

BEYOND SURVIVAL

The Two Standards and the Way of Love

Kenneth L. Becker

POVERTY IS NOT POPULAR. INSULTS NEVER WERE. Poverty as solidarity with the poor—supporting them, meeting them where they are, and amplifying their voices—has as its goal ultimately to help them become less poor. The poor don't want to be poor. We who are less poor are orbited by a multitude of 'necessary' things. And one nods in agreement with Shakespeare's Iago that 'good name in man and woman' is 'the immediate jewel of their souls'. So what can be said for the strategy Ignatius of Loyola attributes to Christ in the Two Standards meditation: that of encouraging people to desire first poverty, then insults and finally humility?

Has the ideal of poverty been outlived? Is it a name for a set of behaviour patterns we would do better to analyze and get rid of? For under the name poverty have developed lifestyles of dependency, immaturity, irresponsibility, coddled trust in providence, and self-punishing insecurity and deprivation. These are hardly positive values. The question then arises: are there really any such values left to be found and discussed or lived out in terms of poverty? And can we see anything in Ignatius' 'insults' other than a pathological self-denial, the grovelling 'Lord, I am not worthy!' of a perverse asceticism?

The following reflections are based rather on the premise, 'I am worthy'. They look at what our worthiness consists in, at the role played by our needs, and at what poverty and insults have to do with all this. Let us organize our reflections by using Abraham Maslow's 'pyramid' of the fivefold basic human needs: physical life-support; safety and security; belonging, acceptance and affection; respect and self-respect; and self-actualisation.¹

¹Abraham H. Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being* (New York: Van Nostrand, 1982 [1962]), p. 3.

Survival and Personal Identity

The first goal of any organism, including us humans, is to survive. Survival involves the first four levels of need. Though for us with our human potential this is not enough (hence the fifth level of need), I must nonetheless first survive physically (the first two levels of need) and socially (the third and fourth levels). I must be and continue to be *me*—through satisfying my physical needs, protecting *myself*, finding my place and role in relation to others, and having my value in my world.

This is what C. G. Jung referred to in describing the development of the ego-personality and its often anxious and excessive need to be. In the course of this process, he emphasizes, other needs and issues of human living are neglected. They are consigned to the unconscious psyche, where they can fester and cause problems because they are not integrated into our everyday life. The development of the individual identity is not in itself bad; indeed, it is essential to human living. My effort to be and to survive as 'I', however, can become a consuming concern, and drive me into an individualistic blind alley. I am then preoccupied with who I am, how I am, what I am—my things, connections, talents, power, friends, whatever else makes up my world—and I live only according to my survival needs. That means I need power to ensure my security: physically, I must be the biggest, toughest bully on the block; or intellectually, I must be right, I must have the truth; or materially, I must have enough or more than enough land, food, or money; or in my relationships I must manipulate people and make myself agreeable or indispensable.

At its best this individualistic egoism ends up in a social contract, since I cannot survive alone. We agree on such values as honesty, mutual respect and protection, and justice, so that each of us can fulfil our needs and thus survive as the people we are. 'You scratch my back and I scratch yours.' Rarely does such a contract work, however, as we can see from all the violence we do to each other, whether in our individual lives, in our communities, or in our national and international interests and operations. Instead, it is a case of 'dog eat dog and may the strongest dog win'—we satisfy our own needs and survive at the expense of others. Moreover, contracts can be broken

and thus require enforcement, which can result in legalised violence, and often serves to disguise the exploitative violence of survival needs.

A Need for More than Survival

More importantly, however, such a contract is just not enough for truly human living and actualisation. We can see this in the case of infants: the love they receive must indeed be real love, unconditional and initiatory in the relationship, not based on reciprocity (I will love you as much as you love me). If the child does not receive this love, it learns to be a manipulative, savage survivor. Thus the social contract is self-defeating—as our experience demonstrates so abundantly. But as a person becomes spiritually aware—aware of the need for human living—it becomes even painfully clear that just surviving, even amid all the back-scratching and merely contractual relations, is not enough. We are made for something more, for greater, higher things, whatever they are. We need to find, grow in, and live that ‘more’ in order to be actualised, to become what we are equipped or destined to be as human beings. Here we move beyond Maslow’s first four needs, centred as they are on survival, to the fifth: the need for self-actualisation and meaningful living.

***Just
surviving
is not
enough***

This ‘more’ process in which one seeks self-actualisation can take three forms. One is a kind of regression, to an infantile identification with something greater that dissolves one’s own identity. The second is that put forward by Jung: the pursuit of individuation, of equilibrium within the self. The third is closer to the Gospel: a process of growth beyond one’s own need into an authentic human love. All three strategies can involve versions of Ignatius’ Two Standards with its invitation to desire poverty and insults as a way of arriving at humility. In all of them we can apply the gospel dictum, ‘those who want to save their life will lose it, while those who lose their life will find it’ (Matthew 16:25). What does this mean in each case, however, and what does the process lead to?

Collective or Cosmic Self-actualisation

First of all, I can identify myself with something greater than myself, abdicating my own identity and autonomous responsibility. I overcome the need to survive by being taken up into, or perhaps swallowed up by,

a unifying project or process of greater life, or truth, or power, or identity, or nonentity. This constitutes a lapse into an unconscious mode of living. In such a condition I have no real personal identity, but identify instead with the greater-than-myself. Structures and movements which foster such identification—ideologies, traditions, sectarian groups and organisations, the state or the party, social trends and ideals, and so on—are in a sense wombs for the weak, swaddling clothes for the soul. It is as though infantile unconsciousness is retained or regained.

In a context of such dependency, 'poverty' would mean that I personally have nothing—everything belongs to what I belong to or live in, or is simply meaningless, *maya*;² survival needs are simply denied. People caught up in such a pattern may well feel as 'insults' the negative reactions of others to their beliefs, and may even welcome their humiliating effect. Often more subtle, and more devastating, is the damage inflicted on a person's self-image and self-esteem through the organization's indoctrination and physical and psychological treatment of its members. The result is a sort of humility: a conviction that I am personally nothing at all, worthless, a drop lost in the sea of whatever greater meaning I believe in. In this sense I find my life by losing it.

Jungian Self-actualisation

The second possibility is what Jung proposes. Through the process of individuation, one becomes a truly human and integrated individual by relating consciously and responsibly to the whole psychic life, both the individual psyche and what Jung calls the collective or objective psyche. The fragments of our psychic reality that we have projected or rejected and repressed in the course of developing and defending our personal identity need to be recovered, recognised, integrated and realised in some way; and the movements of the greater psychic reality of which we are a part, the collective psyche, need to be recognised and discerned and lived with. All the while, however, we are to remain, or rather become, the conscious, responsible persons we are meant to be in collaboration with the whole psychic reality in which

² In Vedantic philosophy, *maya* is the physical world of the senses, considered illusory and unimportant, that conceals the unity of absolute being.

we live, which Jung often also calls the Self. Self-actualisation is the actualisation both of my own personality and of the Self in which and in relation to which I live truly as a human person. This means that we have to look at, revise, or even break down the structures and strategies according to which we have established ourselves and survived as the persons we have been so far. (In practice, of course, this psycho-spiritual process is by no means as linear as the following presentation suggests, but meanders with the course of a person's problems and progress.)

In coming to consciousness we emerge from an unconscious identification with the world and assimilate that world, or parts of it, to ourselves, according to our needs. For I can be me only by using things to survive. But if we identify ourselves according to the things we have and think we need, our true identity as human persons remains unconsciously projected onto the things. We are not ourselves but our things. In so far as we have defined our existence, meaning, and value through things, we are faced with our poverty—our possessions are not enough and ultimately leave us profoundly unsatisfied. Accumulating more and more is no solution. I need to find my own human reality, to withdraw my projections of myself from all my survival means and strategies: from my possessions, from all that I call 'mine' and that I use to secure my survival, including my ideas and even 'my God'. Then I can start to see myself, who I really am, without them. I stand there poor, even fearful, for the process not only dismantles long-cherished psychological mechanisms and the identity I have worked out for myself, but also touches real basic survival needs.

***Accumulating
more and more
is no solution***

Poverty is about *what* I am; insults are about *who* I am. Moving along in this psycho-spiritual process, therefore, we come to the next two levels of survival need: belonging and respect, my need to be somebody with and for other people. This lays me open to insults whether true or false, and involves what Jung calls the *persona*. This is the constellation of images and roles that we have assumed and cultivated in our relations with other people. If I have projected my real worth and identity into my *persona*, it is insulting to discover how ultimately worthless that is, no matter how valuable I have been or think I have been for society. I am not my role—my office, power, talent, influence—nor the sum of my roles. The unconscious sneers at

my pretensions and efforts, and says 'So what? Who are you, anyway—really?' The ultimate insult is death, which is no respecter of persons.

Deeper psychic dynamics are also involved here. My shadow, everything I have neglected or repressed in growing into my social identity, persists in producing problematic behaviour that gives the lie to whom I pretend to be. My self-image, my sexual identity, and all my life-structures and orientations are questioned through the Anima or Animus figures (archetypes representing the opposite sex of a person) and through other archetypal configurations. These are psychic images arising from the unconscious psyche and representing or acting out (as we experience, for example, in dreams) our psychic life and its problems and challenges. If my life is unbalanced, and if psychic elements have been neglected or frustrated, these archetypal figures may be bloated with repressed or derailed psychic energy. Each step in the individuation process can be threatening, and indeed felt as insulting. By living and working with these archetypal contents and dynamics, one is led deep below and far beyond one's ego-self. This ego-self can no longer be the answer to the question 'Who am I?'

Slowly I learn that I in my ego-sovereignty am not master of my destiny. Individuation is a sort of dying, through which one loses the absoluteness of one's individual conscious existence to live a new life as an active and passive participant in harmony with the greater life of the objective psyche or Self. That, according to Jung, is the humility of a true human individual self.

Self-actualisation as Living Love

The third approach to self-actualisation beyond the struggle for mere survival is that advocated by Jesus of Nazareth and Ignatius of Loyola: I need to grow beyond my concern about myself, my own survival and self-establishment, to the greater, freer consciousness and responsibility of a truly human, loving person. 'Loving' here means that the person's attitude is active, inviting, relational, life-sharing. Dynamically but respectfully, one who loves desires and hopes for the self-actualisation of others as autonomous loving persons, each in his or her individual way. Indeed, it is in our self-actualisation as loving human persons that the pursuit of our other needs becomes humanised. Then, for example, we can not only eat, but make our meal a thankful celebration of shared life and love. Likewise with the other needs: our quest for

security is balanced by openness and concern for others; our group-belonging becomes loving community; our achievements become gifts.

Understood in this kind of context, Ignatius' talk of poverty and insults is therefore pointing out how we need to get beyond our survival needs in order to be able truly to love in a free, conscious, individual and responsible way. Thus the question is not merely, 'What do I really need to survive?' but rather, 'Is survival all that human life is about?' How do my needs and my things fit in with real living, that is, my actualisation through loving others? Simple survival becomes secondary: what matters is that we live fully as human beings. Our survival needs must be relativised and transcended so that we can love. This love can take heroic forms. Usually, however, we are challenged to live love beyond our self-interest in the multifarious jobs, exchanges, sharings and concerns that fill our everyday life. Even in the simplest dimensions of life we are to be stretched beyond ourselves, our own ego-interests, to a greater way of living.

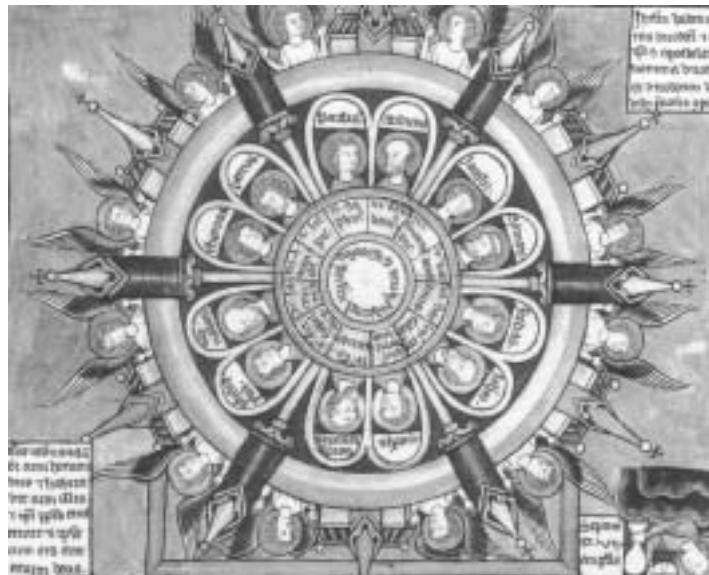
However, our survival needs—as Jung points out in his own approach—can stand in the way of our achieving actualisation as loving human beings. If I have projected myself, my reality and my actualisation, onto the things I need (or feel I need) for surviving and being me, or onto my roles, onto how others recognise and value me, I am not within myself but lodged externally, and I cannot be free to love as I should and need to. In my effort to be 'I', I have become 'not-I'. But to love, one must be an autonomous, responsible individual. I must withdraw my projections if I am to shift my perspective from survival to self-actualisation through love.

In so far as I am not living my life, but letting my projections live it for me, my inner forces and frustrations, my feelings and needs as well as the pain and fear holding me back from my own living and loving, may well be dramatized in the bloated, energized archetypal forms Jung describes. For my own life is disordered, askew, and chaotic, and yet it is somehow ordered to be human, to be what I ultimately need to be: a loving person. The archetypes reflect and express my neglected and painfully unfulfilled needs, including my need for self-actualisation through self-transcendence.

Under the rubric of poverty I need to examine the things I need, or think I need, to survive, in order to see what is really needed, and to balance my survival with the need and call to love. Where am I so

wrapped up in and identified with things that I cannot stand open before others, ready also with 'my' things to foster their living as human persons? Is the meaning of 'my' things located simply in me, or are they here for you and for us as we seek lovingly to share our lives? Poverty means living in a way not simply determined by our need for a secure world. It involves the freedom to be insecure, to doubt, to listen to other views and other truths. For our dogmas, too, can be a means of satisfying our ideological survival needs—a defence against the threats of doubt and error; against the fear of what might happen to me if I think or believe what is wrong; against the fear of doing the wrong thing, of being in the wrong place or of going there someday. So my concern for my survival may take the guise of concern for 'the truth', for an institution or organization, for a 'power', including 'my God', for anything in terms of which I see my life and salvation defined or assured. The full *kenosis* of love disentangles me from these safety lines, leaving me free for the challenge of meeting others, and inviting and fostering them to live out their lives in their own human forms.

Again, Ignatius' talk of 'insults' implies a shift of focus from 'Who am I?' and 'How can I survive and be somebody?' to 'Who are you?' For my survival needs move me to develop relations and social networks in which **I** know who **I** am, what roles I have, what I have to do and to expect, how I have to perform and what I have to achieve. I also pin others down to their roles and to my expectations. In all this I



seek the acceptance and approval of others, or power over them, and the security of social patterns. Love, however, asks first of all not 'Who are you for me and my needs?' but 'Who are you? And what can I do to enable you to become more fully you?' The situation opens wide. It now includes include unplanned and unfamiliar options, and the 'wrong' people as well as the 'right' people. My roles become secondary. I am nothing and have nothing that I need you to have, be that truth, healing, support, consolation, power, wisdom, guidance, or whatever. Whether you like or accept me is not paramount, but rather that you live and love in your own life. This attitude, however, hits me squarely in my social survival needs, especially if I have defined myself firmly in terms of their satisfaction. The unsettling and threatening effects work as insults to who I think I am.

To relinquish my cramped hold on my existence and identity, to let go of the things, structures and mechanisms with which I have tried to assure 'my' survival—this is scary. Survival has to do with fear. Self-fulfilment has to do with love. 'There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love.' (1 John 4:18) Survival asks: 'What is going to happen to me if . . . ?' Love asks: 'What can happen to you if I open to you, share life with you, and invite you to be you, a loving person?'

This implies, of course, that one has been loved and invited to live and grow as an open, loving individual. For if one has not been loved, one learns to survive at all costs—life's first law. One concentrates on one's survival needs, and the need truly to live gets lost. Whereas philosophers speak of proofs for God's existence, Ignatius' Contemplation to Attain Love invites us to realise and share the life of a God active in love. If one can be convinced that one is loved, one can dare to love, to live as a truly human person. This is the goal of the Exercises and the invitation of the gospel. We need to be loved in order to love, and our greatest calling is to love others so that they can live. Love invites love.

But can this freedom to love be attained through spiritual or ascetical practices and structures alone? In many cases, I think, it can only be the result of a long healing and growing process that may require psychotherapeutic support and guidance. To try to realise it in other ways, or to establish it as a system, may lead to the false forms or aberrations of poverty and self-denial mentioned above. 'Poverty'—

'religious' or not—can be a means of survival at all costs, just as wealth and power can. If love has not given me permission to live, then I may make sure that I need as little as possible—both of things and of esteem or love—to ensure that I have enough to survive. Or I may keep myself poor because through unlove I have been convinced that I do not deserve anything: I am not worth anything; I have no right to anything; and if I assert my right to live by taking or having something, 'they' will punish me. I may need to work through, feel, and thus relativise, much of the unlove in my life in order to become free enough of its dictates to grow as a loving individual. This also means releasing my desperate grip on things and roles, of course; and no miser holds onto his money more tightly than neurotics treasure the survival strategies that have saved and served them. In dismantling my structures of 'necessary' things and roles, the 'poverty' and 'insults' are inevitable, and quite threatening, aspects of the process.

Loving may mean relativising my survival needs, but it does not mean denying or ignoring them. On the contrary, my legitimate needs, both physical and social, are a framework for the other person's love. If I love others, I want them in their turn to be loving people who respect others' needs, including my own. Love invites and challenges to love. So not only my strength but also my weakness, not only what I can give but what I need, are part of my invitation to the other to be a loving person. This presupposes, of course, that I am clear and honest about my own legitimate needs. Ideas of justice try to set guidelines for the shape and direction of our loving where the needs of various people are in conflict. Intending the survival (on all four levels) of others, so that their life can be more human, is the minimum of love. It is well and good that I love and care for myself and my family—provided I do not let my workers and their families starve, or leave them stranded with health problems. Through just taxes the needs of children for education, of the poorly-off for health care, or of the impoverished for food and shelter may limit the amount of roast beef I have on my table or the size of my car.

Yet love always remains a living, shifting, creative challenge, ambiguously incarnate in individuals, entangled in their needs. And it persists; it insists on loving and hoping, whether others respect my needs or not. You may take my bread, calumniate or ignore me, sneer at my good intentions—but love is, or tries to be, independent of my survival needs. I am willing to suffer their denial, to some extent at

least, for love of you. At the same time, I am not truly loving you if I let you do anything you want to me or to others—my love may even require that I call in the police.

My fulfilment of my survival needs can also masquerade perniciously as love. I need you to need me, to feel my love and care; I need to save and help you; I need you to be loved, to know the truth, to be saved, to be freed from your problems, and so on. I need my child to be smart, safe, successful, well-behaved. The exercise and efficacy of my 'loving' then become my means of identity and value, and you become the focus and instrument for my psychosocial survival. Hardly a self-transcendence, my 'love' goes no farther than myself. This is the tricky paradox of love. For we do truly need to love—this is our ultimate self-actualisation as human persons. But we can attain this only by transcending our needs, including this very need to love. It is the paradox of Jesus' way: 'those who lose their life for my sake will find it' (Matthew 16:25).

***Fulfilment of
survival needs
can masquerade
as love***

When Ignatius commends 'poverty', therefore, he is confronting the survival need for things, including abstract things such as intellectual and psychological security. I need them, but they do not determine who I really am. Survival is keeping what I am. The poverty that is the freedom to love is giving what I am, to the point of risking loss.

By commending 'insults' Ignatius is confronting social survival needs—my accomplishments, reputation, relations and connections, roles. I need them, but they do not constitute my personal identity and value. Love's free invitation risks your rejecting me, my ideas, and even my best wishes and hopes for you. All that I have and all that I am become ways that I am living love: my true human self-fulfilment as an individual, conscious, autonomous and responsible loving person.

This 'self of love' does not posit a greater Self nor the loss of my individual responsibility in a greater All. Far from extinguishing my individual identity and conscious responsibility, the self-transcendence of love requires them. Love is and must be concrete, incarnate and specific. Only as a real individual person can I love; and only as a real person can you be loved. But my ego-stance is relativised and transcended. If I love, I cannot control my own survival and success so anxiously, and I must let you deal with yours—I cannot know or do it better for you. Love is humbling. It can only invite you to be you, a particular incarnation of love, without knowing how that will be or

should be, or what its consequences may be for me. I can only challenge you to live in love through my existence and my needs and those of others. So the final humility of self-actualisation in love is simply that I am I, with my history, needs, possibilities, trying to be free to live and to give what I am and have; similarly you are you. This humility sees each of us as an individual incarnation of love. It avoids comparing people; rather, it lets each person be, inviting them to grow in living love.

When I let a desire for poverty and insults relativise survival needs, my goal is not a spiritual attitude of 'God is all' in the sense of 'having only God' or of 'only God having me' or of 'trusting God to provide' or 'trusting God to know what's best when God doesn't provide'. That is still a survival perspective. True freedom of spirit means believing and trusting that love is more important than survival, that love constitutes my true life. This is to believe in God-who-is-love, the essential and the ultimate in our living and our meaning as human beings.

Through the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius leads us to the Contemplation to Attain Love. Attaining love is what following Christ, taking up the cross, dying and rising are all about. Above all and through all we are to love. Ignatian spirituality is a spirituality of love; Ignatian mysticism is a vision and experience of the love-energy that can unite us in one Body, one Anointed—a body of Christ in which the individual is not lost, but rather an indispensable member, fully realised in conscious and responsible self-transcending love. It is Augustine who has perhaps expressed this vision most sharply and beautifully: 'there will be one Christ loving himself'.³

Kenneth L. Becker has studied at St Louis University, the Gregorian University and the University of Innsbruck, Austria, and has been engaged in various teaching, pastoral and research activities in the USA and Europe. He now lives in Switzerland, juggling a mixture of teaching, writing, and counselling.

³ Augustine, *Homilies on 1 John*, 10 (on 1 John 5: 1-3), n. 3.