

## Unexpected News

Robert McAfee Brown, *Unexpected News* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984).

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### 1. Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35)

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Male disciples did not take the women's report seriously: "These words" seemed them an idle tale, and they did not believe them (Luke 24:11). 25. They were behind locked doors. After all, if the Committee on Un-Roman Activities has disposed of their leader, won't the followers be next? Rome's first rule in dealing with subversive organization is to wipe them out as completely as possible, so that no little remnants can regroup and reorganize. 26

Therefore, for disciples, Jesus arrest and crucifixion and his cross became an extreme fear, threat for painful punishment, cruelty, terrorism and loss of life. But then, Jesus turned it around to be a hope, saving life.

According to MacAfee Brown, "redeem" would mean to draw people together, to set them on a new path, to reconcile and heal, to usher in a new era of compassion and understanding and justice. 27.

As they approach their destination, the village of Emmaus, disciples invited him to dinner. It is the turning point. For instead of continuing to *talk* about redemption, the *acted it out*; they engage in a redeeming deed, inviting a total stranger to share a meal. Their action changes the stranger from a stranger to a companion – in the most literal sense of the word, for "companion" (from the Latin words *cum* and *panis*) means "with bread." A companion is one with whom to share bread. 27

The disciples had to turn around and go back from Emmaus to Jerusalem. Before, they were behind locked doors, saving their necks. Now they are about to start going out all over the Roman Empire, putting their necks on the line every day. That action, once begun, has no terminus. 28-29.

When they were hiding behind the locked doors or going back to Emmaus they were homeless but now they are on the way home when they returned to Jerusalem risking their lives to be crucified as their teacher experienced.

### 2. Exodus: God Takes Sides (Ex. 1:8-14; 2:23-25; 3:7-10)

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Here is a classic oppressor/oppressed situation, complete with intimidation, humiliation, forced labor, powerlessness, and genocide. When the slaves ask for a three-day weekend to go off and worship God, the kings' response is typical of how oppressors everywhere respond: he not only doesn't grant requests but make things even worse than before – *that* will teach them. 36

The oppressed “internalize their oppression”; that is to say, they accept their lowly status as appropriate or inevitable and, believing themselves powerless to produce change, lose hope. All this happens to the Israelites. They become so shattered that when Moses offers an agenda for protest, “they [do] not listen to Moses, because of their broken spirit and their cruel bondage” (Ex. 6:9).

Good news is that God is not exclusively wrapped up in contemplation of divine attributes but is aware of the Israelites’ plight; God realizes that certain covenantal agreements already referred to make it necessary for something to happen. It is through Moses, in the third passage, that something *is* going to happen. 37

Moses is told that *God takes sides in the struggle*, which introduces fantastic new possibilities. And, as is the consistent pattern throughout the Bible, God does not side with the powerful, the friends of Pharaoh who think they hold history in the palms of their hands, but with the slaves, who up to this moment have had nothing in the palms of their hands but calluses. 37

God’s promise is double-edged: not only liberation *from* Egypt but liberation *for* the Promised Land. “I know their sufferings,” God informs Moses, “and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land, and to a good and broad land” (Ex. 3:7-8). God promised *political* liberation from the economic and social bondage Israel had endured. God believes that religion and politics mix. 37.

MacAfee Brown asserts that *God calls people to join in the struggle*. Moses will be God’s emissary to Pharaoh, the one through whom, along with the other Israelites, God’s determination to liberate them will actually be accomplished. The people, trusting in the power of the Lord, are to be *the vehicle of their own liberation*. God will not do it without their help. They must act on their own behalf. God, while intervening on behalf of the weak, is quite prepared to use the weak. Moses, to offer a brilliant example, is as weak as they come; he ducks and weaves in every possible way to avoid the body blow of an assignment, piling up excuses ranging from the fact that he doesn’t know God’s name to the fact that he stutters and would therefore be an ineffective negotiator with Pharaoh.

A beautiful example of God’s enlisting the people in their own struggle occurs in the account (Ex. 1:15-22), demonstrating that the real heroes of the liberation are actually heroines – a fact our male – dominated scriptures usually cover up: Pharaoh instructs the Hebrew midwives to kill the sons of any Hebrew women at whose births they are assisting. They ignore the king’s instruction telling him that Hebrew women deliver their own babies without help by the time the midwives get there. 38.

God always sides with the oppressed. A God siding with the tyrants would be a God of malevolence; a God siding with no one would appear to be a God of indifference but would also be a God of malevolence, giving support to the tyrants by not opposing them; only a God siding with the oppressed would be a God of justice, a God worthy of the name. 41

MacAfee Brown points out: We are likely to resist the notion that *a class struggle is going on*, for at least three reasons: (1) because we have been programmed to believe that anything that “sounds Marxist” is wrong; (2) because we doubt that in our complex world the distinction between oppressors and oppressed can be so neatly drawn; and (3) because if the distinction holds, we end up among the oppressors, and we don’t think that’s fair. 이 부분은 나중에 교회의 불참을 이야기 할 때 넣을 것

Recognizing ourselves as oppressors will be good beginning of liberating ourselves and others.

**Religion and Politics don't mix P. 45. Revisit later.**

**Amos** punctures his hearers' complacency by turning his sharp words against the folk in Bethel itself: Unless the Israelites repent, they too will be destroyed. Because "they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes – they ...trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth, and turn aside the way of the afflicted" (Amos 2:6-7) – which is a handy summary of exactly what Pharaoh did to those same Israelites in Egypt, save that this time the sandal is on the other foot. Amos is one of dozen voices – all recorded within the Jewish Scriptures – who *from within the life of Israel* keep exhorting Israel not to forsake its commitment to justice, and who keep calling attention to every miscarriage of justice. 48

**3. David and Nathan (2 Samuel 11:2-17, 26-27; 12:1-7) - 49**

**4. Jeremiah and Jehoiakim: To Know God Is to Do Justice Jer. 22:13-17) -63**

Jeremiah indicted Jehoiakim for practicing oppression and violence (Jer. 22:17). The Hebrew word for "violence" used here, *ratsats*, is especially graphic; it means "to smash, grind, or crush," which is precisely what Jehoiakim's labor policy is accomplishing. 'Woe to him who makes his neighbor serve him for nothing (Jer. 22:13-14). 66.

McAfee Brown contends:

To know God is not (necessarily) to go to mass every Sunday or say the Rosary every day. It is not (necessarily) to know the Apostle's Creed or be able to make a perfect act of contrition. One can do all those things and still not know God. Rather, to know God is 'to achieve justice for the poor.' As Jose Miriranda, a Mexican biblical scholar puts it, 'Jahweh is known only in the human act of achieving justice and compassion for the neighbor.' 68

Isaiah 10:5-11 we have the astonishing declaration that the leader of the Assyrian nation, Israel's enemy, is actually God's 'rod' and 'staff' and will be used by God for the fulfillment of God's purposes, since God's own people, Israel, have turned away from God and ca, for the moment at least, be described as 'godless nation' (Is. 10:6). Here is an absolute reversal of expectation and definition: the one we would call the 'godless nation,' Assyria, is God's instrument, while the one we would call God's instrument, Israel, is the 'godless nation.' 69.  
Godlessness is homeless situation.

McAfee Brown would contend that there is no love without justice, no justice without love. 'Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. (1 John 4:7-8) 70

## What is Justice?

Aristotle defines 'justice' as 'rendering to each person his or her due,' and a recent refinement is 'rendering to each child his or her due.'<sup>70</sup>

## Role Play in Page 71-72

### 5. Mary's Song: Whom Do We Hear? (Luke 1:46-55)

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Mary's song is very significant in Jubilee theme because it is sung by the very mother of Jesus. The Spirit of God allowed her to know what kind of a child, a son, she is giving birth to.

According to McAfee Brown, Mary is a lower-class working girl in Nazareth, engaged to a local carpenter. Mary accepts the word of the angel that in her womb the Messianic hope will come to fruition in just nine months' time. *Her* son of a nobody, will be the 'Son of the Most High,' of whose 'kingdom there will be no end.' (Luke 1:32-33). 76.

It is during her visit of her elderly cousin Elizabeth Mary sings her song. It is in two parts: her exultation at what God is doing for *her* (Luke 1:47-49), and her exultation at what God is doing for *Israel* (Luke 1:50-55). The two parts have a common theme: that which was lowly is being lifted up, that which was high is being cast down. And it is all God's doing. 77

Mary's song is religious as well as political; As McAfee Brown puts it, 'Mary's song cuts through all that tidiness, just as the son she is carrying will do later on, challenging the Herods and the Caesars, doing 'secular' things on the Sabbath like picking corn and healing the sick, and getting arrested and killed as a threat to the political order. To start with God (as Mary's song does) and end with God (as her song also does) means lots and lots of politics in between (as the intervening verse demonstrate). 77

As McAfee Brown uses the term, 'upside-down' connotes, her song puts socio-economic and political order of her day in upside-down position. 'In her God has turned things upside down. This God Mary is singing has stooped to regard 'the low estate of God's handmaiden' (Luke 1:48; some translations have 'slave' instead of 'handmaiden,' which makes the point even more vividly). *This* God pays special attention to the poor, the oppressed, the enslaved.' According to her song, Savior is not coming from royal family in Jerusalem but from the salves in Nazareth. 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' (John 1:46).78

Mary offers two vivid contrasts between the lowly raised up and the high brought low. The first is political, the second economic, although each category contains the other. '*God has put down the mighty from their thrones...*' Israel has seen a succession of empires rise and fall: Egypt, Babylonia, Assyria, and Greece.

According McAfee Brown, 'The mighty' are not only Political nations and empires but economic manipulators of other people's destinies, those who decide which plant will close and which stay open;

Mary is challenging political and economic systems that help the rich get richer while the poor get poorer, and insists on land redistribution so that all can own some rather than a few owning all. If God does 'fills the hungry with good things,' that means less for the nonhungry, for whom Mary uses the word 'rich.' Perhaps those who are rich, if ready to be nonrich, can survive. That will be a choice for them to ponder while there is still time.  
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Elsa Tamez puts it, 'Mary's song does not speak of 'of individuals undergoing moral change but of *the restructuring of the order* in which there are rich and poor, mighty and lowly.' Gustavo Gutierrez reminds us that thanksgiving and joy 'are closely linked to the action of God who liberates the oppressed and humbles the powerful.' Mary's song is a call to revolutionary action.<sup>81</sup>

It is apparent that the mother's words foretell and prepare her son's (Messiah's) Jubilee vision which he declares in the beginning of his ministry (Luke 4:16-30) later when he grows up to be an adult.

## **6. Jesus at Nazareth: "Good News to the Poor" (Luke 4:16-30)**

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Isaiah's and Luke's versions are virtually identical. The theme of Isaiah's passage is *reversal*, celebrating the fact that things are getting turned around and offering hope to those who had no reason to hope. Individuals who mourn will be given *a garland* [symbol of rejoicing] instead of ashes [symbol of sadness], the oil of *gladness* instead of mourning, the mantle of *praise* instead of a faint spirit' (Is. 6:1-3). 93

'They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations. (Is. 61:4) This verse simply highlights the prominence of the theme of social reversal in the portions Jesus quotes: the *poor*, whose lives have been one succession after another of bad news, will get good news; the *captives*, whose lives have consisted of being bound, will be released; the *blind*, who have been denied sight, will see again; and the *oppressed*, whose lives have been nothing but enslavement, will be freed. Everything is reversed.<sup>94</sup>

McAfee Brown and other scholars seem to decide on 'Jesus' core message' or 'a focal point' from Luke's account (4:16-30), Isaiah's account (61:1-4) and Jesus' response to John's question (Matt. 11:4-5; Luke 7:22) which is an absolute reversal of the poor, hungry, oppressive situation to joyful liberation.

Scholars concur to the claim that the important thing is the *nature* of the Jubilee, which is a program for radical social change. No one who takes the Jubilee seriously can accuse Jesus of preaching only a 'spiritual,' individualistic message. The Jubilee emphasis means that Jesus' mission is 'a visible socio-political-economic restructuring of relations

among the people of God. The message is shatteringly direct: the good news is for the poor and oppressed; it is liberation from bondage, whether the bondage is political, economic, social or all three. Debts will be canceled, slavery will be annulled, vast land holdings will be broken up. Everything will be restructured. 96.

Who is most threatened by a reversal of the way things are? Those who have made it under existing arrangement and therefore *like* the way things are. Who is most threatened if prisoners are freed? The jailers, who will not only lose their job but may even lose their lives if the released inmates are sufficiently resentful of their treatment during incarceration. Who is most threatened if oppressed are liberated? The oppressors who have built their own prosperity out of the exploitation of others. It is the *beneficiaries* of an Economic system, a political structure, or a religious establishment who are most threatened by change, most perturbed by talk of 'reversal,' most inclined to silence such talk and exterminate such speakers. This is true whether they are deliberately sought to oppress or are merely the compliant recipients of the benefits of oppressive actions by others. 97.

Northern hemisphere commentaries on these verses furnish a dreary litany of examples. The term 'the poor' is to be understood in an 'inward, spiritual sense.' Those described as 'captive, blind, oppressed' are victims of 'inward repression, neuroses, and other spiritual ill.' 'Captivity' has nothing to do with persons in real jails; it means 'the inward but terribly real imprisonment into which their souls may fall.' When 'the poor' are mentioned in the Beatitudes, 'Jesus lays *all* the emphasis on the spiritual or inward character of redemption.' An exegetical study of words for 'the poor,' such as Elsa Tamez, the Costa Rican biblical scholar, has conducted, demonstrates that 'when Jesus reads the promise now fulfilled in him, 'He anointed me to preach good news to the poor,' he is referring to all those who lack the basic necessities of life. When he says, 'Blessed are your poor' (Luke 6:20), he is referring to material poverty.'" 98

According to McAfee Brown's interpretation,

English equivalents to the Hebrew words for 'the poor' are such things as the frail one, the weak one, the bent-over one, the humiliated one. The New Testament Greek word *ptochos* means 'one who does not have what is necessary to subsist' and is forced into the degrading activity of begging. Furthermore, those who are poor are poor not through their own fault or because of fate but because of the injustice of the oppressors, who 'grind the heads of the poor into the earth, and thrust the humble out of their way' (Amos 2:7). Throughout the Scriptures, this kind of poverty *and the social conditions that cause it* are condemned. The Jubilee year was a conscious attempt to restructure social conditions to get rid of such injustice and poverty. 99

There is also a biblical concept of poverty as 'spiritual childhood,' trust in God, a willingness not to rely on material security but to be totally available for God. The most complete biblical understanding of poverty is melding the two interpretations, involving *solidarity with the poor* and *protest against poverty*. One does not accept poverty as good; one opposes it by commitment to, and alignment with, its victims. 99

## **7. Jesus' Story: From Head Trips to Foot Trips (Luke 10:25-37)**

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As McAfee Brown asserts, Jesus reverses the lawyer's question, 'which one of these three, 'do you think *proved neighbor* who fell among the robbers? The Lawyer answers "the one who offered mercy to the wounded man.' It is the one who serves the wounded one. The neighbor was not the wounded man. The neighbor was the Samaritan who *approached* the wounded man and *made him his neighbor*. He enters into the wounded man's situation. Not just any man but *a man who had suffered injustice and violence* and

needed help from someone who was able to have com-passion on him.’ To have ‘compassion’ means ‘to suffer with.’ It means to suffer alongside, to enter fully into the situation of the other, sharing whatever comes. The initiative is not taken to fulfill some formal religious obligation but to act out of care and concern for the other. The Greek word referring to ‘compassion’ in v. 32, can be translated, ‘because his heart was melting.’ ‘Compassion’ really means ‘interhuman justice.’ 111-112

**8. Transfiguration: Ecstasy and Epilepsy (Luke 9:28-43) -117**

**9. Jesus’ Vision: A Task for the Nations (Matt. 15:31-46) -127**

James’ words (2:20: faith apart from works is barren) are an almost perfect commentary on the words of the Son of Man in Matthew 25:

McAfee Brown makes points:

1. *We are accountable and our actions have consequences.* 2. *What really counts before God is not what we thought.* The important things are not (a) regular church attendance, (b) praying daily, (c) knowing the Apostle’s Creed, (d) tithing, or even (e) confessing Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Admirable though such characteristics of Christian living may be, they do not even rate a passing nod in Jesus’ assessment. All that counts in Jesus’ assessment is – helping those in need. 3. *We love God by serving God’s people.* When we support the poor we are not only supporting the poor, we are glorifying God; when we reject the poor we are not only rejecting the poor, we are rejecting God. Jesus makes the same point when he notes that the second commandment (loving your neighbor) is exactly the same as the first (loving God). Paul was even more blunt; ‘For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ (Gal. 5:14). 133 Salvation is not for those who have toted up their good works. It is a gift given for things done without thought of reward. 5. *The judge who directs attention to the poor and outcasts is numbered among the poor and outcasts.* Judge is Christ himself, one whose own life was actively identified with the poor and outcasts, which is the surest possible sign we could have that love for God and love for the poor are inseparable. 133-134.

1. One important aspect of **justice**, Jose Miranda reminds us, involves the restoration of what has been stolen. Giving food to the hungry or clothing to the naked is not a charitable handout but an exercise in simple justice – restoring to the poor what is rightfully theirs, what has been taken from them unjustly. So Jesus’ vision is not a plea for tax-deductible donations but a fervent cry for justice, for setting right what has gone wrong.

Ernesto Cardenal suggests during Mass at Solentiname:

“Those who are saved [Jesus] twice calls ‘the just.’ In the Bible the ‘unjust’ are those who rob orphans and widows, those who are responsible for there being poor, who get rich at the expense of others, take away lands, commit fraud, are bloody and cruel: in short, they are the oppressors. The ‘just’ are the opposite of all that.”  
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2. Pressing the argument, Gustavo Gutierrez insists that ‘we must *avoid the pitfall of individual charity*, as though the message of Jesus were about one-on-one acts of mercy from and to deserving individuals. The ‘neighbor’ means a whole network of *social* relationships, exploited social classes, dominated people, communities of the oppressed. There is more to relationship than I-Thou. Christians need to start thinking about ‘collective charity; a whole system where injustice no longer exists.’ ‘Collectivized charity’ would be the beginning of the kingdom of God. Handouts to needy individuals are responses to injustice that do not challenge the reason for injustice.

I would add that what Jesus is listing in Matt. 25: 31-46 must be seen as meeting basic human needs – ‘food, clothing, housing and health care’. Charity is band-aid and smoothing or guilt but not challenging nor solving the root cause. Here the strong need of advocacy comes in. 134-135

3. Gutierrez is clearly challenging the unspoken assumption that Jesus’ vision proposes tests of individual accountability. Who are gathered before the Son of Man to be separated from one another? The vision is not about individual accountability but about corporate accountability. *It is ‘the nations’ that are on trial.* 135-136

***Does our nation feed the hungry and give drink to the thirsty?***

Welfare budget, health care, food stamps, WIC, housing ..... must be looked at.

Who are the *very least*? P. 136

***Does our nation welcome strangers?*** P. 137

Immigration service ...

Political refugees

***Does our nation clothe the naked?***

Clothing the naked means that all people, even and especially the least, have the minimal necessities of life – clothing, shelter and (especially) jobs – to enable them to live with enough dignity to buy their own clothes.

***Does our nation visit the sick?***

Adequate health care, free medical service for the poor,



***Does our nation go to those in prison?***

Concern for the well-being of the prisoners. Most penologists agree that at least 90 percent of prison inmates should not be there,  
Look at the prison system and cost and relationship with poverty and crime

**10. Furnaces and Faith: “But if Not ...” (Daniel 3:1-18) -142**

**An Epilogue: For Those Who Feel Personally Assaulted -157**

1. The condition of receive good news is *change*. It means conversion. We can uncomfortable about it.
2. The source of our discomfort comes from Bible because Biblical message demands us to change and makes us feel guilty;
3. We are immediately responsible for the policies of the United States. The nation is the most pervasive of all the gods, in any time, in any culture. True patriotism is not worship of our nation but rather, in the light of our worship of the God of justice, to conform our nation’s ways to justice. That will always be a worthy, and necessary aspiration. 159
4. It is true that some folk benefit lavishly from the socio-political-economic system under which we live, while others are crushed and destroyed by it. Corporations try to make greater profits. And the tragedy is that the way they make greater profits may have the unintended consequences that children do starve or dictators are supported. A few powerful people *with good intentions* may, quite contrary to those intentions, produce evil ends. 160

This means that ‘victims’ are not only those who get physically ground to pieces or starve but also sensitive people whom the system forces to act in ways that destroy others, even though they wish they didn’t. Thus *they* are being manipulated and dehumanized; The author hopes that a tiny bit of the possibility of liberation for themselves from the need to spend the rest of their lives beholden to false gods. They could then approach the biblical materials afresh, realizing that beyond the stings of indictment lie the birthpangs of hope. 160

5. The great hope is that we *can* begin to be liberated from some of the false gods - the Bible calls them ‘idols’ – that have held us in captivity. We know their names: fear of change, the need to conform, the burden of success expectations programmed into us from childhood, the stigma of being thought ‘unpatriotic,’ the terror of becoming vulnerable. All these gods urge us to refrain from asking such questions as ‘Isn’t there something wrong when our allegiances physically destroy our sisters and brothers elsewhere and at the same time physically destroy us too? We can finally hear the

words recorded in Jesus' ministry: 'the time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the good news.' (Mark 1:15) 161