to bed. That is how Satoshi passed his childhood and his youth.

Satoshi carried the key to his house around his neck. His home was lonely and the New Year was the only time he ate with his parents. He was comfortable and technologically well, he did not lack anything economic, but lacked the family relationships around food. He said he did not want to repeat this pattern.

What is the point of having an abundance of material goods and all the comforts modernity has created. Modernity has ruined homes, family relationships because on the one hand, as in Satoshi's story, parents have to work to meet the consumer demands of modernity. To have and maintain a life style based on technology has a price and that is the loss of the family relationship. This is also what has happened in our country. Now parents go out to work and the family is disintegrating. Or perhaps this is the life style we should now seek. To be poor in family relationships.

If we observe the poor from a human rights, sociological, political etc, perspective, the poor is the one who lack something vital. If it is from an economic – food perspective, the poor will always be the one who lacks their daily bread.

What does it mean to lack daily bread?

He who lacks daily bread, is the one who does not have the possibility of obtaining it. Therefore, obtaining daily bread is an activity that we "must" do; bread does not fall from the sky. Now, if someone begs, it is because they lack the possibility of working, that is why they put out their hands.

Is our daily bread enough?

Having daily bread, we learn to live with what we have and not what we want. Herein lies the difference, the desire to have more for each day, to want more than what is necessary for life,

leads to greed, envy. Seeing that others have more than what is necessary, leads to envy and selfishness.

How can we be just with the poor?

History is marked by legends of men who have fought for justice for the poor. The classic example is Robin Hood. He stole from the rich to give to the poor and that is understood as retributive justice. However, ethics tell us “do not steal” and that the thief is justified by the poor and condemned by the rich. Where is good and evil? Where are the human rights of the poor and the rich in this example? Who would the rich person be without the poor person? What would society be like if there weren't people who cleaned the streets or the sewers.

Poor, with a meaningful life

The poor person will always be there, somewhere. Jesus told us: The poor will always be with you. However, there are some people in history who sought the dignity of living their ideals like Gandhi, Buddha, men who left their comfortable lives to live in lack... because they found meaning in simplicity, for them to be poor was not an option, it was a decision, a choice against a system of a life of opulence. If the poor are there, our discourse should change and think of the poor as someone who lacks a meaning for life and we should dignify the human being with this condition and work so they can find meaning in life.

Now, I began by quoting a phrase from the bible, which is that according to Jesus, life is not the abundance of goods we possess. Therefore, what is life? LIFE from the perspective of Jesus is Jesus himself, he is life. Ortega and Gasset tell us that life is given to us, but it is not given to us ready made, we must make it ourselves. Under this principle, to live is to do and to do is activity, in such a way that we never do nothing, we are always doing something. To live is not to die. The way we live is constituted in the bio, psycho socio-cultural problematic. Life is also the effort of living, obtaining food to live.

Charity or communication

Food (for the one who gives) should not be given as a work of charity, but as communication. With this affirmation, one does not stop being considered poor, but their life, and even more, life in abundance given by Jesus Christ, has an appropriate meaning, an inter-communicative sense of love.

Jesus (frequently an invited guest at the table), causes objections and polemic around food. He removes the “charitable” sense of food, changing it for communication. For this reason, for Jesus the charitable sense of the food is no longer meaningful while (for those who invited him) the communication also has no meaning, as the charitable sense was more important.

What is my communication like, from what place am I giving food, from the needs of the poor or from my need to be poor. What is it that I want to communicate?

Food should not be given because there is a need to appease hunger, but out of a need to communicate and in our case, to communicate the love of God.

In the story of John 21, Jesus asks for something to eat and the disciples do not have food. The question is not actually about food itself. Rather, he wants the disciples to understand the meaning of his work and the destiny of the food. Jesus gives them instructions to fish and he gives them abundant food. He does not give them food as a work of charity but in order to communicate. After the food, Jesus communicates his purpose: follow me. I will give you food so that you follow me, but the food has another meaning, the food is to shepherd his sheep. He does not seek biological food but food for his sheep, which is to say to communicate his message. Food should begin from here. If I have the possibility of giving food it should be so that people

see that this food it to satiate their hunger, but should also communicate that that they must love each other and love God.

When one has the power to give, one must know how to give. The Glory of God should be the Archimedean point to achieve the correct path, it doesn't matter how others interpret and speak of it, what is important is our excellent communication. Our objective, as Christians, is to follow the model of Jesus, provide the food with the power of communication, which edifies the person, the community and above all glorifies God. That is the food I wish to eat.

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