

## The Rich and Powerful as Subjects of Social Pastoral Care

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A priest I know who works in a prestigious Bratislava suburb once told me of his first experiences in the parish. The people who live there are rich, not just by contemporary Slovak standards. They are also people who have a certain amount of power at their disposal, conferred on them by their property or profession. When they first met they told my acquaintance that they don't want him to tell them what to do – it is their parish and they want to accomplish what they deem good and useful for the parish life. I believe this situation encapsulates who the “rich and powerful” of today are. At least from the pastoral point of view I see this recorded experience as their very important characteristic.

In this paper I will therefore first describe a specific method of pastoral work called *social pastoral care*, which will allow me then to show why and how this characteristic of the “rich and powerful” is important from the pastoral point of view.

### Social pastoral care

Hermann Steinkamp called his variation of a Latin American application of the classical pastoral method *see-judge-act “social pastoral care”*.<sup>1</sup> Quite simply said, the goal of Steinkamp's *social pastoral care* is the establishment of a solidarizing community, e.g. a parish, a youth group, a self-help group or a group of workers in assisting professions.<sup>2</sup> The core of the method is Steinkamp's conviction that *pastoral care does not consist so much in “preaching salvation” as in a certain way of life and attitude to other people. Social pastoral care culminates when the rich learn from the poor, the healthy from the ill, those without a handicap from the handicapped, those who help from those who are being helped. In other words, social pastoral care is at its strongest when the assistant learns from his clients how to assist them.*<sup>3</sup>

Steinkamp's point of departure is the fact that Jesus Christ did not impose his doctrine on anyone and he did not court popularity with his offer of salvation – his offer was powerless, so much so that it eventually cost him his life.<sup>4</sup> Despite its forcelessness it at the same time quite immediately touched on that which is unhealthy in human life and relationships. Jesus

1 I have described those applications and processes of taking over and modifying them in more detail in my paper concerning the working methods of police spiritual ministry. Here it must be noted that Steinkamp takes over the ideas of a certain medium current of theology of liberation, which underlines the preferential option for the poor and practical human acting, but at the same time does not admit violence and revolution as method of liberation. On the contrary, it highlights the spiritual dimension and significance of practical human acting, in a way similar to the way the constitution *Gaudium et spes* speaks of human activity in article 34; cf. Michal OPATRŇÝ, “Pracovní metody duchovní služby,” in *Východiska a perspektivy duchovní služby u policie*, ed. Michal OPATRŇÝ – Jaroslav KOZÁK – Jiří LAŇKA – Roman MÍČKA, České Budějovice: TF JU, 2012, pp. 105-126.

2 Cf. Herman STEINKAMP, *Sozialpastoral*, Freiburg i.Br.: Lambertus, 1991, pp. 85-145. Steinkamp's last major contribution to *social pastoral care* was his book *Diakonie statt Pastoral: Ein überfälliger Perspektivenwechsel*, Münster: Lit, 2012, 342 p., which follows up on his previous work and takes over whole passages from his older publications. I have therefore decided to refer to his older work, where *social pastoral care* is described in more detail than in this last summarizing publication.

3 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 121, 144ff.

4 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 127-128.

did not offer consolation by afterlife, his words and deeds concerned the present, the lives of those he spoke to.<sup>5</sup> Steinkamp therefore believes that creating and sustaining a discontinuance between service rendered to humans in need and preaching God's word or worship is a fatal error of Western Christianity, i.e., not only of the Roman Catholic Church but also of the Lutheran and Calvinist tradition, because the teaching of Jesus Christ cannot be just preached by means of words, it must first and foremost be practically achieved by acting – even without words.<sup>6</sup> Thus according to Steinkamp pastoral care is in fact any acting to the benefit of another human. According to him Christians err deeply and direct their pastoral work outside reality by separating words from acts, because Jesus' word were always interconnected with his concrete acts or the concrete human lives of those he met.<sup>7</sup>

Steinkamp justifies his view with an interpretation of the parable of the merciful Samaritan (*Lk* 10:25-37). When the "expert on religion" – as Steinkamp calls the scribe – asks Jesus what he should do to attain eternal life, Jesus does not present an elaborate theological definition of salvation to him – he tells him a parable in response. Even before he begins he challenges the scribe to answer himself according to what the Law says (*Lk* 10:26). In response to his precise theological definition of what he should do to be saved – love God and love his neighbour as himself (*Lk* 10:27) – Jesus tells him quite simply that he should do what he has just said (*Lk* 10:28). According to Steinkamp the story of the Samaritan merely serves to illustrate this concise answer of Jesus which, on Steinkamp's view, conceals the essence of the story of the merciful Samaritan: "Words and theory of salvation without corresponding acting are of absolutely no value! Only trustworthy healing (*heilende* in German, author's note) practice is a "place" where salvation (*Heil* in German, author's note) can be experienced."<sup>8</sup> Exactly according to the parable, at the end of which Jesus asks the opposite of what the scribe asked at the beginning. The parable began with the scribe's question "Who is my neighbour?" (*Lk* 10:29), but at the end there is a different question: "Who was neighbour to the one who was captured by brigands?" (*Lk* 10:36). According to Steinkamp this means that the one who helps is at the same time the one who is being favoured – the one who helps has become neighbour to the one who has been helped. A situation in which a human being can help someone is thus a moment in which she experiences salvation. Therefore, according to Steinkamp, the parable of the merciful Samaritan is in fact not concerned with the obligation to help the one in need. It is not even a well-masked formulation of the religious precept of love for one's neighbour. That would be a gross misunderstanding of the story, as it would again be concerned with what a human being has achieved by her own powers, by her own effort.<sup>9</sup> On this interpretation the parable of the merciful Samaritan wants to say first and foremost that each situation in which one can help another human being is an experience of salvation for the one who helps, because she experiences such relationship to the other as God has to humans. That is why any such act of help is true pastoral care.

According to Steinkamp, Jesus' promise of eternal life without suffering and death which one receives after earthly suffering and death would be absolutely untrustworthy if one could not somehow experience what this eternal life consists in already now.<sup>10</sup> One can therefore only experience salvation when one can achieve healthy balance in his relationships to other people and himself. But no human can do that by his own powers, so the precious moments when that

5 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 126.

6 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 130.

7 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 122.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 130.

9 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 131.

10 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 122-126.

happens are in fact a gift of God, who thus makes himself known to humans in their human relationships.

According to Steinkamp's *social pastoral care* we can thus say that the only significant acting of a pastoral worker in pastoral practice is one that enables the people around her to experience salvation.

### The "rich and powerful" as subjects of pastoral care

With respect to what has been said thus far one may ask how, and whether at all, the method of *social pastoral care* which, being inspired by theology of liberation, appears to be principally focused on the "poor" (in a broad sense of the word) can concern pastoral care of the "rich and powerful". If *social pastoral care* were really a method principally aimed at the "poor", such question would be due. But the issue of the "poor" is merely the context out of which the question arises. In fact, the key concept of liberation theology, which is *structural evil*, or social evil, structural sin or social sin, implies that all members of society are affected by the evil which has become its structure. That is why every member of society can under certain circumstances experience salvation in overcoming structural evil by means of solidarity. Similarly, another key concept of liberation theology, which is *preferential option for the poor*, in no way excludes the rich from pastoral care. Quite on the contrary. The preferential option for the poor is a decision of the Latin American local churches to be churches for the poor in their countries, i.e., it ought to concern first and foremost the middle-class and rich strata of the church. Precisely those Christians who are not "poor" are to become Christians for the "poor".

Thanks to the *phenomenology of work* of Jozef Tischner we can add that almost every profession of its essence provides a fairly broad space for experiencing salvation, since the fruits of its work are usually enjoyed by someone else.<sup>11</sup> Thus in my view Steinkamp's *social pastoral care* to a great extent transcends the environment of the assisting professions and assisting, since its scope is in fact much broader and it could be interpreted as a certain kind of spirituality.

Within his conception of social pastoral care Steinkamp clarifies this by means of a fairly interesting example which concerns precisely the "world of work". In developed countries there is currently prevalent a deformed attitude to work, when human beings are defined by whether they have work and how prestigious or lucrative this work is. The impact of this specific form of structural evil manifests itself in the personal suffering and family tragedies caused in these "developed" countries by unemployment. Who does not have work is of lesser value. According to Steinkamp, another form of the impact of this structural evil is workaholicism. Addiction to work is on his view a result of the same deformed attitude to work – I will only become a good, useful, loveable and self-loveable human being if I work yet a little bit more, achieve an even more prestigious position and an even better salary. Therefore, according to Steinkamp, the unemployed and workaholics should cooperate in solving their problems – they should work together in self-help groups, as they are affected by one and the same problem. Churches and parishes should provide space for such cooperation. Steinkamp urges that Christians devote attention to this, because the moments when these people affected by the same problem can help each other in solidarity are the moments when they can experience salvation. And that is why it is pastoral care.<sup>12</sup>

11 Cf. Jozef TISCHNER, *Ethics of solidarity*, München: Opus bonum, 1985, pp. 15-17.

12 Cf. STEINKAMP, *Sozialpastoral*, pp. 89-103.

The “rich and powerful” fit well in this example of Steinkamp’s, among other things because they are the ones most commonly affected by the problem of workaholism. This very example therefore implies that Steinkamp’s conception of *social pastoral care* is indeed a very suitable method for pastoral care of the “rich and powerful”. The question concerning pastoral care of the “rich and powerful” that practical theology should answer therefore is what connects these people with other people, especially the “poor” ones, since the preferential option for the poor is fundamental in social pastoral care, one can only abstract from it in a few exceptional cases.<sup>13</sup> But the answer definitely cannot be an admonition to a transfer of money from the rich to the poor. Thereby the existential dimension of social pastoral care would be lost, since there would be no actual relationship. By means of depersonalized money no relationship would be forged. It would therefore perhaps be better to pose the question differently – as one dual question: What can the “poor” offer to the “rich and powerful”? And what can the “rich and powerful” offer to the poor?

### What the “poor” can offer to the “rich and powerful”

In search for the potential of the “poor” enabling them to offer something to others it is obvious that the “poor” can live differently than especially and precisely the “rich and powerful”. They know the art of living life in a way that the “rich and powerful” frequently cannot even imagine. The “poor” can usually get by on a very different monthly budget than the rich and powerful. They can do without products and services that the “rich and powerful” cannot imagine their life without – they cannot imagine surviving without them at all.<sup>14</sup> From the pastoral point of view we must therefore ask whether and how such learning of the rich from the poor, of the successful from the unsuccessful can become part of pastoral care.

I believe that here it is worthwhile to recall the experience of ancient Christians who – as Benedict XVI recalled in his second encyclical *Spe salvi* – represented Christ as philosopher, which was intended to express that Jesus Christ is the teacher of life:

Rather, the philosopher was someone who knew how to teach the essential art: the art of being authentically human – the art of living and dying. (...) Towards the end of the third century, on the sarcophagus of a child in Rome, we find for the first time, in the context of the resurrection of Lazarus, the figure of Christ as the true philosopher, holding the Gospel in one hand and the philosopher’s travelling staff in the other. With his staff, he conquers death; the Gospel brings the truth that itinerant philosophers had searched for in vain.<sup>15</sup>

Radical poverty to which Jesus exhorted his closest circle of disciples on sending them out to the world (*Mk* 6:8-11; *Mt* 10:5-15; *Lk* 9:2-5 and 10:2-12), and which he apparently practiced himself, suggests comparison with contemporary travelling philosophers of various convictions. But Jesus’ and his disciples’ reason for poverty is fundamentally different from theirs. The poverty

13 Steinkamp himself only abstracts from the option for the poor when he applies social pastoral care to marriage preparation counselling, although preparation for marriage perhaps rather serves to illustrate some aspects of social pastoral care; cf. Hermann STEINKAMP, “Leiten heißt Beziehung stiften. ‘Ja aber...’” *Theologisch-Praktische Quartalschrift* 4/2003, pp. 339-347.

14 This situation has been vividly depicted in the third part of the Czech TV series *Innocent Lies* (2013) called *Second Breath*, directed by Petr Zahrádka, screenplay by Mirka Zlatníková. Jiří Langmajer created the main part of a crisis manager who sacked people for years until he was sacked himself. He is unable to find new work comparable in content and salary to the previous one. Despite that he tells his wife, his friends and acquaintances, and especially himself that nothing has happened and he will not have to change his life at all. He cannot imagine leaving his current way of living. He cannot live otherwise. It is only when he ends up in the street, has nothing left at all and his former accountant, whom he had sacked, assists him that he learns to live differently and eventually even returns to his family.

15 *Spe salvi* 6.

of Jesus and his disciples is intended to point to the new order of the Kingdom. It was not intended to express contempt for property or the world in general; it was to show that the order of the Kingdom arriving with Jesus is fundamentally different from the then as now reigning order of property, profit, wealth and abusing the people in one's surroundings.<sup>16</sup> By his practical conduct, in which he resembled travelling philosophers, Jesus showed that with him a different way of life had come. Because he consequentially practiced it himself, he was model and teacher for others. That is why I believe that the conception of Christ as "philosopher – teacher of life" may be what pastoral care in which the "rich and powerful" learn from the "poor" should draw on.

This kind of pastoral care can just as well be inspired by another way of representing Christ used in Antiquity. It was the image of the shepherd, also mentioned in *Spe salvi* in connection with the image of Christ as philosopher.<sup>17</sup> Later development of sacral and folk art practically reduced this motif to one topic – Christ as the shepherd searching for or carrying the lost sheep. But the Roman citizen saw the shepherd in yet another way:

As in the representation of the philosopher, so too through the figure of the shepherd the early Church could identify with existing models of Roman art. There the shepherd was generally an expression of the dream of a tranquil and simple life, for which the people, amid the confusion of the big cities, felt a certain longing.<sup>18</sup>

That is why I believe that, alongside the conception of Christ the Philosopher, the conception of Christ the Shepherd, model of simple life, can also contribute to pastoral care in which the "rich and powerful" learn from the "poor". But precisely not in the sense of a shepherd searching for and bringing back a lost sheep. Christ's already mentioned attitude to property, which he did not scorn, but by modesty rejected the "order" of property, profit, wealth and abusing others, converges with the conception of Christ the Shepherd in ancient Rome. Christ the Philosopher is thus the *teacher of life* and Christ the Shepherd is the *model of appropriate attitude to property, other people and oneself*. Dietrich Bonhoeffer concisely expressed it by the assertion that one must place Christ between oneself and property or even other people including the closest ones – and thereby attain an attitude to them modelled on Christ's.<sup>19</sup> He does not scorn property but does not let himself be dominated by it, he does not abuse others but respects and supports them – and for that very reason his life is quiet and simple.

One must therefore ask how to use these images of Christ in pastoral care, especially in *social pastoral care* when the "rich and powerful" are to learn from the "poor". I would like to outline one possible approach here.

As far as relationship to other people is concerned, Christians are first and foremost called to witness to God – i.e., to testify by their life to the people they meet that God is much closer to those people than they think; closer, in fact, than the Christians themselves.<sup>20</sup> Christ needs witnesses even when he is understood primarily as teacher of life (philosopher) and model

16 Cf. Joachim GNILKA, *Wie das Christentum entstand: Jesus von Nazaret: Botschaft und Gesichte*, vol. 1, Herder: Freiburg i.Br. – Basel – Wien, 2004, pp. 175-177.

17 Cf. *Spe salvi* 6.

18 Ibid.

19 Cf. Dietrich BONHOEFFER, *Discipleship: Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount*, publisher, place and date of publishing not indicated, pp. 61-63.

20 This issue has been originally elaborated by Paul M. Zulehner using the term *mystagogic mission*, which is intended to express the fact that mission must consist especially in introducing people to the mystery (i.e., mystagogy) that God accompanies every human being from the very beginning of her life; cf. Paul M. ZULEHNER, *Kirche umbauen – nicht totsparen*, Ostfildern: Schwabenverlag, 2004, p. 77.



of simple life (shepherd). He needs Christians who would testify to the world and especially to the “rich and powerful” that it is Jesus Christ from whom one can learn simple life. Christian witness is the very kernel of pastoral care, if we conceive it so that not only pastoral professions but Christians in general only assist in the relationship of God to humans, to which humans respond with the opposite relationship – their faith and corresponding life practice.<sup>21</sup> What the “poor”, i.e., the really poor, unsuccessful and in various ways tried people can offer to the “rich and powerful” is precisely their witness that life can be lived in a simple way. Pastoral care should therefore work on enabling these people to such witness, which requires general openness of pastoral care to the world of the “poor”. The Czech situation in which we find only few of the “rich and powerful” among Christians and all the more of the “poor”, provides ample opportunity for this.

### What the “rich and powerful” can offer to the poor

My acquaintance’s experience with pastoral work in a parish of the “rich and powerful” mentioned in the introduction can of course be interpreted as a manifestation of the pride of the “rich and powerful”. But pastoral care should not pronounce judgments, especially not prior judgments made on the basis of superficial experience and first impressions. In other words, one must ask whether there is something positive about this characteristic of the contemporary “rich and powerful”. For pastoral care should first and foremost be concerned with searching for the good and discovering its origin in God, as formulated by the “methodological” article of the pastoral constitution of Vatican Council II.<sup>22</sup>

When seeking a general expression of the substance of pastoral work one can say that its goal is to empower both the individual Christian and the Christian community to become subjects of pastoral care themselves. One becomes subject when one assumes responsibility for one’s relationship to God, other people, oneself and the whole of creation. Vatican Council II expresses it with the following words:

For Sacred Scripture teaches that man was created “to the image of God,” is capable of knowing and loving his Creator, and was appointed by Him as master of all earthly creatures that he might subdue them and use them to God’s glory. (...) Hence man’s dignity demands that he act according to a knowing and free choice that is personally motivated and prompted from within, not under blind internal impulse nor by mere external pressure.<sup>23</sup>

Human subjectivity therefore originates in God, who calls humans to become his image. And Jesus Christ is model and example of such becoming subject. At the same time he is also model for pastoral work, which on this conception *only and merely* assists in the enabling and empowering relationship of God to humans and at the same time assists the relationship of humans to God, which is a response to the Divine call to being subject. The response to the calling to become subject of pastoral care therefore cannot be a pure act of faith, but also a practice of relationships to other people, to oneself and to the whole of creation.

Of course, human imperfection and sinfulness negatively impacts the realization of being

21 Cf. Michal OPATRŇ, “Impassibilis est Deus, sed non incompassibilis: Srovnání pohledů Jana Pavla II. a Benedikta XVI. na utrpení z pastoračního hlediska” [A comparison of John Paul II’s and Benedict XVI’s approach to suffering from the pastoral point of view], *Theologos* 1/2011, pp. 65-67.

22 Cf. *Gaudium et spes* 11.

23 Ibid., art. 12 and 17.

subject.<sup>24</sup> That is why it need not be immediately obvious whether a certain life practice manifests an effort to cooperate with God by assuming responsibility for one's relationships to God, others, oneself and creation, or whether it expresses human egoism and titanism (V. Boublík). But if the main goal of pastoral care is seeking the good in humans and their activity and discovering the origin of this good in God, then one must look at the practice of human life through this lens first. It is therefore necessary to ask and investigate whether the life practice of the "rich and powerful" is always merely a mixture of pride, egoism and titanism, or whether it can also be viewed as an effort to be subject. For it is intrinsic to humans that their life stories are rarely extremely evil or extremely good, but mostly a mixture of succumbing to evil and effort to seek the good.<sup>25</sup> Thus in the life practice of the "rich and powerful" we can also find many cases of striving to be subject.

From this point of view one can say that it is often the "rich and powerful" who can assume responsibility for their own life, not relying on others, the state, etc. It is precisely the "rich and powerful" who assume responsibility for others, whom they employ, direct their work, decide about their future life, etc. Similarly, it is the "rich and powerful" who form the external conditions of contemporary life, thereby assuming responsibility for the environment we live in and thus for creation. Finally, among the "rich and powerful" we can also find good examples of persons who have been able to assume responsibility for their relationship to God. I therefore believe that it is among others precisely the "rich and powerful" who have to a great extent mastered the art of being subject. In our circumstances we can often note that the "poor" like to give up their subjectivity in favour of the state, others, the church etc., in order to become objects of their care. They take a path which is in many respects simpler than the one taken by the "rich and powerful".

The "rich and powerful" can therefore quite generally contribute to the church by giving an example of what it means to be subject. Especially in the case of the "rich and powerful" the church and especially the pastoral profession can learn how to "do pastoral care" in such a fashion that it supports being subject. When pastoral work makes people unnaturally and unhealthily dependent on the pastoral professions and conceives the church not as a fellowship of Christians but as an institution, it suppresses their subjectivity – it is unfaithful to God's vocation for humans and it actually directly prevents human response to this vocation. That is why the church and pastoral work have become unacceptable for many. In this context one can even ask whether it might be precisely because pastoral work in practice tends to suppress human subjectivity rather than support it that we find so few "rich and powerful" among Christians.

But it is not only to the church that the "rich and powerful" can offer their subjectivity. In *social pastoral care* it would be appropriate for the "rich and powerful" to offer their subjectivity first of all to the "poor". This is precisely what the "rich and powerful" can offer the poor – their experience with being subject, assuming responsibility for others, oneself and one's relationship to creation.

## Conclusion

From the point of view of Steinkamp's conception of *social pastoral care* it is obvious that

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, art. 13.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *Spe salvi* 45-46.

pastoral care of the rich can consist in involving them in the preferential option for the poor which should be proper to the whole church. This involvement consists in enabling mutual inspiration of the “poor” and the “rich and powerful”, where the “rich and powerful” can learn to live a simpler life from the “poor”, whereby the poor witness to Jesus Christ as the true philosopher and true shepherd. At the same time the “poor” can learn from the “rich and powerful” what being subject in life means. This of course holds especially in our context, where the “poor” often like to give up their responsibility in favour of someone they expect to take care of them. However, the current social development in Europe raises the question whether such expectations are realistic and whether they in fact ever have been realistic at all.

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**Abstract** The paper derives from Hermann Steinkamp's conception of social pastoral care, which allows for perceiving the rich and powerful as inspiration for pastoral care and provides guidelines for pastoral approach to them.

**Key words** Pastoral care. Wealth. Power. Social pastoral care. Evangelization. Image of God