



Crossroads Cultural Center and Columbia Catholic Ministry

In collaboration with the Center for the Study of Science and Religion

“WHAT’S FAITH GOT TO DO WITH IT?”

FAITH AND MONEY: Do they add up?

October 29, 2008 at 7:00 pm, Columbia University, New York, NY

Speaker: **Msgr. Lorenzo Albacete**

**transcript not reviewed by the speaker*

Crossroads: Good evening, and welcome on behalf of Crossroads Cultural Center. We would like to thank our co-sponsors: the Columbia Catholic Ministry and the Center for the Study of Science and Religion at Columbia. Tonight we are pleased to have again Msgr. Lorenzo Albacete give the third lecture in the series “What’s faith got to do with it?” As you know, this series of four lectures is dedicated to the relationship between faith and life in four important human phenomena (politics, science, economics, affectivity).

We think that this relationship (or lack thereof) should not be taken for granted. Rather, one should verify experientially whether faith can have an interesting, positive, valuable, impact on these aspects of daily life. Also, one should not assume that such a relationship affects primarily the ethical realm, that is, how someone who has faith should or should not behave. Since faith is a form of knowledge, i.e. knowledge of the source and destiny of everything, faith should also “broaden” our reason (in the words of Benedict XVI in Regensburg). In other words, faith should give us a better vantage point to understand the realities of life.

This is the intuition behind this series: how does faith shed new light on each of these four realities? Does faith reveal something new and previously unnoticed about these things? Does it change the way we should think about them? And then, *as a result*, does it change the way we *live* them?

If there is a context in which the relationship between faith and life is commonly understood only in ethical terms, that is certainly the subject of tonight’s lecture, namely money, economics.

Having read *God at the Ritz* we know that Monsignor Albacete is the right man to address these questions. He holds a degree in Space Science and Applied Physics as well as a Master’s Degree in Sacred Theology from the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC. He holds a doctorate in Sacred Theology from the Pontifical University of St. Thomas in Rome. He is co-founder and has been a professor at the John Paul II Institute in Washington, DC. He has taught at St. Joseph’s Seminary in Yonkers, NY, and from 1996 to 1997 served as President of the Catholic University of Puerto Rico in Ponce. He is a columnist for the Italian weekly *Tempi*, has written for *The New Yorker*, and has been Advisor on Hispanic Affairs to the US National Council of Catholic Bishops. He is the Responsible of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation in the United States and Canada. I give you Msgr. Albacete.

Albacete: It’s good to see everyone who’s been here before again in the third classroom; they keep throwing us out—it’s their resistance to the truth.

Faith and money, come on! I probably have little of both. But what the heck, what I have I'll try to relate.

In my world, my Catholicism, where I come from, a Latin American cultural setting, the great issue of the question of faith, the Catholic faith in particular, and economy as understood as the allocation of resources, one would hope for the common good, this issue, this question has for a long time been lived entirely within the discussion about liberation theology which emerged in the Latin American world after the Second Vatican Council to a full grown proposal about the relation between faith and the development of the resources of the world, the earth, the construction of a just society. And everybody knows that it was a big controversy in which John Paul II showed an aspect of his ministry, of his personality perhaps, I don't know, that surprised many people, and that was the determination, even sometimes apparent anger with which he reacted to the liberation theologians and the activities and bishops and others involved intimating the insights of the so-called liberation theology. So that was interesting, and to this day many people still ask me questions—I explained the Pope's particularly strong opposition to this.

Next to the Pope, perhaps even more so in proposing to condemn liberation theology is the man who is now the Pope. When he was Cardinal Ratzinger, the Prefect of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, document after document came from opposing the fundamental tenets of liberation theology.

In popular culture, the origins of Latin American liberation theology are associated or related to Brazil as the starting point with the strongest concentration of thinkers who developed liberation theology that picked up all around Latin America and in some areas of the United States where there's a big Latin American Catholic presence, and Brazil is one of the sources of inspiration with all the big names; the founding books of liberation theology were written in Portuguese by Brazilian theologians, thinkers, economists, politicians, etc..

I mention this because I want to raise a little bit of the drama of what occurred not long ago. The meeting of the Latin American Bishops Conferences that in one way or another dealt with this was held under the new Pope in Brazil on May 13, 2007, just last year, and there was in Brazil Joseph Ratzinger and now Pope Benedict XVI, addressing the bishops, but everyone was listening and people wanted to find out how he would deal with this chapter of Latin American Catholic life—the great influence of liberation theology. And so I would like first, to go over a bit about what he said there, especially as it pertains to the issue under discussion which is the relation between faith and economic resources and the building of just social structures for the common good.

At the beginning there was the usual stuff that was necessary to say, and then there was a standard profile of Latin American Catholic religiosity—the kind of thing we like, the reason why I have in my pocket scapulars, sacred stones and powders. You never know, you know? Let me tell you this, when I'm dying with my tongue out I don't want to be visited by liberation theologians! I want to be accompanied by all kinds of pills. So there's the Latin American Catholicism, the popular religiosity, as it were, that he uses, and he spoke about that, giving the acceptable standard profile of it. But in any case, soon he insisted that with respect to the future, with respect to the survival of the faith in Latin America, this religiosity was not enough. In fact, it may be moving and folkloric, but it did not address the great issues of what was the future if the faith in Latin America—such a vast Catholic area—and indeed in the world is being determined. You could see in his works that he is arguing from now on that the controversies over liberation theology were controversies about the nature of faith itself and about the relation between faith and the human reality and the world which is indeed, if you have been coming these past few weeks to our series here, a question which this man keeps bringing up again and again, reflecting his conviction that we are, in a certain sense, back at the beginning of the Christian entrance into the world. When the Christians moved out of the Palestinian area and arrived at the great cities of the empire, they encountered the Roman/Hellenic world. What do they do? He believes that we are in a similar situation now, and so

therefore, the questions that we face are very fundamental and very basic. We have to show what is the relation between our faith claims and human life, and what is known about our humanity and how it is lived in as much as for Christian faith concerning a judgment in the faith, an act of faith, is always mediated, is always some kind of judgment of statement concerning who Jesus Christ is. The problem, argued the Holy Father, that we face is again and again the same one: What is the relation between Christ and the human reality? Better, what is the relation between Christ and the world?

Okay, now he's in his turf. At the most basic level we have seen when we talked about politics before, and science, and as Rita has reminded us, the proposal of the Pope that the effect of the intersection between faith and life as best we can live it in this world, without special, private knowledge, but you're out there dealing with life as it is itself, the point of intersection between faith and life is this "broadening of reason," and this, as Rita reminded us, has been again and again the main point of the so far public teaching of Pope Ratzinger—the broadening of reason in two ways: In scope, that is to say, the claim is that faith allows us to see more than when you don't have it, but to see, not visions, but to see with your reason, to appreciate more of reality; it expands the scope when you look out towards life, presumably; this is what the claim said anyway—faith allows you to see more; you see exactly what everybody else sees, but somehow you see more. Not more of a *beyond*, but more of life now, more of what exists at the present time. It's not that faith allows you to see the eschatological future of whatever happens after death or at the end of the world, no. The claim is that the "broadening of reason" is something that occurs now and it deals with how much you can see, with the horizon of how much you can see about reality, about what's happening now.

So faith broadens reason in that way, and in another way too—in the way of the duration, the strengthening of reason's energy to continue searching the truth. Remember that was a big point made last time, how faith is the enemy, if you wish, of the stagnation of reason or the tiredness of reason. The Pope is convinced that one of the main problems that we face today is that one—we have given up on our ability to know the truth, and there can very well be enough arguments that tempt one in that direction; the triumph of relativism is something that is not that difficult to understand, but faith is precisely the broadening of reason in that it would strengthen reason's determination to continue its search for truth. When reason stops its search, it creates ideology. So therefore, faith broadens reason by opposing that ideological temptation. Still, in order for this to be sustained, the burden of proof of the faith is its reasonableness.

After talking about the Latin American religiosity and saying that it's not enough to heal, faith is needed to deal with the situations of today, the very first area is not discussed by him. It's not any kind of intra-church problem. It's not about the lack of vocations, the marriage of priests, etc.. What about globalization? I will read to you his lines. He has said that religiosity is not enough; we need to face how the world is today, and interestingly the first topic dealt with is the topic of globalization.

Today's world experiences the phenomenon of globalization as a network of relationships extending over the whole planet. Although from certain points of view this benefits the great family of humanity, and is a sign of its profound aspiration towards unity, nevertheless it also undoubtedly brings with it the risk of vast monopolies and of treating profit as the supreme value. As in all areas of human activity, globalization too must be led by ethics, placing everything at the service of the human person, created in the image and likeness of God.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as in other regions, there has been notable progress towards democracy, although there are grounds for concern in the face of authoritarian forms of government and regimes wedded to certain ideologies that we thought had been superseded, and which do not correspond to the Christian vision of man and society as taught by the Social Doctrine of the Church. On the other side of the coin, the liberal economy of some Latin American countries must take account of equity,

because of the ever increasing sectors of society that find themselves oppressed by immense poverty or even despoiled of their own natural resources.

And then he goes on to apply this to the Latin American situation.

I bring it up only for two reasons, underlining again that the importance of the subject—faith and life, and that the relation between faith and the economy is seen in the context of the relation between faith and human life, and that the question is: What does faith contribute to our perception of what life is all about?

Recall that the discussion with Habermas was again and again on this point. We need a common basis to develop a global ethics that would allow us to confront and guide and “tame” the power that is out there today in order to really remake human life, and in this case both secularists, Habermas and Ratzinger, agreed that this is an important point; perhaps it’s the number one challenge facing us today, but here he is repeating the same thing, as he actually did (if you were here when I read it) the areas of concern in the discussion with Habermas. One of them was the economic effects of globalization.

But that is one subject. The subject that brings us again to the fundamental question, and I wanted to review how he deals with that. For those of us with faith, the question lurking behind this concern is the following: What does Christ actually give us? And I say that for the purposes here, in most of this you could substitute the name *Christ* for the word *faith* and turn it into a problem for more than just Christians, but the man is the Pope.

What does Christ actually give us? Why do we want to be disciples of Christ? The answer is: because, in communion with him, we hope to find life, the true life that is worthy of the name, and thus we want to make him known to others, to communicate to them the gift that we have found in him. But is it really so? Are we really convinced that Christ is the way, the truth and the life?

In the face of the priority of faith in Christ and of life "in him," [that we keep insisting on]... a further question could arise: could this priority not perhaps be a flight towards emotionalism, towards religious individualism, an abandonment of the urgent reality of the great economic, social and political problems of Latin America and the world, and a flight from reality towards a spiritual world?

As a first step, we can respond to this question with another: what is this "reality"? What is real? Are only material goods, social, economic and political problems "reality"? This was precisely the great error of the dominant tendencies of the last century, a most destructive error, as we can see from the results of both Marxist and capitalist systems. [Both of them] falsify the notion of reality by detaching it from the foundational and decisive reality which is God. Anyone who excludes God from his horizons falsifies the notion of "reality" and, in consequence, can only end up in blind alleys or with recipes for destruction.

The first basic point to affirm, then, is the following: only those who recognize God know reality and are able to respond to it adequately and in a truly human manner. The truth of this thesis becomes evident in the face of the collapse of all the systems that marginalize God.

I want to underline that he is not here talking about the contribution which belief in God makes; he’s not talking about an ethical contribution; he’s talking about knowledge of the real, and in this particular case of the real needs of the human person. The “broadening of reason” is that it makes reason more alert to the

needs of the human person. The ethical dimension comes later. Right now he's arguing the point of beginning, is seeing more.

Of course then we say that knowledge of God, faith in general, allows us to see this "more." The question arises next:

Who knows God? How can we know him? We cannot enter here into a complex discussion of this fundamental issue. [Remember it had come up before in the discussion with Habermas] For a Christian, the nucleus of the reply is simple: only God knows God, only his Son who is God from God, true God, knows him. [Then the proclamation of the faith in Christ is made.]

God is the foundational reality, not a God who is merely imagined or hypothetical, but God with a human face; [recognition of the presence of] God-with-us...[Now] we can ask ourselves a further question: what does faith in this God give us? The first response is: it gives us a family, the universal family of God... Faith releases us from the isolation of the "I" because it leads us to communion: the encounter with God is, in itself and as such, an encounter with our brothers and sisters, an act of convocation, of unification, of responsibility towards the other and towards others. In this sense, the preferential option for the poor [a key phrase used by liberation theology] is implicit in the Christological faith in the God who became poor for us, so as to enrich us with his poverty (cf. 2 Corinthians 8:9).

Quite a claim here. Faith, God is the horizon, allows me to see more, etc... In the area of concern—faith, money, resources, the economy—this "broadening of reason" has a particular name, "the preferential option for the poor." This is the claim. This is what he would insist on, we will see, again and again. I repeat, the intersection between faith and the economy is the emergence in us, in our ability to see, in our desire to respond in such a way to the reality of poverty.

The reason, he explains, for the opposition to liberation theology was not the notion of "the preferential option for the poor," but the notion of faith that did not give a broad and adequate enough perception of "the preferential option for the poor."

The peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean have the right to a full life, proper to the children of God, under conditions that are more human: free from the threat of hunger and from every form of violence. [Then he mentions some of the social teachings of the Church on this matter.]... How can the Church contribute to the solution of urgent social and political problems? The answer has to pass through the creation... [this is another important point of liberation theology which he will now embrace and purify, if you wish, the creation of the structures of society. The response to the poor cannot simply be individual charity, nor collective charity. It requires a change in the very institutions, structures of society that facilitate this vision of the needs of the poor.] Just structures are a condition without which a just order in society is not possible. But how do they arise? How do they function? Both capitalism and Marxism promised to point out the path for the creation of just structures, and they declared that these, once established, would function by themselves; they declared that not only would they have no need of any prior individual morality, but that they would promote a communal morality. All of these ideological promises has been proved false. The facts have clearly demonstrated it. The Marxist system, where it found its way into government, not only left a sad heritage of economic and ecological destruction, but also a painful oppression of souls. And we can also see the same thing happening in the West, where the distance between rich and poor

is growing constantly, and giving rise to a worrying degradation of personal dignity through drugs, alcohol and deceptive illusions of happiness.

Just structures are...an indispensable condition for a just society, but they neither arise nor function without a moral consensus in society on fundamental values, and on the need to live these values with the necessary sacrifices, even if this goes against personal interest. [We're back at the Habermas discussion.]

I am only saying that a society in which God is absent will not find the necessary consensus on moral values or the strength to live according to the model of these values, even when they are in conflict with private interests...[The discovery of these values are a matter of right reason]... of *recta ratio* and they do not arise from ideologies nor from their premises. Certainly there exists a great wealth of political experience and expertise on social and economic problems that can highlight the fundamental elements of a just state and the paths that must be avoided. But in different cultural and political situations, amid constant developments in technology and changes in the historical reality of the world, adequate answers must be sought in a rational manner, and a consensus must be created—with the necessary commitments—on the structures that must be established.

This political task is not the immediate competence of the Church. Respect for a healthy secularity—including the pluralism of political opinions—is essential in the Christian tradition. If the Church were to start transforming herself into a directly political subject, she would do less, not more, for the poor and for justice, because she would lose her independence and her moral authority, identifying herself with a single political path and with debatable partisan positions.

[Finally], just structures will never be complete in a definitive way. As history continues to evolve, they must be constantly renewed and updated; they must always be imbued with a political and humane *ethos*—and we have to work hard to ensure its presence and effectiveness.

Three areas here, three proposals for the intersection between faith and the economy. They are not the broadening of reason; they are three ways—scope, energy, if you wish, endurance, and third, updatedness, creativity, so that ideology doesn't allow you to respond to the situations as they really are, so that you are encouraged. With all the rapid changes, it is something that must be re-done every day at every time.

In the end, a man that I follow, Fr. Giussani, says, you know, you can read all this stuff, you can hear this discourse that may inspire you or may not inspire you, but would it really create anything new? Words alone do not create anything new. And in any case, faith is not transmitted by words alone or by witness to a story, to something that has happened in which one can find an echo of our experience, and from it, if it is an experience of faith and has been mediated by faith, from it we can look towards, in this particular case, society from an economic perspective, and have the energy, the determination and the capacity to be creative in the area of these social structures that affirm “the preferential option for the poor,” that respond to what is really being lived at this moment.

I thought, therefore, that we could benefit from looking at one such case. I must say, to drop names, when I met Karol Wojtyla, our discussion was about what was the best way to transmit the faith. Since he found out that I had been a scientist, he asked me whether science was the best language for the transmission of the faith. By the way, he wasn't Pope then. He was sitting there eating some kind of corn flake for breakfast!

And I said to him, “Science? When I wanted a woman I didn’t send her a post card with equations or formulas!”

And he said, “Very good. So then, what is the best way?”

And I said, “Why don’t you answer that question? I answered the other one.”

And he said, “Clearly it is the theatre.”

The theatre, poetry, drama—the theatre! First of all, you’ve got to understand that this guy sitting there is some kind of cardinal. I had never even heard such speech from any bishop or anyone like that. This is amazing, I thought. This is an interesting man.

I said, “Tell me more about it.”

I was to have opportunities as I would have never imagined when he became Pope and a number of meetings with him when he was Pope, and whenever it was the question of the two of us, (I was there sometimes with other groups to discuss other subjects), whenever we had a personal, one-on-one conversation, his question came back again to the same subject. He wanted to discuss theatre.

I taught a class at the John Paul II Institute on the theatrical writing of John Paul II, so he wanted to know what do students think? What questions do they ask? Did they understand this point? Did you understand this point? He was always claiming that because I was not able to speak Polish, I missed 90% of the depth of what he was trying to present. I said, “If it cannot be presented in Spanish, it cannot be presented!” So we always had that discussion.

It’s amazing how this is the case. But in the area I proposed to him, was I wrong in thinking that in the area of liberation theology if I wanted to really find out what it is that bothers him, and what is the argument all about (he must go beyond an intellectual argument given the real excitement that he showed) could I simply not say that it’s all already determined by what he wrote in the play *Our God’s Brother*?

And he said, “Excellent. You do understand.”

So I thought I would give you a summary of what his argument is, and then I’ll conclude with things like the text. Suppose you want to read this? You can’t unless you speak Polish or Spanish or Italian. Perhaps it’s been published in other languages, but I only know of those three. In English it’s only been published once, in the book, this book, *The Collected Plays and Writing on Theatre* by Karol Wojtyla. It is not published by any kind of religious or pious house, but by UCLA Press, but it’s out of print. Ignoring the ethical part, stealing it from someone might be the way, and then you can read something that condemns it, but by then you have the book.

The name of the play is *Our God’s Brother* and it is based on a real life. I cannot pronounce the name of Adam. I myself, in my conversation with the Holy Father called him Adam Gonzales, arguing that in fact he was from Puerto Rico and at an early age he went to play baseball in Krakow, but he denied it.

So Adam X was born on the 20th of August, 1845. When he died, he had another name, Brother Albert, founder of the Congregation of Albertine Brothers and Sisters. He died Christmas day, 1916. He was beatified in Poland on June 22, 1983 and canonized on the 12th of November, 1989. It’s the first time in which the author of a play has canonized his main character! He desperately wanted to sell books.

The story deals with this man who is a patriot, an artist, all kinds of wonderful things. One day he, because of inclement weather, he had to find refuge in this apparently empty building only to discover that it really wasn’t empty at all; it was packed with homeless and poor people. This was their home; they lived there. And he had never seen anything like it. Whatever happened, it struck him in a way that it became an

obsession, the obsession being, I must respond to this situation! Whatever it takes, I must calm my conscience. Adam was not given to little guilt trips, as we see in the play to follow, but somehow something happens to him that says, I've got to deal with this. So he begins the great search. What is the responsible way to deal with the fact that there are in the midst of economic success and progress, that there is this population of people living sub-human lives? And this is the point. A person of faith cannot avoid this problem as we saw in Ratzinger's argument. It immediately strikes you. The point of intersection of faith and the economy is what to do about the poor. What is responsible? What is the responsible thing to do that is not ideological and not just satisfaction on the guilt trip, but that is, in fact, just? That's the question. That's the question this guy begins to try to answer.

There are these characters in the play, some actually historical characters from that time, others made up by the author, and each one in a certain sense personifies different solutions to this problem of poverty. In a sense, the play, the drama is going on inside this man. And these are various temptations, if you wish, although they are personified in a character that comes from the outside. They are intended to be aspects of himself. The conversation he is having is with himself, and going over, testing each one of his experiences, each one is a possible response, and he either accepts it or rejects it.

One of the characters, for example, that emerges first, raises the question: Is it really my problem? Is there a way in which I can deal with it? Alright, I'll pay higher taxes. I'm sorry to bring this up. Whatever it is, I'll contribute to the second collection, but I didn't create this and I have my own life to worry about. How far is my obligation to solidarity with these people? The first character, Max, who is a friend of his, argues this point. "In every one of us," says Max, "there resides both a man exchangeable, like money, and in his innermost depth, a non-exchangeable man, known only to himself." This should ring an alarm immediately. Proposal—if you have faith and you are addressing this faith to this subject, you would immediately be horrified at this statement because it is a dualism; it is a split thing. Part of us is negotiable, but part of us is non-negotiable. There are two of us. I can deal with this problem of the poor only if it stays at my negotiable level. I live my social obligations, my charity obligations, but I will not let it enter into me. That part, closed! "A non-exchangeable man, known only to himself," he says. "It is enough for me," he says, "simply to be aware of the other, the non-exchangeable one, and to know that within me there is the dividing line between the two." Otherwise life would become commonplace and stupid. It is enough to be aware of the unchangeable man. How do we respond to the exchangeable one? It is enough to be aware of him, and through awareness to be separate from him.

Behind this view is a view of the human being that is an anthropological conviction that this man Max has. Listen to him: "The individual makes himself and joins society as an individual. His task, his mission is first of all individual. He has individual responsibility. Society's fate depends on whether the individual accomplishes his task, fulfills his mission, meets his responsibility or makes a mess of it. If he succeeds, society will consist of a greater number of worthy individuals and will be rather more worthy itself. If he fails, he will find in it more and more poor houses and asylums which are of course antisocial phenomena. They are madness drawing human wrecks and loafers."

Adam, who is the main character says, "There is indeed a great deal of truth in what you say, but you are ignoring one thing, Max. In this situation, what do you do? What am I to do?"

"I will explain it to you," Max replies. "...to create values, to create all the resources that he finds in his life, and because he finds these resources, he himself, he must shut himself up from the rest of the world, otherwise he will fritter away what he has, and that would be an anti-social attitude."

Adam replies, "I thought like that for a long time. My thoughts from even two months ago, but since then I have seen that this view is not enough. We cannot permit a whole mass of people who swarm through the poor houses leading almost animal lives, gradually deprived of all awareness except hunger and fear. No, no, no."

At one point, the discussion continues, and Max thinks that he is being accused of running away from responsibility. "How can I be held responsible for these people?" He says.

Adam replies, "Max, the problem is that you still think that the pattern of human poverty corresponds to the pattern of punishment. No matter. But this is not just running away from responsibility. It is running away from something, or rather someone, in myself and in all those people." And this is as far as his discussion with Max will take him.

Another character that appears is called the Stranger. The Stranger follows the "way of anger," "creative human anger" until it reaches the point of awareness and revolution. Charity is the enemy of this because charity will postpone the revolution. Adam has a vision or experience of this anger among the poor. Right after this vision, a new figure emerges to talk with him called the Other. The Other describes himself as pure intelligence. He stands for all intellectual, ideological solutions to the human drama. Later in the play, he shows his weakness because he is unable to recognize a concrete poor man who is standing next to a lamppost. Adam says to him, "But look at that guy there." The Other says, "I don't see anyone." He is not interested in him. He has to go *beyond* to mankind. Adam, on the other hand sees in this man what he calls "the image and likeness of God" in each person. The Other is furious at this kind of talk. Remember that the Other and all these people are the main character himself, the struggles within him. I'm sure ole Karol Wojtyla would want me to repeat that to you.

This guy says, "He does not attract my intelligence." Adam answers, "How much is missing in you. How much you miss." The point is that Adam cannot accept either the limitation of the problem to an intellectual problem. He has to respond to this with an action that is not that of his exchangeable self, but that is himself. The other guy, the "creative anger" guy, comes and goes. At the end he will be the last one to remain, and the one that Adam will recognize as most realistic.

At this point Adam goes to confession and the dialogue has to do with his faith in Christ, and the confessor tells him, "Let yourself be molded by love." After that experience, Intelligence pops up again and says, "Last time you succeeded in reducing the matter to the limits of knowledge. You will not make that mistake again."

Adam says to him, "I will not accept the limits that you put down because now I am letting myself be molded by love. I know one Force that surpasses me. It surpasses me infinitely in love. I cannot bear that strain. This shames and humiliates me, but it also guides me, lets me develop...I am simply overjoyed at the thought that someone as helpless as I, clumsy and lame, can rid himself of undeniable intelligence, can possess something that bypasses it, something that exposes it, unmask it, betrays it...I have freed myself from the tyranny of intelligence."

Finally, the Stranger comes back, the revolutionary, the final dialogue. Adam talks to him like this: "Man's poverty is deeper than the resources of all goods. All those goods that man can aspire to by the force of his anger...I am sure, I believe that man is to aspire to all goods. To all. To the greatest of them too. But here anger fails, here Charity is essential. I want only to rouse this anger in the right way. It is one thing to cultivate a just anger, make it ripen and reveal itself as a creative power, and another to exploit that anger, use it as raw material, and abuse it."

The Stranger says, "The poor will not follow you."

Adam replies, "No, I will follow them."

And his position was to get rid of everything and to go join these people. Out of that act came this congregation that he founded, that to this day devotes itself to the poorest of the poor.

In the last scene of the play when he is now Brother Albert, news comes that a revolution has begun and this is his reply and the last words, “I knew that anger had to erupt, especially such a great anger. And it will last because it is just. I know for certain, though, that I have chosen the greater freedom.”

Why do I bring this up? I certainly have no intention of following in his steps. If we all did, that’s the end of the world. It’s stupid. He is brought forward not because we are all called to the vocation of making ourselves poor, of giving everything to the poor and then following Jesus. This is his own charism; this is his own vocation. It’s only for him. In fact, at one point in the last scene he advises a member of his congregation to leave because he realizes this way is not his vocation, but it is important because this is a particular vocation that shows us in a clear almost extremist way what faith intends to do with us, all of us, independent of our circumstances and our particular vocations. This “broadening of reason” achieves in this area its highest expression in what Fr. Giussani called “the virtue of poverty.” And this is the proposal we make to the world, to people concerned about economic justice.

Second, this example shows also, again in an extreme case, how this man was tempted by ideological possible answers, and again and again and again he is able to escape them, even to the point of such a shocking expression, “I have escaped the tyranny of intelligence.” It doesn’t mean he embraces stupidity. It means a totally created mental view of human needs and human reality. It is said that our enslavement to an intellectual ideology is our death. His faith allowed his reason to recognize these temptations as insufficient ideologies when compared to the truth about the human person, to the depth and real nature of human needs.

This is what the “preferential option for the poor” moves us to do, to follow this path. Fr. Giussani says, “Poverty [and again I am talking about an interior virtue, an interior way of looking] is an expression of true freedom.” Today we have this crisis. Right now we are living it. If we look at it from this perspective, what can we say? Again, we’re not experts. (Well, some are and are able to speak like experts.) But in general, crisis, indeed this past political season about to end, so centered on things like hope and trust. The present crisis is a crisis about hope and trust, without which, if you do not have this hope, if you do not have this trust... Hope and trust are needed for a non-ideological market economy that responds to reality, and not an abstract vision of resources, not to the virtue of world, of abstract money that does not reflect the actual value of our resources, and which easily becomes the creation of this pure technological intelligence immediately at the service of the temptation of greed. Fr. Giussani says “the obstacle from hope to trust is the attribution of this certainty in the future [which is real hope] to particular things that we already possess” such as money; that is to say, what allows the hope and the trust to be possible, to exist, so you can respond to reality, is what he calls “the virtue of poverty” which opens up space for trust that moves us to creative actions based on reality.

It sounds pious. It sounds pious to say, if you ask me, that in the end poverty is what faith recommends in the name of “the preferential option for the poor.” It sounds like an escape, perhaps. But this man is a real man. He went through this. We can see this as a temptation, an escape—more on the side of the last guy there, Anger, if the awakening of “the preferential option for the poor” requires for its maximum expression to own nothing, of the virtue of poverty. Doesn’t faith create just a bunch of idealists running around? Silly. But yet, if we know history, who created the great institutions of western civilization—hospitals, universities, works for the poor, refuges, schools?—people who had been called to a life of poverty. Out of this came real institutions, far more realistically rooted than the creation of the ideologies, be they of the right or the left. That is a fact. So we are at this moment again in history in which we are in need to re-create these structures of a new economy, of a new society, a new just order. Then, really, I realize that without faith as challenge, and the name of that challenge is “the virtue of poverty,” we will not be able to respond to it.