

fluence on Christian theology. As postliberal theologians put it, the biblical world "absorbs" the universe, rather than the other way around. This has the happy result of helping Christianity avoid becoming captive to the surrounding culture without succumbing to a \*fundamentalist withdrawal from the culture. Third, it militates against some liberal and revisionist attempts to harmonize all religions as if they were making the same claims about God and the world. Fourth, we can celebrate the tendency of postliberalism to wrench Scripture from the control of the academic elite and return it to the church as a world-creating and identity-forming text for the laity. Fifth, we can commend postliberalism for its strong sense of \*community over against modernity's assumption that religions are a matter of private choice with little impact on other aspects of life. Sixth, postliberals remind us that every experience is modified by interpretive elements, so that the biblical narrative provides the interpretive framework for Christian experience and the means through which it is conveyed.

At the same time, postliberal theology has been criticized. First, does postliberalism appreciate that doctrine can sometimes *express* religious experience *and* make universal truth claims? Second, it has been accused of being antirealist—that is, of being concerned solely with the regulation of Christian discourse without insisting that doctrine accurately represent the significance of a historical event. Is postliberal theology concerned about an ontological reference to which doctrinal statements correspond? Related to this is a third concern: some ask if the biblical narrative and the significance of Jesus Christ are grounded in nothing more than the community process of socialization or catechization. For instance, they wonder why the Christian book is normative as opposed to some other book, such as the Qur'an. They agree that postliberals can answer the question "Who is Jesus?" but argue that they cannot answer the question "Why Jesus?"—a significant concern in a world that is religiously pluralistic and contentious. Fourth, do postliberals appreciate the extent to which culture influences us? Is there a dynamic interplay between culture and biblical text that calls into question a one-way absorption? Fifth, rather than the biblical text, does the *church* end up absorbing the world and becoming the ultimate norm?

See also BARTHIANISM; MODERNISM AND POSTMODERNISMS; RADICAL ORTHODOXY.

BIBLIOGRAPHY. H. Frei, *The Eclipse of the Biblical Narrative: A Study of Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974); idem, *The Identity of Jesus Christ* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975); G. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984); T. R. Phillips and D. L. Okholm, eds., *The Nature of Confession: Evangelicals & Postliberals in Conversation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996); K. J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005).

D. Okholm

POSTMODERNISM. See MODERNISM AND POSTMODERNISMS.

POSTSTRUCTURALISM. See MODERNISM AND POSTMODERNISMS.

## POVERTY

*Poverty* is a word whose meaning we tend to take for granted. Everyone knows what poverty is. When we see its images on television or hear its stories, we recognize poverty easily. Like so many of our ideas, the meanings we ascribe to an abstract noun reflect our way of looking at, thinking about and making sense of our world. Therefore, we need to examine how we understand poverty as well as how we think and feel about the poor. We need to identify our assumptions and look for blind spots. In addition, sociologists have been studying poverty for a long time. Development academics have been doing field research and codifying what they have learned.

Poverty is the condition of people whom we describe using abstract noun *the poor*. Referring to people by a label is always dangerous. We may forget that the poor are not an abstraction but rather a group of human beings who have names, who are made in the image of God, whose hairs are numbered and for whom Jesus died. Many tend to view the poor as a group that is helpless. This invites us to treat them as objects of our compassion, for which we can do what we believe is best. We, the nonpoor, take it upon ourselves to name them—homeless, destitute, indigenious, working poor and so forth.



Promised Land fairly according to clans and household units (Wright, 68). Joshua made commitments in the name of his family (Josh 24:15). Lydia and her household were baptized by Paul, as were the Philippian jailer and his family later in the same story (Acts 16:15, 33). One test of leadership is that deacons "must manage their children and their households well" (1 Tim 3:12).

### 3. Who the Poor Are Not.

Some say the poor are lazy, fatalistic and will not save for the future. Others say the poor are poor and ignorant. Robert Chambers debunks these claims and calls us to be more humble in our judgments. The poor may not save, but this may be for the very good reason that their survival today will not permit it. The poor may appear lazy, but what we may be seeing is their way of conserving limited physical energy or waiting for things over which they have no control. Fatalism may be an adaptation that is prudent, not giving up at all. "The appearance of powerlessness, unawareness and acquiescence may be a condition for survival" (Chambers, 106).

The assertion that the poor are ignorant and stupid does not survive any informed understanding of real poor people. The depth and breadth of their indigenous knowledge frequently astounds us. Their knowledge of local ecology, traditional medicine and survival skills are considerable. The poor can survive in conditions that would daunt the best of us. The poor are no more lazy, fatalistic, improvident, stupid or arrogant than anyone else. All people suffer from these problems, poor and nonpoor alike. In fact, only the nonpoor can really afford to indulge these behaviors. "People so close to the edge cannot afford laziness or stupidity. They have to work and work hard, whenever and however they can. Many of the lazy and stupid poor are dead" (Chambers, 107).

### 4. Toward an Understanding of Poverty.

Poverty has been described in various ways and with increasing sophistication. Three important contributors will be briefly summarized and lessons drawn from each.

**4.1. Poverty as Entanglement: Robert Chambers.** Robert Chambers is a respected development professional, working at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, in Brighton, England, and an important author

on poverty and development. Chambers describes the poor household as living in a "cluster of disadvantage" (Chambers, 103-39). This cluster has five elements: the household is poor, physically weak, isolated, vulnerable and powerless. Chambers connects these dimensions of poverty into an interactive system that he calls the deprivation or poverty trap. This systems view of poverty has considerable explanatory power and aligns well with experience.

**4.1.1. Material Poverty.** The household has few assets. Its housing and sanitation is inadequate. It has little or no land, livestock or wealth.

**4.1.2. Physical Weakness.** The household members are weak. They lack strength because of poor health and inadequate nutrition. Many in the household are women, the very young and the very old.

**4.1.3. Isolation.** The household lacks access to services and information. It is often remote, far from main roads, water lines and even electricity. It lacks access to markets, capital and credit.

**4.1.4. Vulnerability.** The household has few buffers against emergencies or disaster. Its members lack choices and options. They cannot save and they are vulnerable to cultural demands, such as dowry and feast days, that soak up savings.

**4.1.5. Powerlessness.** The household lacks the ability and the knowledge to influence the life around them and the social systems in which they live.

**4.1.6. Spiritual Poverty.** We may add this category of poverty to Chambers's list in the interest of working toward a holistic Christian understanding of poverty. The household suffers from broken and dysfunctional relationships—with God, each other, their community and their creation. Its members may suffer from spiritual oppression—afraid of spirits, demons and ancestors. They may lack hope and be unable to believe that change is possible. They may have never heard the gospel or may have responded to a truncated version of it that lacks transforming power.

Chambers's systems approach to understanding poverty is a powerful tool. The interconnection between the six elements of his poverty trap is an important feature. Each is linked to and reinforces the others. A problem in one area means problems in another, and it is easy to see how the momentum can move toward

greater and greater poverty.

One important feature is missing from Chambers's analysis of poverty: the impact of spiritual poverty. Each of the elements of his poverty trap has a spiritual dimension. Powerlessness is not just a problem the poor have with the material world and the nonpoor who live in it. The poor often live in fear of the unseen, spiritual world of curses, gods, demons and angry ancestors. The poor often associate spiritual causes with physical weakness. Isolation from God and the Bible is as significant as not having access to government services, markets and capital. The need to find money to lift curses and ensure the blessing of the spirits contributes to vulnerability in the same way that disasters and social convention do.

There is another, more fundamental level at which we can see the spiritual missing. There is a spiritual reality that underlies the entire poverty trap system and its six interacting elements. This foundational spiritual reality provides the explanation for (1) the deceptive and dominating activity of the nonpoor, (2) the contribution the poor make to their own poverty by destructive behavior within the household, and (3) the poverty of being (we are of no value and are unworthy) and meaning (there are no answers for important questions), especially among the poor. No systems account of poverty is complete without a holistic view of the spiritual and material at the level of people and the social systems within which they live.

**4.2. Poverty as Lack of Access to Social Power:**

**John Friedman.** John Friedman, professor of urban planning at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) and a promoter of what he calls "alternative development," describes poverty by focusing on powerlessness as lack of access to social power. Poor households are excluded and need to be empowered. Like Chambers, he begins with the household as the social unit of the poor and sees it imbedded in four overlapping domains of social practice: state, political community, civil society and corporate economy (Friedman, 26-31). Each domain has a distinctive type of power: state power, political power, social power and economic power.

Each domain has its own set of institutions. The central institutions of the state consist of the formal executive and judicial elements of government. The core institutions of the political community consist of independent political

organizations. In the overlap between the state and the government domains, Friedman places the legislature and regulatory bodies. Civil society consists of all households; it is the larger community. Where the civil society overlaps with government, we find churches and voluntary organizations. The central institutions of corporate economy are the corporation and local and national markets. This domain is also open to and profoundly interconnected with the global economy and transnational corporations. Where the corporate economy overlaps with the political community, we find political parties, protest movements and environmental groups. Where the corporate economy overlaps with civil society, we find the nonformal economic sector and popular economic organizations. These interacting domains form the system within which the poor household struggles to find space, location and influence.

Friedman then develops a set of eight bases of social power that are available to the poor as a way of creating social space and influence: social networks, information for self-development, surplus time, instruments of work and livelihood, social organization, knowledge and skill, defensible life space, and financial resources (67).

Absolute poverty for Friedman occurs when the values for these eight dimensions are too low for a household to move out of poverty on its own. Friedman's explanation of poverty is a lack of social organization and lack of access to the political process.

The (dis)empowerment model of poverty is a political variant of the basic needs approach. It is centered on politics rather than planning. . . . The starting point of the model is the assumption that poor households lack the social power to improve the condition of their member's lives. (Friedman, 66)

Friedman's understanding of poverty brings a more sophisticated understanding of how poverty is related to lack of access to social power, in contrast to simply a lack of things or lack of knowledge. It also inserts poor households into a social system that goes beyond the local setting. The role of government, the political system, civil society and the economy, integrated into the global economy, is now part of the field of play. Poverty is understood as a

state of disempowerment. These are helpful developments.

Like Chambers, Friedman's understanding of poverty does not take into account the spiritual dimension of life. There is no explanation for why social systems exclude the poor and become self-serving. A spiritual dimension is needed to account for the fact that social institutions frequently frustrate even the best and most noble intentions of the people who inhabit and manage them. Without a doctrine of fallen principalities and powers, it is unclear why good people cannot make social institutions do the good they were set up to do. Furthermore, there is no means to account for the destructive behaviors and poor choices of both the poor and the nonpoor, nor the fact that the poor often exploit each other.

**4.3. Poverty as Disempowerment: Jayakumar Christian.** Jayakumar Christian, a long-time Indian development practitioner and development author, builds on Chambers and Friedman, and as a Christian practitioner, develops the spiritual side of understanding poverty. Christian sees the poor household embedded in a complex framework of interacting systems. These systems include a personal system that includes psychology and self-understanding; a social system, similar to Friedman's; a spiritual system, which is personal and social; a cultural system, which includes worldview; and a biophysical system (Christian, 334). Christian argues that the poor find themselves trapped inside a system of disempowerment made up of these interacting systems. Each part of the system creates its own particular contribution to the disempowerment of the poor, including what Christian terms captivity to the god complexes of the nonpoor, deception by principalities and powers, inadequacies in worldview, weak mind and body, and suffering from marred identity.

**4.3.1. Captivity to God Complexes of the Nonpoor: The Social System.** Similar to Friedman, Christian argues that the social system reinforces powerlessness by exclusion and exploitation, but Christian seeks deeper roots for this (Christian, 178). The nonpoor understand themselves as superior, necessary and even appointed to rule. They succumb to the temptation to play god in the lives of the poor, using religious systems, mass media, the law, government policies and people occupying positions

of power. These people create narratives, structures and systems that justify and rationalize their privileged position. The result is that the poor become captive to the god complexes of the nonpoor. This can take place at the local level through landlords, police and local government functionaries. Or it can take place in the form of the World Bank imposing policies for poverty reduction on poor countries that have little choice but to comply.

**4.3.2. Deception by Principalities and Powers: The Spiritual System.** While acknowledging the impact of the Fall and sin on individual human beings, Christian also identifies an additional impact of the Fall in what he calls deception by the principalities and powers (Christian, 252). The powerlessness of the poor is reinforced by fear of and deceit on the part of "the god of this world [that] has blinded the minds of unbelievers" (2 Cor 4:4) and "the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will" (2 Tim 2:26). The poor and the nonpoor are "enslaved to the elemental spirits of the world" (Gal 4:3). Christian is affirming the biblical position that it is not simply human beings and the systems within which they live that create and sustain poverty; there is an adversary who works against life. This adversary is "a liar and the father of lies" (Jn 8:44). Any account of poverty that ignores the reality of an evil one lacks the full explanatory power that the Bible offers.

**4.3.3. Inadequacies in Worldview: The Cultural System.** For Christian, powerlessness is reinforced by what he calls inadequacies in worldview (Christian, 199, 262). Writing from within a Hindu context, he points to the disempowering idea of *karma* that teaches the poor that their poverty and exclusion is a just response to their former life and something that must be accepted if they hope for a better life the next time around. The Brahmin are taught by their Hindu tradition that the poor were made from the lower parts of god, and are thus inferior by nature. Every culture has beliefs that disempower people, discourage change and label oppressive relationships as legitimate, sacrosanct and ordained.

**4.3.4. Weakness in Mind, Body and Spirit: The Biophysical System.** This expression of poverty corresponds to Chamber's category of physical weakness. The biophysical system—mind, body and spirit—is diminished and reinforces

powerlessness as a result of hunger, illness and lack of education (Christian, 200). Undernourished, sick and weak bodies and minds are easy homes for a marred image, captivity, deception and inadequate worldviews.

4.3.5. *Marring the Identity of the Poor: The Personal System.* Christian concludes his explanation of poverty by pointing out that captivity to the god complexes of the nonpoor, deception by principalities and powers, inadequacies in worldview, and a weak mind and spirit result in what Christian terms the marred identity of the poor (Christian, 206). The identity of the poor is marred in two important ways. First, the poor are systematically excluded as actors. Too often people see the poor as "damaged goods" and thereby still the voices of the poor. Second, a lifetime of suffering, deception and exclusion is internalized by the poor in a way that results in the poor no longer knowing who they truly are and why they were created. The poor come to believe that they are, and were always meant to be, without value and without gifts to contribute. This is the deepest and most profound expression of poverty.

For Christian, these five interacting systems

of disempowerment create in the minds of the poor what he calls a "web of lies" that entrap the poor in ways far stronger and insidious than physical bonds (Christian, 264). Table 2 illustrates the web of lies associated with each element of Christian's disempowering system.

5. The Causes of Poverty.

Our understanding of how poverty is caused is important because it tends to direct the way we respond to poverty. Table 2 illustrates the point:

Articulating the cause of poverty is often in the eye of the beholder. Our understanding of cause is shaped by our place in the social system, our education, our culture and even our personalities. Understanding cause also depends on where we start (and stop) looking at poverty. If we begin with needs, we see the lack of water. Without further thought, this is the cause of poverty, and providing water is the answer. However, behind needs are issues, such as ownership of the water. If this is the cause of the lack of water, then the response is to work on ownership or access. Yet behind issues there are structures, such as caste, that influ-

Table 1. Poverty as Disempowerment (Developed from Christian, 264)

Theme	Social System	Lie
Captivity to the god-complexes of the non-poor	Social Political Economic Religious	You are outside the social system. Your purpose is to serve us. You have no assets, nor should you. We will speak to God on your behalf.
Marred identity of the poor	Social Political Economic Religious	We are not worthy of inclusion. We have nothing to say; we are ignorant people. We have nothing to contribute. God is not interested in us.
Inadequacies in worldview	Social Political Economic Religious	Our place in the social order is fixed. They are supposed to rule over us. Our poverty is ordained. We sinned; god is giving us what we deserve.
Deception by the principalities and powers	Social Political Economic Religious	Social systems are not for the likes of you. Political systems are not for the likes of you. Economic systems are not for the likes of you. God is not for the likes of you.
Weakness of mind, body and spirit	Social Political Economic Religious	I'm not smart enough. I'm uneducated. I'm too weak to matter; I have nothing anyway. I can't understand these things anyway.

Table 2. Causes and Responses to Poverty (Developed from Christian, 264)

View of Cause	Proposed Response
The poor are sinners.	Evangelism and uplift
The poor are sinned against.	Social action; working for justice
The poor lack knowledge.	Education
The poor lack things.	Relief/social welfare
The culture of the poor is flawed.	Become like us; ours is better
The social system makes them poor.	Change the system

ence who gets access to water and which often create impenetrable barriers to access. Behind structures are groups who inhabit and enforce the structures by insisting that it is their water and their right to control its use. Behind the groups are the ideologies and values that drive the group and social structure, the unspoken assumptions that we are to be served and they are so completely other that they aren't supposed to drink where we drink.

This kind of social analysis does deepen our understanding of what causes poverty. It allows us to discover much of what Chambers, Friedman, Christian and Jayakaran say we must see. We raise our view from physical need and the individual person to the social and cultural systems within which the poor live. We begin to understand that ideas, values and worldviews need to change.

**5.1. Physical Causes of Poverty.** There are physical causes to poverty. Chambers' categories of material poverty and physical weakness speak to this. People need food, shelter, water and clean air. They need an environment that supports life. Money, land and livestock are helpful assets to have. Absence of these kind of things is the immediate cause of material poverty.

**5.2. Social Causes of Poverty.** The physical causes of poverty exacerbate and are exacerbated by the social causes of poverty. "There are large-scale social practices and a whole system of social roles, often firmly approved by the members of society generally, that cause or perpetuate injustice and misery" (Wolterstorff, 24). This idea was developed by Chambers and then more fully by Friedman. Christian's framework points to these systems as the source of the web of lies. Jayakaran locates stakeholders behind each limitation to growth.

**5.3. Mental Causes of Poverty.** Lack of knowledge and technical skill are also causes of pov-

erty. Debilitated mental states resulting from poor nutrition, poor healthcare, and alcohol or drugs create and sustain poverty. But the mental causes of poverty go deeper than this; poverty is within the mind. Christian is right to propose the idea of the web of lies that the poor believe and that, by their believing, disempowers them. Melba Maggay, a Philippina activist and theologian, provides an evocative description of this kind of poverty:

The spirit that always denies, the annoying yet darkly seductive doubt that constantly questions the best we believe. The result for some is a creeping disillusionment, an intemperate realism, that in the end takes away the spring and lightness in our step, stoops our shoulders and makes us bitterly huddle in corners. (Maggay, 97)

We need to be careful, however, lest we imply the poor make themselves mentally poor. This is not the case. The social activist and theologian Walter Wink reminds us that "powerlessness is not simply a problem of attitude, however. There are structures—economic, political, religious and only *then* psychological—that oppress people and resist all attempts to end their oppression" (Wink, 102).

**5.4. Spiritual Causes of Poverty.** The spiritual causes of poverty are often overlooked or undeclared by development academics. I have already pointed out how Chambers and Friedman ignore the impact of the spirit world, shamans, and witchcraft and their very significant contribution to making and keeping people poor. Money is spent on charms for protection and time is lost to feast days, all done in an attempt to manage these power relationships. Technical improvements are refused for fear of the reaction of the spirit world. Furthermore, while there are lots of references to oppres-

sion, deceit, malfeasance, corruption, violence, fatalism, alcohol, and broken and unjust relationships in the development literature, the spiritual dimension seldom surfaces in the explanatory schemes. There is no hypothesis about the source of these causes of poverty. As I have noted, Christian adds the principalities and powers and their active deception to his variation of Friedman's framework for powerlessness as the cause of poverty. Maggay supports this view: "Social action is a confrontation with the powers that be. We are, ultimately, not battling against flesh and blood, nor merely dismantling unjust social systems; we are confronting the powers in their cosmic and social dimensions" (Maggay, 82). R. Jayakaran actually names the spiritual as a cause of poverty.

So what can we say about poverty and its causes at the end of this review of four major contributors to the conversation? First, poverty is a complex phenomena of many interacting factors; there are unlikely to be any simple answers. Second, understanding poverty requires that we be multidisciplinary; we need the tools of anthropology, sociology, social psychology, spiritual discernment and theology, all nicely integrated. Third, the work of Chambers, Friedman, Christian and Jayakaran need to be seen as complimentary, each adding something to the other.

### 6. A Holistic Understanding of Poverty.

Combining what can be learned from Chambers, Friedman, Christian and Jayakaran with a theological and biblical perspective, two major summary statements can be made about poverty.

**6.1. Poverty Is Fundamentally Relational in Nature.** At the end of the day, poverty is relationships that do not work for well-being. Poverty is relationships that are not just, that are not for life and that are not harmonious or enjoyable. Poverty is the absence of shalom in all its meanings.

All four poverty frameworks provide explanations that rest on the idea that relationships are fragmented, dysfunctional, dominating or oppressive. Chamber's poverty trap, Friedman's access to social power and Christian's framework for disempowerment all have at their foundation relationships that lack shalom, that work against human well-being of all, against life and life abundant.

Understanding poverty as relationships that do not work as they should is consistent with the biblical account as well. The scope of sin affects every one of the five relationships within which every human being lives: with God, with our community, with those we call other, with the environment in which we live and within ourselves. Each of these relationships find expression in the poverty systems related earlier in this section.

At the center of this relational understanding of poverty is the idea of the poor not knowing who they are and the reason why they were created. When people come to believe that they are less than human, without the brains, strength and personhood to contribute to their own well-being or that of others, their understanding of who they are is marred. Similarly, when the poor do not believe they have anything to contribute, or believe they cannot be productive, their understanding of their vocation is damaged as well. With marred identities and a diminished view of their vocations, the poor cannot play their proper and rightful relational role in the world, either within themselves or with those around them.

**6.2. The Fundamental Cause of Poverty Is Spiritual.** What causes the distortion and injustice in our relationships? What stands between God and us? What divides us inside ourselves into a family of competing, conflicting voices? What separates us within our community, with some doing well and others suffering? What causes us to exclude and sometimes demonize the other? Why do we abuse the earth? What is it that works against life, against shalom? The answers to these fundamental questions provide us with an explanation for the fundamental cause of poverty. Why does the poverty trap work as it does? Why are the poor denied access to social power? What is at the root of the web of lies and the powerlessness that results? Sin is what distorts these relationships. Sin is the root cause of deception, distortion and domination. When God is on the sideline or written out of our story, we do not treat each other well. We work instead for what we think life is for. We try to provide our own abundant life. Without a strong theology of sin, comprehensive explanations for poverty are hard to come by.

Finally, if it is true that sin is the fundamental cause of our lack of shalom, of our world of dominating relationships, then there is

good news and bad news. The good news is that through Jesus Christ there is a way out of sin and toward transformation. The bad news is that if we do not accept this news, there is a sense in which we sit wrapped in chains of self-imposed limitations.

**7. Poverty of the Nonpoor.**

A section on poverty is not complete unless there are some comments on the poverty of the nonpoor. They have their own set of problems, not the least of which is that God hates idolatry and injustice.

The nonpoor have a great deal in common with the poor from the biblical perspective. The nonpoor are made in the image of god, are fallen, are being offered redemption. Sadly, it is harder for them to hear this good news than it is for the poor. This is partly true because they enjoy, knowingly or not, playing god in the lives of the poor.

The nonpoor are poor in another way that we sometimes miss. Their poverty is in their excess and it is the mirror image of the poverty of the poor. Too little food makes us weak and susceptible to disease; too much food makes us overweight and susceptible to heart disease and cancer. Illness among the poor is physical; illness among the nonpoor is physical and increasingly mental. The poor have inadequate housing; the nonpoor are sometimes slaves to their houses. Koyama puts this "too much is poverty" idea nicely:

Man cannot live without bread. But, man must not live by this essential bread alone. Bread-alone, shelter-alone, clothing-alone, income-alone, all these *alones* damage man's quality of life. Strangely, these good values contain danger elements too. Man is supposed to eat bread. But what if bread eats man? People are dying from over-eating today in affluent countries. Man is supposed to live in the house. But what if the house begins to live in man? . . . Man needs bread plus the word of God. (Koyama, 4-5)

The idea of too much or too little being two sides of the same problem reminds us of Proverbs 30:8-9:

Give me neither poverty nor riches;  
feed me with the food that I need,

or I shall be full, and deny you,  
and say, "Who is the LORD?"  
or I shall be poor, and steal,  
and profane the name of my God.

The activity of the nonpoor in safeguarding their privilege and power also creates a poverty unique to the nonpoor. When we misuse a social system for our benefit, it is hard to believe that our friends are not doing the same. When domination is the goal, we have to keep winning in order not to lose.

At the end of the day, the poverty of the nonpoor is the same kind of poverty as the poor, only differently expressed: The poverty of the nonpoor is fundamentally relational and caused by sin. The result is a life full of things and short on meaning. The nonpoor simply live with different deceptions. The only difference is that the poverty of the nonpoor is harder to change. This is what Jesus was trying to say when he compared a rich man getting into the kingdom to a camel trying to go through the eye of a needle (Mt 19:24). For more on this topic see my *Walking with the Poor*.

See also HOLISTIC MISSION; MONEY, WEALTH; POWER, POWERS; PREFERENTIAL OPTION FOR THE POOR; RELIEF AND DEVELOPMENT; SUFFERING; WORK, THEOLOGY OF.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY.** R. Chambers, *Rural Development: Putting the Last First* (London: Longman Group, 1983); J. Christian, "Powerlessness of the Poor: Toward an Alternative Kingdom of God Based Paradigm of Response" (PhD thesis, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, 1994); J. Friedman, *Empowerment: The Politics of Alternative Development* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1992); R. Jayakaran, *Participatory Learning and Action: User Guide and Manual* (Madras: World Vision of India, 1996); K. Koyama, *Three Mile an Hour God* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1979); M. Maggay, *Transforming Society* (London: Regnum, 1994); R. Mouw, "Thinking About the Poor: What Evangelicals Can Learn from the Bishops," in *Prophetic Visions and Economic Realities: Protestants, Jews and Catholics Confront the Bishops' Letter on the Economy*, ed. C. R. Strain (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989); B. Myers, *Walking with the Poor* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1999); W. Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992); N. Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* (Grand Rapids: Eerd-

mans, 1983); C. J. H. Wright, *An Eye for an Eye: The Place of Old Testament Ethics Today* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983).

B. L. Myers

## POWER

Contemporary theological treatments of the word *power* are varied. With the social forces of modernity rapidly shaping our world, a lively global theological debate has emerged about how current human power structures are now often negatively affecting the poor of the earth, and—ecologically speaking—the earth itself.

The analysis of power that follows seeks to understand the new powers of \*globalization, including the ethical problems that they pose. Theologically speaking, in contrast to top-down constructions, power that emerges from contemporary forms of global empire-building, new “bottom-up” theologies have emerged that provide a new vision for humanity and a new articulation of power that is not centered either politically or geographically. We will focus here on this kind of Christian bottom-up approach in the context of biblical, neo-orthodox and \*liberation theologies, concluding with a discussion of human agency in the face of the way power is conceptualized and exercised in the light of global liberation struggles against the dominating forces of empire.

1. Natural Power
2. Human Power
3. Institutional Power
4. Divine Power
5. Power Discourses in the Bible
6. Pentecost and the Global Struggle for Liberation
7. Theological Implications

### 1. Natural Power.

Throughout history humans have been amazed and terrified at the brutal power of nature. While nature has been thought to demonstrate a creative capacity through the great number of natural species that have emerged to create the beautiful array of life on the planet, it also has destructive capabilities demonstrated in natural disasters like hurricanes, tornadoes and tsunamis. The Eastern notion of *chi* is one example of how to describe this underlying life force that animates nature as a cosmic field of living energy.

### 2. Human Power.

Like natural power, human power, too, can be said to have creative and destructive capacity. For Nietzsche, the will to power is the elemental and creative vitality that is at the very core of life itself. One example of this will to power is what Nietzsche described as the pre-Socratic war ethic. Another version is the “superman,” or *Übermensch*, which is Nietzsche’s vision of a powerful being that not only exhibits the will to power but finds in this the highest aspirations of nobility. The *Übermensch* imposes his will upon others, but also, most importantly, he imposes that will upon himself, subjecting his own will to the same kind of scrutiny that he would impose on others.

### 3. Institutional Power.

Michel Foucault, an influential interpreter of Nietzsche, builds on Nietzsche’s conception of power by pointing directly to the conceptualization and exercise of power at work in social and political institutions. Forms of power can likewise be used by those oppressed by such institutions as a way of resisting injustice. Foucault documents what he argues to be a shift in the internal logic of power as it was understood and practiced in eighteenth-century Europe, with its emphasis on top-down mechanisms of external control, to what he described as a logic of “discipline,” that is, analysis of the role of the direct or indirect supervision of social norms that are internalized by human beings through schools, governments and prisons. In that way, people become internally formed by the mechanisms of power in a similar way that certain practices discipline the body and bring about certain results.

Earlier, the German sociologist Max Weber, in his discussion on power and leadership, had focused on those holding institutional positions of power, arguing that individual leadership traits—or charismatic authority—are often most important in legitimating the actual exercise of power. At the same time, he gave particular attention to the routinization or bureaucratization of institutions and social norms that often develop in order to maintain the authoritative role of a leader over time.

Foucault went further than Weber in arguing that these “institutions of control” are deployed by controlling power centers to maintain subjection of the populace in general.