

**Self Employed Women' Association
(SEWA)**
Ahmedabad
India

**Association for the Promotion of North-
South Dialogue (NSD)**
Bonn
Germany

**The Meaning of Poverty in the
„Sermon on the Mount“ and in the Thinking of Mahatma Gandhi**

**Symposium in St. Trudpert (Black Forest, Germany)
from Thursday, July 6 to Monday, July 10, 2000**

Edited by the Association for the Promotion of North-South Dialog (NSD)

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Bonn, December 2000

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Monastery of St. Trudpert, Black Forest

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Introduction

In the context of the co-operation between SEWA (Self-Employed Women's Association), India and NSD (Association for the Promotion of North-South Dialogue) Dr. Ela Bhatt, founder of SEWA expressed her interest to learn to know more about the meaning of poverty in the Bible.

The symposium took place in the monastery of the Franciscan nuns in St. Trudpert (Black Forest) from July 6 to 10, 2000. It was attended by Dr. Ela Bhatt, Ms. Birgit Mock, Sr. Dr. Maria and Karl Osner.

This documentation summarises some of the inputs which helped the participants to reflect together. It does not pretend to be a protocol neither a report.

Karl Osner and Birgit Mock, Bonn, 4th of December 2000

Symposium Sermon on the Mount (6. – 10. July 2000)

Programme

Thursday, 6 July	morning	Arrival Ela Bhatt 8.40 a.m. at Frankfurt International Airport, 11.00 Discussion with Ms. Kairat from The German Trade Union IG-Metall Transfer to St. Trudpert
	evening	Getting to know each other, overview on the following days, expectations on the results, evening reflection
Friday, 7 July	morning	Morning reflection: <i>Birgit Mock</i> Sermon I expectation of the Reign of God: <i>Sr. Dr. Maria Osner</i> Sermon II beatitudes: synopsis: <i>Sr. Dr. Maria Osner</i>
	afternoon	Excursion St. Peter, library: <i>Wolfgang Mecklenburg</i> Freiburg, cathedral: <i>Dr. Konrad Kunze</i>
Saturday, 8 July	morning	Morning reflection: <i>Dr. Ela Bhatt</i> Sermon III Gandhiji on Poverty on Employment: <i>Dr. Ela Bhatt</i> Sermon IV biblical theology of poverty: Birgit Mock
	afternoon	Excursion Colmar, isenheimer altar: <i>Karl Osner</i>
Sunday, 9 July	morning	Conclusions Reflection
	afternoon	Excursion Freiburg, installation by Helmut Lutz, discussion with the artist, excursion to the castle in Neu-Breisach, Opening Event in Freiburg
Monday, 10 July	morning	Departure Ela Bhatt

Sr. Germana, Sr. Maria Osner, Ela Bhatt, Karl Osner, Birgit Mock

Part I

Theological introduction in the Sermon on the Mount

The Beatitudes in the Sermon of the Mount

The Beatitudes Mt 5, 3-12; Lk 6, 20-26

Mt 5, 3-12

- ¹ When he saw the crowds he went up on the mountainside. After he had sat down his disciples gathered around him,
- ² and he began to teach them:
- ³ "How blest are the poor in spirit: the reign of God is theirs.
- ⁴ Blest too are the sorrowing; they shall be consoled.
- ⁵ Blest are the lowly; they shall inherit the land.
- ⁶ Blest are they who hunger and thirst for holiness; they shall have their fill.
- ⁷ Blest are they who show mercy; mercy shall be theirs.
- ⁸ Blest are the single-hearted for they shall see God.
- ⁹ Blest too the peacemakers; they shall be called sons of God.
- ¹⁰ Blest are those persecuted for holiness' sake; the reign of God is theirs.
- ¹¹ Blest are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of slander against you because of me.
- ¹² Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is great in heaven; they persecuted the prophets before you in the very same way."

Lk 6, 20-26

- ²⁰ Then, raising his eyes to his disciples, he said: "Blest are you poor; the reign of God is yours.
- ²¹ Blest are you who hunger; you shall be filled. Blest are you who are weeping; you shall laugh.
- ²² Blest shall you be when men hate you, when they ostracise you and insult you and proscribe your name as evil because of the Son of Man.
- ²³ On the day they do so, rejoice and exult, for your reward shall be great in heaven. Thus it was that their fathers treated the prophets.
- ²⁴ But woe to you rich, for your consolation is now.
- ²⁵ Woe to you who are full; you shall go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now; you shall weep in your grief.
- ²⁶ Woe to you when all speak well of you. Their fathers treated the false prophets in just this way.

The Beatitudes form the introduction to the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-8,1)

Did Jesus deliver the Sermon on the Mount as it was written down by Matthew, the Evangelist? Not at all. This would have been impossible due to its length and the abundance of thoughts. The Sermon on the Mount, this linguistic masterpiece, is the work of Matthew. But what about the message of Jesus? Matthew summarised the most essential statements of his master in a dense single sermon.

1. Structure

Matthew based his sermon on a plan, like an architect does when planning the construction of a house. Let us take a brief look at this plan without going into details. All we have to know for the time being is that the Beatitudes are comparable to the entrance hall of this house and that the Our Father is the centre, or the core, of this house. The call for bearing fruits is its exit. You can tell true prophets by the quality of the fruits they bring forth.

Ref. Mt 7, 16-20

"You will know them by their deeds. Do you ever pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from prickly plants? Never! Any sound tree bears good fruit, while a decayed tree bears bad fruit. A sound tree cannot bear bad fruit any more than a decayed tree can bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. You can tell a tree by its fruit."

2. Theological interpretation of the composition of the Sermon on the Mount. What did Matthew have in mind when he wrote the sermon?

Matthew chose a mount as the setting for Jesus' sermon, thus the name "Sermon on the Mount". According to Luke, however, Jesus delivered the sermon *at the mount* or *on the plain*. For this reason, his much shorter text (Lk 6, 20-49) is also called "Sermon on the Plain".

Lk 6, 17-18

"Coming down the mountain with them, he stopped at a level stretch where there were many of his disciples; a large crowd of people was with them from all Judea and Jerusalem and the coast of Tyre and Sidon, people who came to hear him and be healed of their diseases."

Why did Matthew place Jesus' sermon onto a mountain? Matthew addressed Christians who had their origins in Judaism. Moses had announced the law, the ten commandments, on a mountain, the Mount Sinai. Jesus announced the new law on a mountain, too. Both of them addressed the people of Israel, the people of God. Both of them promised the people that they would *inherit the land*. For the people of Israel, this was the so-called "Promised Land" and for the disciples of Jesus, it was the "Kingdom of God", a spiritual reality rather than a political reality as the disciples expected it to be in the first instance. This helps us to

understand the third Beatitude according to Matthew who wrote: "Blest are the lowly; they shall inherit the land".

Jesus talked to a crowd just as Moses did, he talked like a *teacher, a rabbi, a scribe who knows the law and the prophets as well as the words of wisdom*.

However, the new law announced by him goes far beyond the law of Moses. It is of a completely new quality. This is proved by the Beatitudes. According to the announcement of Jesus, God is not only the source of the laws but also the source of life.

Jesus does not tell his disciples what he expects them to do, but what will happen to them, if they open themselves to the values of the Kingdom of God. For example,

if they are prepared to be poor ...

if they are prepared to make peace ...

if they are prepared to seek justice ...

... their lives will not be cheerful, but nevertheless they will be happy.

The spirit of the Beatitudes and of the Sermon on the Mount encompasses a new way of life.

In Mt 5, 43-48, Jesus describes this new quality of discipleship: The disciples must be made perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect, who rains on the bad and the good. This is the deeper implication of the Sermon on the Mount. The way goes from *love of one's neighbour* to *love of one's enemies*. "Love your enemies, pray for your persecutors" (44).

Mt 5 43-48

"You have heard the commandment, 'you shall love your countryman but hate your enemy'. My command to you is: love your enemies, pray for your persecutors. This will prove that you are sons of your heavenly Father, for his sun rises on the bad and the good, he rains on the just and the unjust. If you love those who love you, what merit is there in that? Do not tax collectors do as much? And if you greet your brothers only, what is so praiseworthy about that? Do not pagans do as much? In a word, you must be made perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect."

The former Mayor of Strasbourg (1958-1983) and President of the European Parliament, Mr. Pierre Pflimlin, who died a short time ago at the age of 93, set a good example in this respect. He was a great European and a devout Christian. In 1945, he called upon Germany and France to put away old enmities, to forgive and to break the vicious circle of enmity. He said that Christian ideas had always been his source of inspiration for politically constructive action. He was an excellent peacemaker and co-founder of the new Europe.

Only some of Jesus' disciples reached this high quality of discipleship, entered this state of maturity. We often have the opposite impression. But the Sermon on the Mount keeps sending out impulses. It encourages us to follow the path of our master and to live our lives accordingly. These impulses might be quite attractive, but the path is not easy to find

because it makes heavy demands on the individual. For this reason, Jesus uses the image of the "narrow gate".

Mt 7, 13-14

"Enter through the narrow gate. The gate that leads to damnation is wide, the road is clear, and many choose to travel it. But how narrow is the gate that leads to life, how rough the road, and how few there are who find it!"

Das auferstandene Buch, a book written by Richard Rohr (published by Herder), provides interesting remarks on this subject.

3. Brief Summary

The Sermon on the Mount and its invitation to "be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect" is always present. It challenges us to do the possible. No-one can be expected to do the impossible, of course, which is an ethical principle. One has to withstand the tension between *what is possible now* and *what is not yet possible*.

The Sermon on the Mount is insofar difficult as it does not provide ready-made recipes like a recipe in a cookery-book which explains step by step what you have to do in order to prepare a certain meal. The Sermon on the Mount sends out impulses – impetuses for reflection and for action. It is up to us how we react on it. Will we respond to the internal impetus, to our own call? And if so, in what way? In this respect, we need *creativity* to find adequate answers to the problems and miseries of our time by using the available resources.

Camilo Maccise, the Mexican superior of the Carmelite order, for example, has formulated a leitmotif for the monks and nuns of the world-wide Carmelite communities. It calls for "creative loyalty to the roots". Today, it is not only essential to abide by the roots but also to add some creativity.

All divine services transmitted by ZDF, one of the German public broadcasters, in 2000, are entitled "Roots and Visions". The programme is accordingly labelled with the symbols of roots and a light. I took up this idea and set all events, including the event in Heidelberg, under this leitmotif.

The reason why I have mentioned this is that I perceive these roots, which are essential for us today, in the Sermon on the Mount and in the Beatitudes. But creativity is needed to make use of them today, to make them valid for us now.

Bishop Klaus Hemmerle has simply drawn up eight Beatitudes *for our times*, which I will discuss later on. But before that, let me provide some theological information on the traditions of the Beatitudes of Luke and Matthew.

4. Luke and Matthew address their messages to a real audience

While both of them use the same source of Proverbs, the same early composition of the central issues of the announcement of Jesus, they focus on *their respective audiences and also on the future reader*.

The Sermon on the Plain written down by Luke (6, 20-49) forms the fundamental tuition which Jesus entrusted to the apostles and disciples (and the people and the readers) who are to pass it on within the Church and beyond (ref. J. Kremer, Lukasevangelium, Echter, p. 71).

The "Sermon on the Mount" written down by Matthew is directed towards Jewish Christians.

5. Differences between the Beatitudes as written down by Luke and Matthew

Luke directly addresses his audience:

"Blessed are you poor; the reign of God is yours." 6, 20

Matthew, however, uses the third person plural:

"How blest are the poor in spirit: the reign of God is theirs." 5, 3

Luke mentions four Beatitudes while Matthew provides nine. Luke's text is apparently based on earlier sources. The five additional Beatitudes written down by Matthew were probably drawn up by himself.

The literary category of the Beatitudes is principally based on two traditions: the '*Beatitudes of wisdom*' and the '*apocalyptic Beatitudes*'. Here, the phrases "*Blessed are you*" and "*Blessed are the poor*" refer to the near reign of God as announced by Jesus. These are *eschatologically* founded Beatitudes. Those who are in the state and condition characterised by the Beatitudes are granted the eschatological salvation here and now and for all times. Matthew uses *condition- and state-related terms as well as ethical terms*. He specifies *the poor* by adding the words *in spirit*. It is not only a *social but also a religious term* which, apart from the actual fact of poverty, also expresses the absolute dependence of man on God, a kind of poverty, which can be overcome only by God's unconditional bestowment. (ref. Christian Schütz, Prakt. Lexikon der Spiritualität, Herder, p.124-125)

The *maledictions* were apparently added by Luke himself. They are intended to emphasise the Beatitudes. He calls upon the rich and the rulers to do everything possible to help the

disadvantaged. He also addresses the poor. They are called to listen to the Word of Jesus and to accept it.

In order to understand Luke's intention, it is useful to look at the biblical background in Is 61, 1ff:

“The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me. He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the lowly, to heal the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners, to announce a year of favour from the Lord and a day of vindication by our God to comfort all who mourn, to place on those who mourn in Zion a diadem instead of ashes, to give them oil of gladness in place of mourning, a glorious mantle instead of a listless spirit.

They will be called oaks of justice, planted by the Lord to show his glory.”

Luke looks at the Word of Jesus from the aspect of salvation, the acts of salvation, the acts of redemption done by Jesus. What was announced by the prophet Isaiah is carried out by Jesus. In the synagogue of Nazareth, Jesus read a text by Isaiah which referred to himself:

“He came to Nazareth where he had been reared, and entering the synagogue on the sabbath as he was in the habit of doing, he stood up to do the reading. When the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed him, he unrolled the scroll and found the passage where it was written: ‘The spirit of the Lord is upon me; therefore he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind and release to prisoners, to announce a year of favour from the Lord.’

... Then he began by saying to them, ‘Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing.’ (Lk 4, 16-21)

Matthew also derives his moral calls from the salvation promised by Jesus, but evolves them on the basis of the Jewish Community's traditional expectations of salvation (being consoled, inheriting the land, seeing God). Matthew has the history of the people of Israel in mind. God is always the first to act. However, man has to follow him. Then, God can redeem his promise. “Only if we trust in God, we are able to do what we are asked to do. But only if we are ready to fulfil our duties, we can trust that we participate in God's perfect reign.” R. Schnackenburg, *Alles kann, wer glaubt*, Herder TB, p. 52

6. The Beatitudes in general

Ps 1,1-2: *“Happy the man who follows not the counsel of the wicked nor walks in the way of sinners, nor sits in the company of the insolent, but delights in the law of the Lord and meditates on his law day and night.”*

Sir 14, 20: *“Happy the man who meditates on wisdom, and reflects on knowledge.”*

Rv 14, 13: *“Happy now are the dead who die in the Lord! The Spirit added, ‘Yes, they shall find rest from their labours, for their good works accompany them.’”*

Beatitudes, or *acclamations of praise*, can even be found in the Old Testament, mainly in the Book of Wisdom. They praise those who live their lives according to the rules of Wisdom, e.g.:

Sir 25, 7-10

“There are nine who come to my mind as blessed, a tenth whom my tongue proclaims: The man who finds joy in his children, and he who lives to see his enemies’ downfall. Happy is he who dwells with a sensible wife, and he who plows not like a donkey yoked with an ox. Happy is he who sins not with his tongue, and he who serves not his inferior. Happy is he who finds a friend and he who speaks to attentive ears. He who finds wisdom is great indeed, but not greater than he who fears the Lord.”

And they can also be found in the Book of Psalms, Ps 84, 5f.13: *“Happy they who dwell in your house! Continually they praise you (5)... O Lord of hosts, happy the men who trust in you! (13)”*

Ps 128, 1: *“Happy are you who fear the Lord, who walk in his ways!”*

(NTD, E. Schweizer, Matthäus, Vandenhoeck, p. 45)

In Jesus’ time, the term *blessed* was used in various ways: as form of salutation, as means of qualification and of admonition, as benedicite.

The paradox here is that any of the poor have ever been blessed or beatified.

Blessedness is a *sphere*. By saluting, beatifying or blessing someone, I get this person into the sphere of fortune and misfortune. Jesus puts the addressed group of people in the sphere of the Kingdom of God. This is a *given* blessedness rather than a blessedness which is attained by one’s own action. Blessedness also has a *prophetic* aspect. It is existing now and reaches into the future. The ambiguous presence is already revealing a part of the unambiguous future.

Sr. M. Osner

[translation from the German original]

[English Bible quotations were taken from “The New American Bible, Benziger, 1970”]

The Beatitudes according to Matthew 5, 3-12

1. The poor: *“How blest are the poor in spirit: the reign of God is theirs.”*

But who are the poor?

The have-nots, those who have nothing to give and who cannot but take, just like *The Beggar* of Barlach, but also those who expect everything of God.

Why does Jesus bless them? Because they are poor? This would be derision.

They are blessed because God is on their side, because He takes their part. They are His favourites. For them, the Kingdom of Heaven has already started to become something real. Heaven is the place where God is, and God has already turned His face to them.

The Old Testament often speaks of the poor.

In the Book of Isaiah (61, 1), the prophet has been sent to the poor: *“The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring glad tidings to the lowly, to heal the brokenhearted.”*

In the Book of Sirach (13, 16-17), poor and just may be identical in meaning: *“Is a wolf ever allied with a lamb? So it is with the sinner and the just. Can there be peace between the hyena and the dog? Or between the rich and the poor can there be peace?”*

According to E. Schweizer (Matthäus, NTD 2, Vandenhoeck, p. 49-50) there is a formulation in Qumran which is most similar to that used by Matthew: The poor or humble in spirit; they are those who know about God, who strengthens weak knees and who raises up all who are bowed down. In the first place Jesus addresses the poor. The merest appearance is avoided that man has to render previous services. Salvation is granted to all the poor.

2. Poor in spirit, what does this actually mean?

“How blest are the poor in spirit [those who know about their being poor]: the reign of God is theirs.”

“According to Matthew, those are blessed who are poor in their way of thinking and feeling, who, in their mind, assume the attitude of the poor and who, in this way, want to show solidarity with the poor.” (cf. H.J. Venetz, *Die Bergpredigt*, Patmos, p. 36)

Indirectly Matthew requests the Christians to assume this new attitude and to practice solidarity in taking the part of the poor, just as Jesus did Himself. In the synagogue of Nazareth He applies the words from the Book of Isaiah (61, 1-2) to Himself: *“The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me. He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the lowly.”*

Let us make some more reflections on the “attitude” to be poor in spirit.

It is a lack of spiritual possessions, not in a sense that I am ignorant, but in a sense that I have received everything.

It can have manifold meanings:

- ⌘ to have respect for something which transcends reason and knowledge
- ⌘ to know about one’s own limitations
- ⌘ to respect the wisdom of other people
- ⌘ to be willing to receive spiritual gifts of others
- ⌘ to recognise that variety means enrichment

People who strive for this poverty in spirit are open-minded, adaptable people who can ask questions, people who do not leave the path, who will never come to a standstill because they are poor enough – and consequently wise enough – to know that life is a dynamic process, that it means learning their whole life, searching their whole life for the truth. They are not self-complacent, but open-minded and sometimes even vulnerable. They are mystic, sensitive to the mystery, people who understand that mysticism does not mean to know nothing about the truth but it means a continuous process of growing into the sphere of truth. In this way God is a mystery and we cannot say that we do not understand it; it would be better instead to say that our efforts to understand will never end. This corresponds to the tremendous and infinite hunger for the truth which dwells in the people’s hearts, if they are really poor in spirit.

The best example for this poverty in spirit is Mary, the mother of Jesus. Her canticle (Luke 1, 46-55), which contains many references to the Old Testament, shows very clearly that God is on the side of the poor and the humiliated.

Sr. Dr. Maria Osner

[Translation from the German original]

[English Bible quotations have been taken from “The New American Bible, Benziger, 1970”]

Eight Beatitudes

Blessed are those who love the interest of the others human beings (of the other groups, the other community) as they love their own – because they will cause freedom and unity.

Blessed those who are always willing to do the first step - because they will discover that the other person is much more open minded than he could show.

Blessed those who never say: “That’s it / That’s enough!” – because they will find the new beginning.

Blessed are those who first listen and then speak – because they will be listened to.

Blessed those who will find out the little piece of truth in each contribution to a discussion – because they will integrate and facilitate.

Blessed those who never misuse their standing – because they will be respected.

Blessed those who are never defended or disappointed – because they will influence the atmosphere of a dialogue.

Blessed those who are able to be defeated and to loose – because the Lord then can win.

Bishop Klaus Hemmerle

Dr. Ela Bhatt

Part II

Interpretation and reception of the text in different cultures

Biblical theology of poverty

(concept: Egbert Ballhorn; realisation: Birgit Mock)

What picture of the poor do the following passages express?

What picture of GOD do they show?

1. Proverbs 24,30-34
2. Amos 8,4-14
3. Luke 1,46-55

The bible shows a various picture of poverty and those cannot be reduced on a common point of view. Some of that sentences are here presented and interpreted.

In the old and new testament you can read about the economic and theological dimension of poverty.

In the old testament you find

1. a tradition of wisdom (book of proverbs): poverty is the product of laziness.
2. and a prophetic tradition (amos): poverty is the product of exploitation by the rich (as the rich have neglected the commandments of GOD)

In the new testament the image of poverty has two dimensions: a social one and a spiritual one.

1. Poverty will be destroyed by GOD, he will raise the poor and the mighty ones.
2. To live in (the spirit of) poverty is to live in the spirit of GOD (luke).

Gandhiji on Poverty and Employment

(by Dr. Ela Bhatt)

Reflection on Gita

by Dr. Ela Bhatt

St. Peter/ church – Birgit Mock

Part III

Cultural Programme and elements of the seminary

Morning reflection

by Birgit Mock

Indian Bhajan: Jesu, Jesu (singing)

Dancing Mirjam (slide)

Meditation: Mirjam is a prophet. She is dancing over the water and clapping her timbrel. Her hair is flowing. Her whole body is in movement. She wears a dress with the colours of the rainbow – the symbol of the bond with GOD.

She moves between the waves – red and green – what are opening like a narrow street. The powerful water is pulling down the walls of barbed wire.

We remember the story: the people from Israel have been in slavery with the Agypt. And GOD heard the cries of his people. With Moses he led them out of the country – through the ocean – the people from Israel were going on dry foot between the waters. So God saved them from the Agypt Kind. Mirjam, the sister of Moses, encouraged the people with her music. She led them on their way. She motivated them to sing to the praise of GOD: “Sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously.” Jahwe, the god of Israel has been the liberator and the saver of life. The given freedom now has to prove at the lives of the widdows and orphants, the foreigners and landless.

(nach Getrud Casel. Mirjam und der Aufbruch der Frauen. In: Hoffnung den Ausgegrenzten, hg. von Erwin Mock, Schwabenverlag, 1996, 62-69)

Our LORD, creator of the world,
you have created the variety of the people
The hate turned them against each other
Unite them through your spirit
And bring the world through him to completion.
Amen

Ubi caritas et amor, ubi caritas, deus ibi est (singing)

St. Trudpert: Rosemarie Osner, Birgit Mock, Karl Osner, Ela Bhatt

St. Trudpert: Sr. Germana, Sr. Maria Osner, Ela Bhatt, Karl Osner, Birgit Mock

St. Peter: Birgit Mock, Ela Bhatt

St. Trudpert: Ela Bhatt

Artist Helmut Lutz and his wife in their house in Breisach

Mr. Lutz and Ela Bhatt

Breisach: Opening of Mr. Lutz work “Europe”: Ela Bhatt, Karl Osner

St. Peter/ library: Wolfgang Mecklenburg explains the architecture and philosophical ideas behind

In dialogue: Sr. Germana, Sr. Maria Osner