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The
GOSPEL
— in —
SOLENTINAME

Ernesto Cardenal

Translated by Donald D. Walsh

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Then Jesus looked at all those who were surrounding him and he said to the man: "Hold out your hand." The man did so, and his hand was sound. But the others were very angry, and they began to wonder what they could do against Jesus.

REBECA: "Because they were selfish. They had no love for the sick man. They didn't care about anything except keeping the Sabbath. Then when they saw that Jesus performed the miracle, they got very angry, and what they wanted was to kill him. Because that miracle went against their religious practice."

FELIPE: "They were angry because they saw that Jesus had a law different from their law. The same thing happens now with the rich, and with all of us who are selfish: We don't like it when we're told we must help, serve others, share."

TERESITA: "What Jesus was showing them, when he put that man in front of them, is that they had religious traditions that wouldn't allow them to practice love."

I said that among the oldest manuscripts that are preserved from the Gospel according to Luke there is one that has a saying of Jesus not in any other manuscript or recorded by the other evangelists, and for that reason it has been left out of the Gospels. That manuscript says that Jesus saw a man working in the field on the Sabbath and said to him: "My friend, if you know what you are doing, you are blessed; but if you do not know, you are wicked and you are breaking the law." Some think that this may be an authentic saying of Jesus, and I am convinced that it is, because it is very revolutionary. It's hard to think that those words would have occurred to anyone except Jesus himself.

FELIPE: "It's clear. If he had the mentality of the Pharisees but didn't observe the Sabbath, if he thought work was a sin but was doing it anyway, he was doing evil. But if he did the work because he knew that the only precept is the law of love, he was close to the kingdom of heaven. A man who works believing that work is a sin is doing it out of avarice. The man who believes that his work is not evil is doing it for love. He's working for others, not just for himself. He thinks that to plough the field so there will be bread, even though it's the Sabbath, is a good thing."

MANUEL: "It means that if a person works on Sunday, you can say the same thing to him: If you don't know, if you believe what you've been taught and you don't conform, you're evil; but if you know

that that precept of not working on Sunday is nonsense, you're close to the kingdom of heaven."

I said afterwards that the advances of medicine were due to Jesus. The first Christians, following the example of his cures, devoted themselves to taking care of the sick. That wasn't done before. The sick were abandoned to their illness. That Christian concern for the ill produced the advance of medical science. But nowadays in capitalist countries medicine has become very unjust. Its advances are no longer progress for humanity but a retreat, for most of them are only for the rich. Often enormous resources are used to prolong for a little while the life of someone beyond any hope of recovery, while countless children are dying for lack of the most elementary medical services. The same thing can be said about this classist medicine that was said by Jesus: That not to do good is to do evil. That not to save a life is to destroy it.

WILLIAM: "The truth is that in today's world there are two kinds of people: Some are on the side of life and others are on the side of death."

41.

The Other Cheek

(Luke 6:27-31)

But to you who hear me I say: "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who insult you."

There was a long silence. Nobody spoke. We heard only the hubbub of some children playing in the church, and outside the murmur of the lake. I asked if anyone had any comments to make. Everyone kept silent.

"What do you say, Laureano? Don't you want to speak?"

He smiled and said: "No, I don't want to speak; that nonsense is very confusing. That's crazy."

OLIVIA: "That's a very difficult thing, but we have to do it, because the Gospel orders us to do it. The words are very clear."

I asked if they thought this was practiced much here in Solentiname. And some answered Yes and others No.

ANDREA, Oscar's wife, said: "Nonsense! We answer evil with evil. When they insult us, we insult back."

Another said: "I believe this is practiced quite a lot in this group."

LAUREANO: "It's true that we don't usually insult each other."

REBECA: "I understand that God wants us all to love each other, not to have enemies, because he has come to give us love here on earth. He hasn't come to give us hatred. Then what he wants is for all of us to love each other and not to have enemies. For all of us to treat each other with love, because he ordered it and that's how it's written."

I said: "Rebeca has told us one thing very clearly: The kingdom of God is love, and therefore we cannot have hatred in that kingdom. And therefore we are commanded to love our enemies. Is that clear enough?"

WILLIAM asked: "Even class enemies?"

I said: "In the class struggle we are struggling to put an end to the division into classes. As long as we are divided into classes, with opposed interests, we have to have class enemies. But if we struggle to unite with them and to form all together a humanity united in classless society, then we are struggling for love and not for hatred. Marxists sometimes talk about hatred. And Che has a phrase or two in which he says that the revolutionary must hate. But I think that is just a way of talking, a little like what Jesus says: 'He who does not hate his father and his mother is not worthy of me.' We Christians have always said: 'We must hate sin and love the sinner.' I have the impression that Che never fought because of hatred of other people but because of hatred of injustice. I was very pleased by a phrase that I heard from a Marxist priest in Chile, Father Arroyo, on one occasion when we had a small Eucharist in his home. A priest was defending revolutionary hatred and he said to him: 'Only love is revolutionary, hatred is always reactionary.'"

OLIVIA: "What Rebeca said was very well put: God is love and he has come to give us love, and we must have love and give each

other love. But love is not expressed by repeating that little word 'love.' Love is expressed simply by loving each other. If someone doesn't love you and you can help him out in some way, you can put an end to that hatred. Love destroys hatred. This commandment I believe is for unity."

FELIPE: "And so in the community there would be no enemies. This is also a practical teaching, then, for the community."

MANUEL: "But we have class enemies. And how are we going to manage to struggle against the enemy if we have to love him? How are we going to defend ourselves?"

MARCELINO, slowly: "If we hate, we are no longer struggling against the enemy . . . We are the enemy, because we are evil . . . He says we must love the enemy, but he doesn't say we can't fight them . . . The question is how are we going to fight them. If they hate, the weapon against them is love. The difference between us and the enemy is that we fight them without wanting to oppress them, only to liberate them. They do hate us. But we are no longer the opposite of them if we answer hatred with hatred . . . I say that it is with love that we can defend ourselves."

If someone strikes you on one cheek, offer him also the other cheek. And if someone takes your coat from you, let him have your shirt also.

JULIO RAMON, incredulous: "Does this mean that the poor person must suffer and let people take his things away from him?"

LAUREANO: "It seems to me that this applies to the rich: They should let people take their things from them. He talks about a coat, right? And poor people are always in shirtsleeves [laughter]. So when the revolution comes and their farms are taken away, their factories, their extra houses, they shouldn't put up any resistance. And if they lose one piece of property, let them offer up the other piece."

FELIPE: "Let them give it up freely and give more than is asked of them. This is for the haves. What can the poor give, if they don't have anything? The Christian should be detached from everything, not wanting to defend property with force."

MANUEL: "Then what it says about the other cheek is only for the rich, and the poor should never turn the other cheek?"

I said: "This is also a precept for the poor, and it is very revolutionary. I mean that we must pass over our own personalities, put

aside all personal pride and all individualism, fight not for our own interests but for those of other people. This doesn't mean not to fight. It means not to fight for yourself but for others. And Christ says to turn the other cheek, but it's *your* other cheek, not the other cheek of other people. Christians who don't fight for the revolution aren't turning either one of their two cheeks. They're turning the cheeks of undernourished children, of the hopelessly ill, of abandoned widows, of workers robbed of their work."

WILLIAM: "And I believe that in the revolutionary struggle, turning the other cheek, your own other cheek, is also a very effective weapon. The man who gives the punch feels worse than the man who takes the punch. The work stoppage, the peaceful demonstration in front of guards armed with machine guns, the hunger strike, the takeover of factories or churches or universities: all these are turning the other cheek. And I remember what Gigi, our Peruvian friend, was telling us about what the students in Lima had done during the Belaúnde regime. When a guard was beating a student the rest of the students would speak to the guard with love and so would disarm him. And if the guard went on beating, they would say: 'Hit him harder, if it makes you feel good, hit him harder, don't stop, hit him.' It's a way of appealing to the good that's in the hearts of the most evil of people. And something like this happened here with that guard who was bothering us so much because of what we were saying in these meetings and he kept on saying that he was going to screw us because we were communists. The boys and girls of the Youth Club went and talked with him in a friendly way. They treated him with love, and he changed. Not right away. At first he denounced them to the commanding officer at San Carlos, saying that a group of young people had gone to his house to attack him. And he went on saying bad things about all of us. The group went back again. They told him he was poor like them, one of the exploited. And he admitted that he was, that he was very badly paid. Now, even though he's not in that post, now he's even our friend. And it was clear that at heart he was not an evil person. He was a guy who thought he had to be evil because he was a guard. And when he saw some friendly human beings, who didn't answer him with hatred, he changed, and his bad will toward us disappeared. This too is blessing those who curse us, doing good to those who hate us. There are some other examples of this. When Batista's army would capture guerrilla fighters, they murdered them at once;

when the guerrilla fighters took wounded prisoners, they took care of them and then set them free. Che tells how once when Fidel freed some wounded prisoners, he gave them what little medicine was left. And Che protested to Fidel because their troops were left without any medicine. But Che behaved just the same in Bolivia. Inti Peredo, who fought with him, tells how he treated the enemy without any ill feeling and took care of their wounds. General Torres, who was just overthrown in Bolivia, earlier fought against Che's guerrilla fighters and was captured by them. He told how he became a leftist because of the good treatment that Che had given him and because of the discussions they had had. This also is offering the other cheek to the armed enemy. But there is a saying of Martí's that Che repeated a lot: that we ought to feel any blow to anyone anywhere in the world as if it had been on our own cheek."

DONALD: "It's obvious that the greatest example of that was given by Jesus Christ himself, who forbade his disciples to use arms to save him and who died praying for his enemies."

ALEJANDRO: "A clarification: It's a different thing to let yourself be beaten because you're weak or a coward. You do it because you're brave. And sometimes maybe you won't turn the other cheek but will react differently. When Jesus was beaten in the house of Caiaphas, he protested against the man who struck him, and he reasoned with him. Maybe by this he was trying to show us what he meant by 'turning the other cheek.'"

I said: "These words of Christ can be understood in a reactionary way (and they have been so understood many times) or in a revolutionary way, as we are understanding them now. And I believe that the only correct way of understanding them is the revolutionary way."

TOÑITO (a student who is going to be a Jesuit): "But we must also remember what it says at the beginning: 'But to you who hear me I say . . .' He's talking to the poor. They must love each other. If somebody takes something away from you, maybe they need it more than you do, and then you shouldn't ask to have it back."

RAMON: "Then are we defending injustice? The person who takes from us what we maybe need? The poor have to defend what little they have because what they have isn't enough for them. Can the rich take things away from the poor?"

REBECA: "Jesus is talking inside the justice area. Everything is justice there, because the Gospel has no injustice. Everything will have to be done with justice, without exploiting anybody. We have to give

ourselves to each other, but all inside the justice area, with no exploitation, no selfishness among us. That's the way it seems to me."

ADANCITO, softly: "If we all ought to give things to each other, how much more should the rich hand over what doesn't belong to them, and how much more reason there is to keep the rich from taking things from the poor."

GLORIA, Olivia's pretty young daughter: "Well, the only thing to do is to struggle so we'll all live equal, nobody will exploit us, nobody will oppress us, nobody will be rich, and nobody will be poor."

Give to anyone what he asks of you; and he who takes from you what is yours, do not ask him to give it back.

"It's the same thing in different words," said somebody.

"But stronger," added somebody else.

TONITO: "I believe we shouldn't understand this just passively: that when somebody takes something from us that they need, we should give it to them. We're also shown that when we don't have what we need we ought to take it. If somebody has more things than they need and somebody else needs them, they are obliged to give them up. The Gospel is saying it here. And therefore we're obliged to take them away, I believe."

JULIO (after we have all been silent): "I think this is clear. Why should they take things away from the poor if we don't have anything? The Gospel must be talking here of taking things away from the rich, who are the ones that have things."

I said that we see clearly that here it says that those who have must give, and that they mustn't try to keep things but share them with others. And so we'll have that society that Gloria talks about, in which we're all equal.

DON VENTURA: "And if somebody steals? Should stealing be permitted also?"

TERESITA: "If somebody steals, you have to give to that one, too. Maybe not your shirt, but certainly some instruction. He did what he did through ignorance. He has to be taught that he shouldn't do it."

Do unto others as you wish them to do unto you.

JULIO: "Just as the rich want us to work for them, so also they should work for us."

I said that this system is called socialism. Everyone works for everyone.

FELIPE: "To want for everyone what we want for ourselves means that we're all going to be equal."

I said that here Christ is really planning a new society for us. I asked Laureano: "Now do you agree?"

He smiled. He blushed a little. I asked him again: "Is it clearer now?"

He nodded. And he said: "I was very confused before."

42.

Do Not Judge Others

(Luke 6:37-42)

Do not judge others, and God will not judge you. Do not condemn others, and God will not condemn you.

OLIVIA: "I think 'judge' means to think evil about somebody. I'm missing a ring and I think that what's-her-name stole it. And maybe she didn't. I judged her unfairly."

Somebody else said: "But you can suspect somebody if she is suspicious . . ."

And another: "But you can't be certain if it's not clear to you."

TOMAS PEÑA: "That means that you ought to talk about what you see and not talk about what you don't see."

OLIVIA: "Well, if we talk when we see, we're not judging."

TOMAS again: "In other words, talking about what you don't know about."

ALEJANDRO: "It seems to me that the word 'judge' means to make a judgment on a person. The other thing would be false evidence, or slander."

FELIPE, Tomas's son: "To judge here, it seems to me, means to condemn. Because it says in the same verse: 'Do not condemn others.'"

FELIX: "And how many times we condemn others unjustly. The jails are full of innocent people, because a person can be jailed for a simple suspicion: I mean if he's poor and has nobody to defend him."

JOSE ARANA: "And how often the innocent are in jail and the criminals go free."

Forgive, and God will forgive you.

Somebody asked: "And how can you do this in today's society, forgive crimes?"

GIGI, our Peruvian friend, answered: "This can't be applied to today's society, which is unjust. But a Christian society, or a revolutionary society, which is the same thing, can and must reach the point of having no repression, no jails, no police."

TERESITA: "But can't a community judge, a community like ours?"

MARIITA: "It seems to me that a just community, that is, a community like this one, can judge."

WILLIAM: "This passage refers to the judges (in the current system), the police, the guards, that is, all those who do the repressing. But it also applies to us. We have to treat each other with forgiveness and not with harshness, and nobody should act as a judge or a policeman or a guard toward his brother. Nobody should control anybody, because we're all equal and nobody is better than anybody else."

DONALD, Alejandro's brother: "We must forgive each other's offenses and go on treating each other always like brothers. Like brothers who get along well and not like brothers who get along badly."

"And as for forgiveness in this society," said someone else, "the truth is that the rich are always absolved and the crimes of the poor are punished very harshly. There is no forgiveness for them if they are poor."

I said that a boy had been here who was a delinquent, one of those who broke into homes. He had reformed and he told us that they would arrest the thieves in Managua and a week later they would free them if they promised to pay a thousand pesos to the police and the lawyer. And then the thief had to break into another

house to get the money; soon afterward he would be arrested, even though he hadn't done anything, and once again he would have to steal to pay the thousand pesos. And so he could never reform (although some of them wanted to). This boy hadn't stolen a thing for two years but they kept arresting him. Finally, although he was no longer a thief but an honest Christian, he had to steal a wallet from a man to be able to pay his fare to somewhere else.

GIGI said: "But in Cuba and in China they don't usually arrest delinquents. They put them on farms where they are out in the open air working on something productive and getting trained and they have sports and get political education and they can go to visit their families on weekends. So they get rehabilitated, not punished by society but forgiven by society. And it seems to me that that's what the Gospel is telling us here, that there shouldn't be jails or punishments, and that the only law of society should be the law of love."

Give to others, and God will give to you. He will put into your purse a full measure, packed down, shaken down, and stuffed. Because with the measure with which you measure, you will be measured.

I said that the measure was a measure of grain. Jesus was talking to them in *campesino* language, as we might say a "bushel."

LAUREANO: "This must apply to those who have something to give. And those who have something to give are the ones who don't give. We don't have anything to give; the poor don't have to give anything."

OLIVIA: "Nevertheless the poor give a tiny bit of what they have. There's scarcely a poor person who won't give to another brother, to another neighbor. If he has a pound of salt, he shares it with his friend who asks for some. And he never lets him go away without what he needs."

I said: "There's one application for the rich, the one that Laureano has made, and there's another application for the poor, the one that Olivia has made. There are different social classes, and the Gospel doesn't apply equally to all the classes. The rich ought to give, as Laureano has said, until we are all equal and there are no classes and we have a society in which everything is shared just as the poor share that pound of salt that Olivia speaks of. There is a saying of Jesus which is not in the Gospels but which we know

through Saint Paul, who must have heard it from someone who had heard Jesus say it: 'It is better to give than to receive.' But it is also good to know how to receive. There are some who know how to give but not to receive. And there are some who don't know how to give or to receive. They only know how to buy and sell."

GIGI: "But when we all give and receive, as Christ says, what we'll share with the generosity of the pound of salt will no longer be a pound of salt but a great abundance and wealth for everyone."

MARCELINO: "It's not only money that you can give; also knowledge, teaching people to read. Or you can give time, working for the Cooperative, for community causes."

COSME: "Another thing you can give is good advice."

JULIO: "And that's something that poor people can really give to rich people."

"What advice?" someone asked. And JULIO answered: "To give to the poor. To stop being rich."

GIGI: "And then we'll have a different society, without rich people, when everyone will give their work and their time, not to pile up things for themselves but for all of society."

"First they have to begin to give back what doesn't belong to them," said somebody.

And REBECA: "But the rich, if they're going to understand these things, have to read the Scriptures. Because the rich who don't even read the Scriptures don't understand anything. They're deceived by their selfishness. God knows the rich, and he said it would be hard for them to be saved, unless they study the Scriptures."

I said that there have been some rich people who have really studied the Scriptures. Then money no longer interested them and they devoted themselves to serving others. That had been the case with many saints, and also with many revolutionaries. And nowadays among middle-class families there are young people who have no interest in money, because they are Christians or revolutionaries, or because they are at the same time Christians and revolutionaries."

"Those have already stopped being rich," said someone.

OLIVIA: "Rebeca said that the rich should know the Scriptures, but the truth is that they know them, but they don't pay any attention to what they say. They're more interested in money than in salvation, it seems to me."

REBECA: "But if they understood the Scriptures, these Gospels, they would change."

COSME: "There are people who don't come close to believing in anything!"

TOMAS PEÑA: "They don't like to hear these things. If they hear them at Mass, they probably leave and go to another Mass."

JULIO: "They know, man! What happens is that they don't do what they know they should. There are others who don't read the Gospel but they practice everything it says and they stand for love and everybody being equal."

TOMAS: "I imagine some would rather go on some spree, to one of their great parties, than go to Mass. Because they probably say: 'Everyone there will be taking shots at me. Because there's a lot of poor people there and they're going to be fighting with me.'"

OSCAR: "There are a lot of people who don't have any religion and they say their God is money."

I said: "There are others who want to be both Christians and rich. Even Christians and millionaires. And they think they can do this if they give to charity."

OLIVIA: "It seems to me that this business of our giving to others so that God will give to us, or that God will give to us as we give to others, is the same as saying we must do to others as we want them to do to us. Because the truth is that God does to us as we do to others."

MANUEL: "It seems to me that the business about filling the purse with a full measure is that God always gives more to those who give. He increases what they have. I mean he makes them more generous, he makes them better hearted, he gives them more love. And also in the resurrection he can give them an even better prize, now that they're free."

GIGI: "Giving doesn't make you poor is what the Gospel says here; giving makes you rich. Rich in love, as Manuel has said, but also in material things. I mean that in an economy based on giving and not taking away there's much greater abundance of material goods than in an economy of avarice and selfishness."

WILLIAM: "But the main prize, it seems to me (the filled purse, the full measure), is sharing it all with others. It's love."

OSCAR: "But look, William: with the same measure that you give with, you receive. Because if you are hardened toward another person, your heart hardens. If you see another as evil, and he's not evil, it means that you're evil. And to the extent that you see someone as evil when he isn't, to that extent you're evil. So judging

another person as evil makes me evil. Condemning another condemns me."

*Can a blind man perhaps act as a guide for another blind man?
Won't they both fall into some hole?*

OLIVIA: "That's the priests who don't know about this. They read the Gospel a lot and they don't know that it's against the rich. And they get you all confused. I remember the priests used to preach to us that the Protestants were blind guides. But they themselves were on the side of the rich and the powerful. They were really the blind guides. Catholics or Protestants, blind guides are the ones who read the Gospel that says, 'Woe to you rich!' and they're so comfortable they don't see it. They preached a lot of things, but they didn't preach love, and they didn't practice love. And we were blind in that same chain, and we didn't show any love for others either."

MANUEL: "Blind Christians led by other blind Christians. The wrong leading the wrong."

MARIITA: "I think there are parts of the Gospel that they don't read. They don't know about this."

GIGI: "They do read it but they don't understand it. They explain it to themselves some other way."

OSCAR: "I don't think they read it. If they did they'd understand it as it is, because it's very clear. The rich know more than the poor because they've studied a lot, yet we poor people understand this. Why don't they understand it if we understand it?"

GIGI: "The rich have studied more than the poor, as Oscar says, but they don't know more than the poor. They don't know more than you do, and the proof is that all this is very clear to you but they don't understand it."

WILLIAM: "It says 'fall into the hole.' The hole is the society of injustice and exploitation into which we've fallen. Because the guides were blind. And all the people have been blind with them. This is alienation. Until the time comes when the people open their eyes, and this is conscientization."

No disciple is more than his teacher, although when he ends his studies he will become like his teacher.

"The teacher is Jesus Christ," said GLORIA.

REBECA: "Those who live in great luxury, it seems to me, whether bishops, priests, or any other disciples of Christ, want to be more than their teacher, because their teacher was poor."

MARIITA: "At the Last Supper he began to serve them with an apron on to make them see that he was their servant. This way he tried to teach them that nobody should be the master of anybody else, but that we must all be servants of each other. That was his teaching."

WILLIAM: "He was a carpenter like Jose Arana, and a man of the people. And anyone who wants to be above the people wants to be more than Jesus."

OSCAR: "The studies will end in glory, in the other life. And then the disciples will be glorious like Christ, but only if they were equal to him in this life."

JULIO, his brother: "It seems to me that studies are the awareness that we develop about equality, the conscientization, feeling that we're all equal. And at the end of the studies will come the glory, when all of us are going to be really equal."

"Christ is equal to all of us, and there won't be teachers anymore because we'll all be equal to one another and also equal to Christ," I said.

How can you see the mote in your brother's eye and not see the beam that is in your own eye? How can you say to your brother: "Brother, let me remove the mote that is in your eye?" Hypocrite! First take out the beam from your eye and you will thus be able to see well to take out the mote from your brother's eye.

DONALD: "You can always see clearly the evil in others and not the evil in yourself. But this is not seeing clearly. Because if you have a beam in your eye you're not seeing anything."

OSCAR: You see the other person's error and not your own (or my own, I mean; why should I say 'you'?). And that's an error that I commit. Maybe bigger than the error that I'm looking at. It's the same as I was saying before, about judging: the way I judge I'm judged. Because if I judge bad I make myself evil. Noticing somebody else's speck is judging him, is seeing him evil, and that makes me worse. Because I don't do it to reform him but because I think I'm better, and therefore I'm worse. I'm a blind man who wants to