

GRASSI, Joseph A., *Broken Bread and Broken Bodies: The Lord's Supper and World Hunger*, Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1985, ISBN 0883441934, 116 pp., paperback, US\$6.95.

For anyone who has not as yet been exposed to the ideas of liberation theologians, *Broken Bread and Broken Bodies* is a simple, yet persuasive, introduction. A Christian, not concerned for the plight of the millions of people living daily below the poverty line, crawling into bed at night with pains of hunger in their bellies, watching their children die from lack of nutrition, would be a strange believer indeed.

Liberation Theology is not everyone's "cup of tea". To the more conservative, it smacks of disrespect for authority, seeds of revolution, and is nothing short of political leftist propaganda dressed in disguise as Christianity. Yet, if there is one point at which Christians of all persuasions are likely to share a bond of common concern, it is surely for the problem of feeding the world's masses. As the media, especially through television, bring the famine of Ethiopia into our homes, the suffering from floods in Pakistan, the trail of refugees on the march looking for food and shelter for one reason or another, few people can be left untouched by the anomaly of the overfed switching from one crash diet to the next, as against the emaciated and malnourished underfed and hungry of the world.

In this little book, the Christian symbol of broken bread is contrasted with the broken bodies of the 15 million people who die of starvation each year, and the 500 million who suffer from acute hunger and severe malnutrition. The Lord's Supper, or Eucharist, becomes the focus of the solution to the problem. Broken bread is symbolic of Christ's last meal with his disciples, and of His own broken body on the cross. In this, it has sacramental meaning. But, as Professor Grassi leads the reader through a Bible study and historical sketch of the social and political times of Jesus, one comes to understand the breaking of bread as a literal sharing of food, a call to feed the hungry.

Part I, "The Eucharist and Radical Discipleship", therefore, gives a brief survey of the social, economic, political, and religious forces in Israel

at the time of Christ. It shows a society starkly stratified, seething with injustice and suffering, oppressed by Rome, and weighed down by the burden of excessive taxation. Nor could all injustice be laid at the feet of Rome; much came from within Jewish society itself. Taxation by the Herods, for instance, was more oppressive than taxation by the colonisers. Side by side with a minority of wealthy Israelite landowners, prepared to collaborate with Rome, was the vast majority of people, who lived in poverty and suffering.

Nor was all oppression rooted in the economic, social, and political systems: the religious institutions further segregated groups within society. Religious laws, which designated people “clean” and “unclean”, promoted discrimination and inequality, with women, in particular, suffering under a patriarchal system.

Chapter 2 poses the question of Jesus’ reaction to this milieu. Was His response simply spiritual, or was He a political and social revolutionary? Grassi believes that “God, and the great prophetic leaders of the Old Testament, served as prototypes of the kind of leader Jesus was to become – one sensitive to the historical situation of human beings, and especially ready to service the down-trodden.” (p. 12).

The Palestine liberation movements of the first century included the Sicarii, Zealots, Pharisees and Sadducees, Essenes, and finally the movement of John the Baptist, proclaiming his radical message that the kingdom of God was at hand. If the kingdom were to be a “definite realm in which people obeyed God and practised justice” (p. 19), then his message had a strong political overtone. Grassi notes that Josephus, the Jewish historian, ascribes political motivation to the movement, and that this was also Herod’s perception. While all these movements were religiously motivated, at the same time, each group placed varying degrees of emphasis on social, political, and religious reforms.

Jesus’ approach was profoundly religious, but He continued to preach the same radical message as the Baptist, and this He directed especially to the poor. Grassi picks up the words of Albert Nolan, “To say ‘Thy kingdom come’ is the same as saying ‘Thy will be done on earth as it

is in heaven’.” (p. 22). While Grassi believes that Jesus did not see Himself as a purely political leader, “He did understand the significant political implications of His teachings and actions” (p. 23). Rome certainly saw him as a political leader, and his disciples considered him the Messiah, who would restore an earthly kingdom of Israel. “We were hoping that He was the one who would set Israel free” (Luke 24:21). Grassi concludes that Jesus was a religious reformer, His approach was that of a social revolutionary, and, politically, He perceived an actual realm in which His teachings would be put into practice.

Chapter 3 highlights Jesus’ message of good news for the poor. This was the reiteration of the call of the Old Testament prophets. Grassi shows that for Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Hosea, Ezekiel, to know God was to know a God of justice, and spirituality could not be separated from practical justice. Justice is not a call for charity or generosity from the affluent: it is a biblical teaching that the earth, and its resources, are a gift from God, lent to human beings for the equal benefit of all. Jesus’ good news for the poor was an attempt to break down social and religious barriers, to bring justice to women, to lepers, the mentally ill and disabled, and to the hungry, and underprivileged. The command, “follow me”, did not mean passive listening, but full collaboration”, as Mark’s do-it-yourself gospel shows (p. 25). If the kingdom of God is to prevail, then the kingdom of Satan must be overcome. Chapter 4 challenges the reader that the only means of winning this holy war against selfishness, greed, and human desires for pleasure and personal gain, is for people to have a “revolutionary inner conversion that links them in obedience to God, who is a God of justice” (p. 42).

Perhaps the most dynamic chapter of the book is chapter 6, the linking chapter between Parts I and II. This chapter centres on the Christian motif of sharing food. Just as the miracle of the manna in the desert for the children of Israel was as much a miracle of sharing, as one of actual food, so, too, was the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, which fed the five thousand. Jesus did not simply say to His disciples, “Give them to eat”, but, “You, yourselves, give them to eat” (Matt 14:15; Mark 6:37; Luke 9:13) (p. 52). This is the key to the miracle of sharing: “we ourselves” are the ones who should provide food for the

hungry. Just as the members of the early church in the book of Acts shared bread together, so the Lord's Supper today must link Christians to the situation of hunger and exploitation in our contemporary world.

Part II leads the reader to a deeper understanding of the Eucharist. It is both sacrament and action-sign of the kingdom, as the title of this section says, and it is a covenant of obedience to Christ. If one bread makes believers one body, as St Paul claims, then the Eucharist has compelling social implications, and the Christian community is challenged to reflect on this in words and deeds. Faith and works are linked as the means to continue Jesus' ministry to the poor. For, as St Paul points out in 1 Cor 12:26, "If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it". In the account of Jesus joining with two disciples on the road to Emmaus, it is not until the breaking and sharing of bread that He is recognised. When this story is linked with Christ's words in Matt 25:35-36, "I was hungry, and you gave Me food", we see the special significance of this message.

Grassi challenges his readers to take Christ's words literally, as well as spiritually, and, in so doing, to muster Christians as individuals and communities to action, so that the Eucharist perpetuates, politically and socially, the miracle of sharing. Faith language can then be translated into food language.

Broken Bread and Broken Bodies is written in simple terms. Its solution may sound too simplistic. Christians with goodwill and an acute sense of morality, even so, feel helpless to know where to start. If all believers sold what they had and gave to the poor, it would be a drop in the ocean of the overwhelming problems of the world. This book shows, however, that Christians must not allow themselves to be overwhelmed on a personal level, but have a covenant with God to go beyond that level and mobilise, on a political and social level, to institute change.

I have no hesitation in recommending this book to readers in Melanesia. For tropical islands, which do not know the suffering of starvation, abject poverty, and oppression, it can both inspire less selfishness and self-centredness towards other less-fortunate nations, and prompt the reader to look inwardly at justice at home, where creeping

greed, corruption, and class stratification could, one day, result in broken bodies, if the bread is not shared today.

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BARR, James, *Escaping from Fundamentalism*, London UK: SCM Press, 1984, ISBN 0334003857, x + 195 pp., paperback, £2.95.

There is increasing concern throughout Melanesia about certain Christian groups, which are aggressively evangelistic, to the point of denigrating other churches, and re-baptising converts. Attention tends to focus on the charismatic phenomena often fostered by such groups, as if these were somehow un-Christian, although such phenomena are attested in scripture, and have their counterparts in traditional Melanesian cultures. Many people seem to overlook the root cause of the problems posed by sectarians: their peculiar attitude to the Bible, which they regard as an arsenal of infallible proof-texts, giving them an exclusive claim to true faith. This attitude is generally known as “fundamentalism”.

James Barr, a distinguished British exegete, and Regius Professor of Hebrew in the University of Oxford, has already produced a thorough scholarly study of this widely under-estimated mentality (*Fundamentalism*, London UK: SCM Press, 1977). The work under review “is intended rather as a pastoral book. It seeks to offer help to those who have grown up in the world of fundamentalism, or who have become committed to it, but who have, in the end, come to feel that it is a prison from which they must escape.” (p. vii). Its basic thesis is “that fundamentalism is not, as its adherents suppose, soundly founded upon the Bible itself” (p. viii). Scripture does *not* say that it is inerrant, or infallible, not even in the favourite fundamentalist proof-texts, 2 Tim 3:16-17 and 2 Pet 1:20-21 (see ch. 1 on Biblical Inspiration and Authority).

Himself a model combination of tolerance and scholarly objectivity, Barr insists that fundamentalism “is lacking in a sense for the total history of Christianity, from the Bible up to the present day” p. ix), and that its