Foreword

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An occupational hazard of so-called academic theologians is that our scholarship will become, indeed, merely "academic." This very real danger weighs particularly heavy on those of us who claim to be contextual or practical theologians, whose theological reflections claim to be rooted in the praxis of flesh-and-blood communities, especially marginalized communities. (Indeed, the constitutive link between theology and communal praxis is the responsibility of all theology, but that's a topic already addressed at length in many books and articles elsewhere.) Ultimately, then, our scholarship must answer to *el pueblo*, to those communities which the Gospel proclaims are the privileged bearers of God's Word in the world. This responsibility implies that, precisely as Christian scholars, we must accompany those communities in practical, everyday ways. We must also collaborate closely with those grassroots pastoral and community leaders who so often function as a bridge between *el pueblo* and academic and ecclesiastical institutions. Our first task is to listen: to the poor, to those community leaders immersed in the everyday lives of the poor, and ultimately to the living God revealed in a preferential way among the poor, in the lived faith of the poor. Dr. Paul Farmer's life and work were the embodiment of this dynamic, this preferential option for the poor. As Jorge José Ferrer argues in his chapter, Paul Farmer was the epitome of what Antonio Gramsci called an "organic intellectual."

Like so many others, I was first introduced to Paul Farmer through Tracy Kidder's bestselling book *Mountains Beyond Mountains*. However, my personal relationship with Paul began several years later in 2011. In May of that year, he gave a now-famous speech at the Harvard Kennedy School commencement entitled "Accompaniment as Policy." Unbe-

knownst to me at the time, he referenced my own work on accompaniment in that speech. I had no idea that Paul Farmer had ever heard of my work, much less read any of it. Needless to say, I felt incredibly honored. Most of all, I felt a sense of affirmation in the face of those ever-present fears that my scholarship would remain ensconced within the ivied walls of the academy. As it turns out, Paul had been introduced to my work by Jennie Weiss Block OP, his Chief-of-Staff, spiritual director, and herself a theologian. Since then, Jennie, Paul and I continued our conversations around the central theme of accompaniment, so fundamental to Paul's vocation. Paul and I also shared a common, long-time friendship with Fr. Gustavo Gutiérrez, who had a profound personal and intellectual impact on our lives and work.

Over the years, I observed the extraordinary influence that Paul had in the lives of so many of my own students at Boston College, several of whom went on to work at Partners In Health. In 2013, I invited him to join me at Boston College in a public conversation on the role of accompaniment in public health and theology. There was a standing-room-only crowd of over six hundred people, and hundreds of others had to be turned away. (Of course, I was under no illusions about who they were all there to see.) The entire evening was a truly moving demonstration of the power of one man's Christian witness to inspire hope in a world so often bereft of hope, especially among the young.

And yet the Paul Farmer who spoke that evening, and whom I was blessed to know, was anything but some sort of serious, pious social crusader. Oh, he was certainly a social crusader but always one who did not take himself too seriously, who—whether in the struggle against Ebola or socioeconomic devastation—had a preternatural confidence that all was indeed in God's hands. The struggle itself was not his but God's. That confidence made Paul one of the most liberated persons I've ever met. He had the indefatigable sense of humor, that "lightness of being" of someone who could joke around or laugh at the drop of a hat—not because he didn't take his work seriously (he did), not because he didn't take the persons whom he accompanied seriously (God knows, he did!), but

because he didn't take himself too seriously. Indeed, he was free not to take himself seriously precisely because he took other people so very seriously; when he was with you, he was with you. He had that remarkable gift of attention that, the French philosopher Simone Weil suggested, is really the essence of love. (See Leo Guardado's chapter herein.). Paul lived the accompaniment he preached and thereby changed people's lives.

Above all, what inspired and transformed Paul was God's preferential option for the poor. His discovery of God's preferential love for the dispossessed, the unwanted, the "disposable" persons (in the words of Pope Francis) helped him rediscover his own Catholic faith and launched him in his vocation as an *accompagnateur*. As a student at Duke, he had been profoundly impacted by the murder of Archbishop Oscar Romero, which in turn led him to start reading liberation theology, especially the writings of Gustavo Gutiérrez. At the same time, he wore his faith lightly—again, because he wore his own persona lightly. He often seemed reticent, even sheepish, about talking too explicitly about his faith. When around theologians, he liked to make lighthearted, self-deprecating remarks about his supposed lack of theological sophistication despite the fact that, beneath his intellectual humility, lay a truly profound theological mind. (For a fascinating, perceptive analysis of how Paul's sophisticated knowledge of his faith undergirded so much of his thought, yet was often revealed only in seemingly innocent, spontaneous, usually humorous asides or observations, see D. Brendan Johnson's chapter in this volume.) Paul lived St. Francis's famous adage: "Preach the Gospel and, if necessary, use words." His actions themselves spoke volumes; he didn't need a lot of words.

But words he did speak, and write, for Paul was also every bit a brilliant scholar and teacher. He transformed the field of public health by transforming the very vocation of scholar-teacher-practitioner, as his friend Gustavo Gutiérrez had done in the field of theology. Inspired by Christ's preferential love for the poor, Paul entered into "pragmatic solidarity" with the dispossessed of our world. He did so to assure them that they matter, that God loves them, that they are not forgotten or

abandoned, that they are indeed human beings. He accompanied the poor in their struggle for life in the face of death, for health and dignity in the face of disease and humiliation. And through it all he listened ... and learned. He learned of the incredible personal, communal, and spiritual resources the poor draw on in their everyday struggle to survive. He learned that the obstacles to that survival are not just microbes, bacteria, and viruses, but (in)human global economic and political structures that systematically keep the poor poor, the sick sick. He learned—as he repeatedly admonished us—that those microbes, bacteria, and viruses themselves have made a preferential option for the poor. And, finally, he brought those lessons back home to Harvard, to the Brigham, to anyone in our cloistered world of libraries, lecterns, and labs who would dare to listen.

Paul Farmer was a healer, in the deepest possible sense of the word. Something else he learned from the Gospel was that healing must involve the whole person: mind, body, and spirit. As a doctor, he healed his patients not only through the compassionate, expert medical care he extended to them, though he certainly did that. He healed them by listening when others were deaf, by staying (and staying and staying) when others had long left, by asking their names when others treated them as mere objects of pity, at best. He took to heart the question Gustavo Gutiérrez always asks those of us who claim to want to help the poor: "Could you please give me the names and addresses of those poor persons?" (See the chapters by Guardado and Brian Volck in this volume.) Paul could give Gustavo lots of names and addresses. That's actually a good definition of accompaniment: the ability to give names and addresses, or to say whether someone even has an address. You can't heal the whole person unless you know their names and addresses, their kids' names, their favorite jokes, their deepest sorrows, and the God they pray to. Then you can tend effectively to their physical wounds—because you now recognize whose wounds they are.

That's real contextual and practical theology! It can be practical only because it's first of all contextual—names and addresses. Finally, it can be

theology at all only because it's contextual and practical. That is, if as theologians we claim to speak of the God of Jesus Christ who has privileged the poor, we cannot possibly do that so long as we still consider them underprivileged. Our theology will be little more than idolatrous wordsmithing. This is not in any way to romanticize the poor; Paul was adamant about avoiding that danger which is, in fact, simply another form of objectification. (Those pesky names and addresses are also a safeguard against romanticization.) As Gustavo Gutiérrez never tires of reminding us, the poor are privileged not because they are necessarily good but because God is good. The discarded and disposable persons of our world are accompanied by the God who is also discarded and disposable, born in a stable, murdered on the outskirts of town, and revealed in the borderlands of Galilee—always an outsider. If our theology is to have any credibility, it must be born there as well.

But it can't stay there. Jesus would not have been crucified had he just hung around with the peasants in Galilee. He had to go to Jerusalem. What he learned in Galilee, he brought back to the centers of power. He translated the language of the Galilean peasants into a language comprehensible in those centers, in order to subvert the religious and political structures of power which victimized those Galilean peasants. That's what prophets do. That's what Paul Farmer did. That's what we Christian theologians are called to do: take what we have heard on the streets, in the churches and clinics, and translate those lessons into a language comprehensible in the world of libraries, lecterns, and labs in order to call that world into question. We scholars owe the poor our very best scholarship, for only the very best scholarship will stand any chance of effectively confronting the global structures of injustice. Paul's credibility in the halls of power stemmed not only from his work as a doctor and anthropologist in Haiti and Rwanda but also from his work as a scholar, teacher, and mentor in Boston. The incredible success of Partners In Health would not have been possible without both. Nor would his transformative impact on both have been possible without his impressive

ability to bridge the worlds of Haiti and Boston. That's why he spent his life on an airplane.

Paul was also a bridge between the intellectual worlds of medicine, anthropology, and theology. I was always grateful for how seriously he took theology, not only as ecclesial and pastoral reflection but also as a scholarly discipline. His work with Fr. Gustavo and myself is but one example of Paul's genuinely collaborative approach to all his work; he was not just an *accompagnateur* to his patients but also to his scholarly collaborators. As someone who has attempted to do theology in collaboration with other disciplines, especially the social sciences, I was humbled by his intellectual generosity in this regard. This was but another instance of how he served as an example to so many of us. Paul's scholarship was characterized by a generosity and humility that was but the intellectual dimension of his personal generosity and humility—which is not to say that he wasn't deeply passionate, because of course he was. Again, he was passionate about ideas only because he was first passionate about the flesh-and-blood persons with whom he worked; the latter passion drove the former, not vice versa.

Among the hundreds of personal anecdotes about Paul that have been recounted over the years, one that has always stood out for me as a prism through which to understand this many-faceted Christian disciple is a story told by Jennie Weiss Block in her beautiful book, Paul Farmer: Servant to the Poor. There she describes meeting Paul for the first time:

> Paul was sitting in the living room [of his house] reading when I arrived. As he put his book down to stand up to greet me, I glanced down and saw the title of the book he was reading: *Selected Writings by Meister Eckhart*. Eckhart (1260–1328) was a German Dominican friar, brilliant theologian, and mystic. Erudite, profound, and dense, Meister Eckhart is not an easy read ... I couldn't help but ask, "You are reading Meister Eckhart?" "Trying to, but it is not easy," was Paul's humble reply. All these years later, we both still thank Meister Eckhart for bringing us together.

As Jennie implies, if one were to ask most people which book Paul Farmer might be reading were they to encounter him sitting on his couch, the writings of a medieval theologian and mystic would hardly be the first book that would come to mind. And yet ... the more I thought about it, the more Jennie's anecdote made perfect sense, the more it reflected just who Paul Farmer really was.

Perhaps Meister Eckhart's most well-known saying is: "The eye with which I see God is the same eye with which God sees me: my eye and God's eye are one eye, one seeing, one knowing, and one love." Here Eckhart tries to convey in mere human language the fundamentally inexpressible experience of union between the human and the divine. Or, in the words of St. Augustine, "God is nearer to us than we are to ourselves." Can there be a more accurate depiction of Paul Farmer's understanding of what it means to be a human being, whose inherent dignity and rights derive not from ourselves but from the God who lives and breathes in us, especially in those who have been denied their dignity and rights?

In other words, Paul understood that, before accompaniment is a strategy it is a spirituality. To break bread with the poor is to open ourselves to the One who "became known to them in the breaking of the bread." If we reduce the praxis of accompaniment to a method or technique for delivering health care effectively (though it certainly does that), we undermine its very essence as a revelatory encounter—with other persons, of course, but even more profoundly with the God who sees us through their eyes. Indeed, the effectiveness of accompaniment as strategy will be dependent upon the authenticity of accompaniment as compassionate, revelatory encounter; the usefulness of strategies for social structural change will be dependent on the uselessness of our everyday friendships with poor persons. And another word for "uselessness" is Grace. In the end, social transformation and personal conversion can only be two sides of the same coin. Paul knew that the revolutionary and the mystic are one.

Given Paul Farmer's understanding of his own vocation, this collection of essays by prominent theologians and ethicists is a fitting tribute to his

ongoing legacy. As the book's subtitle suggests, the essays all reflect Paul's vision of the integral relationship between the theological task and the prophetic demands of the Gospel. This book is also fitting because of Paul's deep interest in theology and theological ethics in particular. *A Prophet to the Peoples* makes very clear Paul's brilliance not only as doctor and anthropologist but also, indeed, as theologian. In her essay, Jennie Weiss Block recounts that "[Paul] much admired theologians and often said that if he ever got another degree, it would be in theology." Though he never had that opportunity, maybe this book represents a sort of honorary degree in theology. If Paul took theologians seriously (as he most certainly did), with this wonderful book theologians return the favor.

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