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obedience of faith*

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# Editorial

There are approximately 5,000 slum colonies in Bombay. More than half of Bombay's 10 million plus inhabitants live in dehumanizing conditions of poverty, inadequate housing, sanitation and water. They are the unevangelized of this city. Less than 10% of Bombay's 600 churches work among them. They leave it to the para-church agencies who are able to reach only a fraction of the people in need.

Calcutta is the same stow, only worse. Half a million children from 3 years upward toil on an average 14 hours a day in factories and in cottage industries in shameful conditions earning less than 5 dollars a month. There are at least 20,000 child prostitutes in Calcutta. Jesus cares; do we his disciples?

At the beginning of his ministry Jesus announced his manifesto in the synagogue at Nazareth, ending with 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing' ([Luke 4:21](#)).

In him the Kingdom had come. Empowered by the Spirit he preached good news to the poor and through them to the whole community. The response of the poor was a sign to the rich, perhaps the only sign they would respond to. Ministry to the poor authenticates the good news for all people.

The dichotomy between evangelism, church growth, compassionate service and social justice is a judgement on both the theology and practice of the Church. Liberals give priority to justice, evangelicals to evangelism or to compassionate service—with the result that we all fail in church planting. The poor neither hear nor see the gospel. They remain unevangelized. Commando raids from the outside are no answer. Only incarnational servant-hood will be able to train the poor to reach their own people. But the cost is more than most of us are willing to bear. The love of Christ and the empowering of the Holy Spirit alone can enable the Church to fulfil this ever-widening task.

This issue of ERT is dedicated to the Consultation 'The Evangelization of the Poor' sponsored by the Ethics and Society Study Unit of the Theological Commission of WEF and held October 17–23 1993 in New Delhi. Seven women and fifteen men participated drawing together theologians and practitioners [p. 100](#) from ten countries. The hermeneutical process involved a serious dialogue between the Scriptures and a wide range of case studies and theological reflection. The result is a creative and living theology. A selection of papers and case studies is included in this issue. A larger book and study guides for churches and missions will follow. [p. 101](#)

## Priorities in Our Common Task: Ministry to and with the Poor

Bruce Nicholls

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*The consultation, The Evangelization of the Poor was held in New Delhi, India, 17–23 October and was sponsored by the Ethics in Society Study Unit of the Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship. Twenty-two theologians and practitioners participated*

*and gave papers or case studies. As Coordinator of the Consultation, I was privileged to give the opening address. In it I attempted to review our failures, the ever-increasing dilemmas of the Church's ministry with the poor and to call for a fresh vision and commitment to identify with the poor in our common task.*

Editor

## **I. A CONFESSION OF FAILURE**

We must begin this consultation by confessing to Almighty God that as local churches we have failed in our ministry to the poor. There are exceptions of course, but in the majority of churches that we represent, we have not been faithful to our Lord's call or followed his own example to reach the poor for Christ. We have neither served them nor evangelized them. We confess there are very few churches among the urban poor and slums of our cities. We thank God for the example of the para-church agencies—the relief and development agencies and the missionary societies—that have identified with the poor in sacrificial service and witness as they are able. We will hear some good case studies in this consultation.

Some denominational bodies have ambitious schemes to serve the poor but few have been able to implement them. We also thank God for the many institutions— [p. 102](#) hospitals, schools, orphanages, and agricultural institutes—that are ministering to the poor but this does not relieve local churches of their responsibility to reach out to these who are deprived and oppressed. With the exception of the Pentecostals and some Catholic churches or base communities as in Latin America, we are a middle class community, establishing middle class churches in middle class suburbs. Our attempts at evangelism have been hit and run and not incarnational. Alas our churches are inward-looking, preserving their gains against a hostile world. In many countries we are a ghetto Church. We are fragmented often through no fault of our own. Our churches are absorbed in managing the institutions inherited from the overseas missionary agents. This has led to multi-litigation and further fragmentation of the Church. As we come together let us confess our sin and ask the Lord for forgiveness.

## **II. THE POOR ARE THE UNEVANGELIZED**

The AD 2,000 and Beyond Movement has identified the 10/40 latitude window around the globe as the belt of unevangelized people. It is significant that the majority of the poor live in the same region. Despite advances in technology and communications the number of the poor in the world is rapidly expanding. Fifty percent of Bombay's 10 million people live in slums. By 2020 it will be 75%. Five percent of the people of India are very rich and own more than 50% of the land while more than 50% of the population live below the poverty line. Among this 50%, at least in the cities, there are very few churches.

We live in an age of escalating violence—abortion, female infanticide, rape, murder, arson, terrorism, civil war. Violence brings rich countries to poverty, and poverty intensifies violence. Uganda, Ethiopia, Burma, Cambodia, to name a few, were once rich countries, but now they are desperately poor.

Violence and poverty increase the incidence of disease. The threatening scourge of AIDs, especially in the poor countries, further adds to suffering, death and poverty.

The women of the poor suffer greater oppression than men. Their educational levels are lower; they work longer hours, they are harassed and abused by the male members of society. Children are being sexually abused and forced to work long hours in factories. The village poor become bonded labourers.

### III. A CALL TO THINK MORE DEEPLY ABOUT THE GOSPEL

At the heart of the gospel is good news about relationships. Humankind—male and female—are relational beings. Each has a personal relationship to other personal beings. Our self-understanding as persons is in relationship to others. A person in isolation is a non-person. Our primal relationship as human beings is in relation to God our Creator. Being created in the image of God all people have a deep hunger for God. In the Fall we are sinners and in our rebellion against God this relationship with the Divine is fragmented and broken. We are self-centred not **P. 103** God-centred. We recreate God in our image and we worship the gods we have created.

The Gospel is good news that in the Cross Christ has atoned for our sin and in our repentance and faith the relationship is restored. We become new men and women in Christ.

The gospel is good news about Jesus Christ who at great cost emptied himself and became one with us, dying in our place and rising again for our justification. In the resurrection of Christ we are given hope of the transformation of the whole person, spirit and body, as one integrated person. Therefore, the gospel is both spiritual and material in its relationship. Evangelism is the verbal proclamation of the gospel to the whole person in relation to God and one's neighbour. Social justice is the gospel of transformed social relationships in the light of our relationship to God in his attributes of love and justice. While evangelism and social justice are distinct in their focus, they both address issues of broken relationships with God and with human society. There can be no dichotomy between loving God and loving one's neighbour. Together they are the sum total of the commandments of God.

The gospel is addressed to all people but in particular to the poor, for the poor are those who suffer more than others from spiritual despair, material deprivation and social ostracism as Jesus outlined in his Nazareth 'Manifesto' ([Luke 4:14-22](#)). Those who are poor in spirit are those who in their powerlessness cry out to God for mercy. To them belongs the Kingdom of God.

In giving priority to the salvation and liberation of the poor Jesus gives a model for the redemption of the rich and powerful. They must humble themselves, acknowledge their helplessness and look to Christ for salvation.

The liberation of the poor demands the liberation of person—individual and communal—from the bondage of religious fatalism, idolatrous and cultic practices and from a state of guilt and shame. This liberation also demands a recovery of human dignity through meeting the personal needs of food, clothing and housing and establishing mutual respect with others. The miracle of the gospel is the transformation of individuals, families and communities, and also of the structures of society, economic and political. At its very heart this requires a transformed human nature. Chou en Lai of China was right when he saw that unless human nature were changed, Marxism would not succeed in transforming society. The message of the gospel is that God in Christ alone can change human nature and create the new society.

### IV. THE CENTRALITY OF THE CHURCH IN MISSION AND EVANGELISM

In the words of the Lausanne Covenant, 'The Church is at the very centre of God's cosmic purpose and is his appointed means of spreading the Gospel.' The Church is both the believing community of the people of God, and the necessary structure of order to enable the Church to fulfil its mission in the world. **P. 104**

In the Old Testament the institutionalizing of Israel in monarchy, priesthood and prophethood was designed by God for the salvation of the people and the elimination of poverty ([Lev. 25](#)). But unfortunately institutionalized Israel became the agent of poverty and oppression. We see this clearly in our Lord's rebuke of the Pharisees and the Scribes of the law.

Tragically, the same has happened in the Church. A classic example is the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America where the people have been oppressed and reduced to poverty. Thus one of the central concerns of this consultation must be the renewal of the Church in all the dimensions of its life. In the midst of the celebration of the building of Solomon's temple, God called the people to return to the Lord and receive forgiveness and the healing of the land ([2 Chron. 7:14](#)). The renewal of the Church for mission includes renewal in the power of the Holy Spirit, reformation in theological understanding, ethical cleansing in the purity and honesty of the Church's administration. It also demands a renewed missiological vision for the whole world beginning with a new vision for the poor. For where there is no vision the poor perish.

Above all else our mission to and with the poor calls for a deeper commitment to Christ and his Church. We love him because he first loved us. Such discipleship is costly, for following him means taking up our cross daily.

May this consultation be a catalyst for a new vision, and a new commitment to Christ and to the poor.

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**Dr. Nicholls relocated from New Delhi to Auckland, New Zealand from where he will continue his several Asian and international ministries. p. 105**

# Evangelism and the Poor

Bong-Ho Son

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*In this carefully reasoned article the author analyzes the different types of human suffering and the relationship of poverty to sinful lifestyle, to structural evil and to being poor in spirit. He raises issues in the relationship of salvation to liberation from poverty. In evangelizing the poor, he argues, distinctions need to be made between the absolute poor, the relatively poor and the voluntarily poor. He calls on evangelists to accept voluntary poverty in order to witness to the poor.*

Editor

More than half of the world's population live in 24 poor nations. Of the ten countries with the largest number of non-Christians, eight have serious problems with poverty.<sup>1</sup> Bringing a witness of Christ to the poor has become one of the heaviest burdens of Christians today. We have a large obligation to motivate ourselves for the task, to be equipped with effective strategies, and to go into action.

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<sup>1</sup> Tom Houston, 'Good News for the Poor' in *Transformation*, Vol 7, No. 1 (Jan./ March 1990), p. 6.



## I. POVERTY AND SUFFERING

The poor require our attention because they are suffering people. According to Tom Houston, "The poor to whom Jesus and the early church brought Good News included the naked, the hungry, the disabled, the oppressed, the imprisoned, the sick, the bereaved, widows and orphans."<sup>2</sup> People thus qualified become poor and the poor can very easily become one kind or more of the people mentioned. Evils usually come in groups and poverty represents many negative sides of human life. The poor in the Bible, **P. 106** especially in Luke and Acts, represent suffering people.

### 1. Physical Pain

Suffering physical pain is the primordial experience of man which cannot be reduced to any other experience. It is the final criterion of all that is negative. Everybody except a few masochists dislikes and tries to avoid pain. This is why all forms of punishment inflict pain directly or indirectly upon the culprits.

Animals also suffer physical pain; pain which is direct and immediate. But men are also destined to suffer, in addition to physical pain, psychological and social pain. Some of these pains are directly or indirectly related to the physical, while some of them are not related but may be just as painful.

All suffering calls for our genuine attention and compassion. We pay attention to anything unusual, but unless it is related directly or indirectly to suffering, we are not so serious about it. We can be somewhat playful about other things. With anything, however, which has to do with suffering, either of ourselves or of others, and either in this world or the next, we cannot be anything but earnest and concerned. We can even speculate that there would be no need or desire for salvation if men were free from suffering. Without suffering, we would not have had the culture we have now and might have become some other kind of living beings than the ones we are.

Hunger is one of the most primitive and common forms of pain, and as such it is one of the most severe. It is not only painful in itself, but it is also the cause of many other pains and sufferings as Tom Houston has listed.

Malnutrition, exposure to excessive heat and cold, and other forms of physical discomforts are hard to bear in themselves, but they also threaten further pains. Men share the physical pain of hunger and cold with animals, but men are gifted or cursed with imagination to fear future pains which may aggravate them.

### 2. Social and Psychological Suffering

What makes poverty still more painful is its social and psychological effect. The poor feel not only helpless, desperate and angry but they are also ashamed of themselves. They feel inferior and deprived of their human dignity. The sense of shame and indignity is subjective but it depends to a great extent upon the attitude of others toward them. The poor are disliked and deserted by society ([Prov. 14:20](#); [19:20](#)), and it is especially difficult in the societies of the so-called shame cultures where one's subjective attitude is decisively influenced by the way others look on an individual.

One is ashamed of oneself when certain negative consequences are supposed to have been caused by one's own faults or moral shortcomings. The poor are regarded in most societies as not entirely free from moral blame.

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<sup>2</sup> *Idem.*, pp. 4-5.



Poverty is looked upon as a curse of supernatural forces, and the latter are regarded as irresistible but not always wholly capricious. There must be some reason for the curse either in the afflicted person or in some of their ancestors. In a word, p. 107 the one cursed with poverty is suspected of certain moral failure which has invited the misfortune.

The universal phenomenon of associating poverty with moral failure finds its root in ambiguities in interpretation of the causes of poverty. Laziness is counted as the primary cause of poverty in most cultures. In fact, there are many who are poor because they are simply lazy. Careless living, over-spending, speculation etc., are undoubtedly direct causes of poverty. One cannot, therefore, criticize as totally groundless the association of poverty with personal blame.

Many social determinists, including some Christian theologians, blame the structural injustice of capitalistic societies as wholly responsible for poverty. It is true that social oppression is a fundamental cause of poverty.<sup>3</sup> But one cannot explain all cases of poverty and other personal ills in terms of unjust social structures. Various personal traits such as laziness, unreasonable speculation and dishonesty are also to blame. Those personal traits are also indirect consequences of wrong structures, but such an explanation is too deterministic for Christians to accept. Samuel and Sugden report that 'a repeated experience throughout the world is that the poor respond to the gospel and after three to four generations become economically middle class'.<sup>4</sup> This seems to be clear proof of the fact that a change in one's outlook can exert at least some influence upon the economic status of a person or(?) of his descendants.

But not all nor even a majority of cases of poverty are due to any moral failure of the poor themselves or of their ancestors. Since the last century, sociologists and philosophers have made it clear that the majority of the poor are victims of social injustice rather than moral culprits.

At the same time, the plain and undeniable fact that many poor people are lazy and careless confuses our general judgment upon poverty. Even in those cases where laziness is not the direct cause of poverty, people are not always patient or careful enough to discern its true roots. Most of us are content with the stereotypical association of poverty with personal failure, so many poor people have to suffer unjustified defamation. Thus they are doubly victimized: they suffer undeserved poverty and they receive undeserved blame.

The pain of poverty is especially acute when the poor have to be at the mercy of the rich for survival or for other necessities of life. To depend upon others' mercy is itself humiliating enough, but the humiliation is often associated with moral blame. There is a general impression that to be at the mercy of others means moral inferiority to those who show the mercy. In reality, however, the reverse is often true, i.e. the rich are morally guilty while the poor are their innocent victims. This lopsided relationship holds true not only between individuals but also and p. 108 more often between countries and classes within a country. The world has witnessed this situation between the colonial powers and colonies, and between the exploiting powers and the exploited.<sup>5</sup> In 1979, a net \$40 billion flowed from North to South. In 1990 the South, while still poorer, transferred a net \$20

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<sup>3</sup> Orlando Costas, 'The Gospel and the Poor' in V. Samuel and C. Sugden eds., *Evangelism and the Poor*. Regnum Books, Oxford, 1983, p. 83.

<sup>4</sup> V. Samuel and C. Sugden, 'Summary of the Workshop discussion on Evangelism and the Poor', *Idem.*, p. 137, 138.

<sup>5</sup> Ronald Sider has convincingly analyzed how the lopsided trade relations between the First World and Third World have caused impoverishment of the latter. See Ronald Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger. A Biblical Study*, IVP, Downers Grove, Ill., 1978, p. 131ff.

billion to the North, and if the reduction of commodity prices in the same period was added, the annual flow from the poor South to the rich North might be as much as \$60 billion.<sup>6</sup> The pain of poverty will be still more acute when the poor realize the injustice and yet have to beg for mercy from the immoral rich.

The poor suffer shame and indignity today more than at any other time because mankind has become more materialistic than ever before. In the past, there were the honourable poor and poverty as such was not always scorned. But the poor are becoming a threatened species today. Gradually money has been turned into the standard for all values including the value of persons. Even personal dignity seems to depend upon material possessions. The poor today are perhaps better off materially than those of olden days, but socially and psychologically they are much worse off. This situation demands that we be more interested in distributive justice than retributive justice.

## II. POVERTY IN THE BIBLE

Biblical teaching on poverty is ambiguous. Poverty is described sometimes in negative terms, but sometimes in positive terms. Yet the ambiguity in the Bible is not due to insufficient discrimination of the causes of poverty. It is due more to practical reasons.

On the one hand, poverty is seen as the consequence of laziness ([Prov. 6:6-11](#); [24:30-34](#)), of lack of discipline ([Prov. 13:18](#)) and of indulging in pleasure ([Prov. 21:17](#); [23:21](#)). It is a reason for being shunned and deserted by friends and relatives ([Prov. 14:20](#); [19:4](#), [7](#)) and oppressed by the rich and powerful ([Prov. 14:31](#); [30:14](#)). The wisdom of the poor is despised ([Eccl. 9:16](#)) and hunger is often punishment from God for the sin of individuals or of a community ([Is. 44:12](#); [65:13](#)). Nowhere in the Bible is material poverty idealized, or asceticism encouraged. Poverty is portrayed as a misery ([Job 24:4-5](#), [9-11](#)).

That does not mean that the Bible commends material prosperity. The rich in material goods are repeatedly warned ([James 5:1-6](#); [Luke 6:24](#); [1 Tim 6:9](#)), and rebuked when they oppress the poor ([Is. 3:13-15](#); [Jer. 5:26-28](#), etc.). The rich in material possessions have greater temptation to be proud in spirit and to oppress the weak and the poor, and that is the worst aspect of being rich.

On the other hand, the poor are often promised the Lord's protection. Israelites are reminded of their days of being poor and oppressed in Egypt. The poor among them will be likewise protected and led by the p.109 same Lord ([Is. 14:30](#); [Ps. 68:10](#); [10:15](#)).

God assumes the function of protector of the poor neither because the poor are necessarily better persons nor because God shows special favour towards them. The Bible makes it clear that lazy, undisciplined, and pleasure-seeking people become poor and they are justly disliked by friends and even relatives. We are supposed to work hard not only to be self-sufficient but also to be able to help others ([2 Thess. 3:6ff.](#); [Acts 20:35](#)). It is rather God's justice which prompts him to be especially concerned with the poor ([Ex. 23:3](#), [6](#); [Lev. 19:15](#); [Is. 11:4](#)).

Everyone has the right to eat and to be clothed regardless of whether one earns it or not. The hungry should be fed first of all even with consecrated bread if no other food is available ([Matt. 12:1](#); [Deut. 23:24-25](#)). The right to eat and to be clothed seems to have priority over the right of property in the Bible. The Bible also encourages us to provide food and drink for our enemies ([Prov. 25:23](#)) because preserving life has priority over anything else. It is unjust for any individual or society to let anyone starve to death.

Paupers unable to sustain themselves in most societies are put under the care of their immediate family or blood relatives (cf. [Lev. 25:25](#); [25:35](#), [39](#)). Thus, those poor people

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<sup>6</sup> Tom Houston, *Op. cit.*, pp. 7-8.

who have nobody to take care of them really suffer. In the Old Testament widows and orphans were the ones who were not only poor materially but also socially and legally unprotected ([Is. 10:2](#); [Ezek. 18:12](#); [22:29](#); [Amos 2:7](#); [4:1](#), etc.). When the leaders of Judah exploited rather than protected them the Lord himself had to assume the role of their guardian ([Ps. 14:6](#); [35:10](#); [113:7](#), etc.; [Jer. 49:11](#); [Is. 1:16-17](#), [23-25](#)).

The poor in material possessions, however, have the advantage of being also poor in spirit, and that is one aspect of being poor. It does not follow, of course, that the poor are always humble. In the early stages of socialist revolutions, the poor are not humble and should not be humble. To the contrary, they are and should be angry at being wronged and feel rather morally righteous for being exploited rather than exploiting others. But in most other societies, the poor are humble since they are powerless and have to depend on others for survival. In [Luke 6:21](#), the Lord says 'Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God', and this does not necessarily contradict [Matt. 5:3](#). 'While material poverty is condemned as a scandalous condition, nevertheless, it constitutes a privileged path to the poverty of the Spirit, because those who have nothing have less difficulty in humbling themselves before God, than those who have riches.'<sup>7</sup> Those psalmists who desired earnestly that their prayer be answered stressed that they were poor ([Ps. 40:17](#); [70:5](#); [109:22](#)). It is not only divine justice but also the humility of the poor which puts them in a favourable position for salvation. God has anointed the Lord to preach the gospel to the poor ([Lk. 4:18](#); [7:22](#); [Is. 61:1](#)). The poor are invited to the banquet of the King [p. 110](#) along with the maimed, the lame, and the blind who also must be poor and humble ([Lk. 14:13](#)).

### III. SALVATION FOR THE POOR

The salvation which believers enjoy now and look for in the future is the same for everyone who is saved. It is an objective state of being blessed. Yet since we would not lose all our distinct personal identity in the kingdom of God, there must be some difference in our experience of salvation which would be determined mainly by the situation from which one is saved. The kingdom of God may be appreciated differently by martyrs and by robbers who have repented or by the poor differently from the rich. 'It is true that all have sinned. But if the poor are oppressed, are sinned against and by nature are dependent on God, why should they experience redemption in the same way as the rich who are oppressors and are more sinning than sinned against?'<sup>8</sup>

For the poor, salvation should at the least be experienced as liberation from their poverty. A kingdom of God where one remains poor would be self-contradictory. The state of heavenly blessing is often described as an opulent banquet ([Matt. 8:11](#); [22:2ff](#); [25:10](#); [Lk. 13:29](#); [14:5ff.](#)) where food and drink overflow. The invited are supposed to be dressed formally ([Matt. 22:1ff.](#)). The kingdom of heaven is not a place where one has to worry about what one shall eat and what one shall wear (cf. [Matt. 6:25](#)). God will provide abundantly for every one who is saved. It is also clear that the poor would not be discriminated against in the kingdom of heaven. It is more likely that they would be recompensed richly for the suffering which they have undergone on earth.

Salvation, however, is more than a promise for souls to go to heaven after physical death. The salvation in its holistic sense which we are supposed to preach and witness includes the state of 'already', i.e. the state here and now of our being under the sovereign

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<sup>7</sup> Samuel and Sugden, *Op. cit.*, p. 85.

<sup>8</sup> *Idem.*, p. 135.

rule of God in which we enjoy the love and saving grace of Christ. If so, then, would the salvation have any meaning to the poor if they still have to suffer malnutrition and be oppressed and exploited? Evangelical Christians today should wrestle with this difficult question if they are truly interested in effectively preaching the gospel to the poor.

Except in extreme circumstances, one should be able to survive biologically and meet the basic needs of life in order to experience salvation. One should also be able to maintain one's faith and hope in the ultimate justice of God, although one cannot experience it in one's own society. Considering the present conditions of justice in most societies, the poor are in a difficult position to experience holistic salvation. The spiritual advantage of the poor of being humble is offset by the disadvantage of social obstacles to believing and enjoying holistic salvation. p. 111

#### **IV. EVANGELIZING THE POOR**

It is generally true that the poor are more religious than the rich.<sup>9</sup> They easily recognize their own inability to escape the miseries and injustices they suffer and look for some supernatural power to liberate them.

This does not imply, however, that the poor are always easily accessible to the gospel. Very often in the Third World the more religious a person is the more difficult it is to reach him with the Christian gospel. Poor persons who have little opportunity for modern education are in general less secularized from their traditional religions. Usually those who are secularized from their traditional religions are more easily reached. The urban poor who have been uprooted from their rural backgrounds are most responsive to the gospel. Evangelistic experiences of Korea and Hong Kong confirm this. It would be strategically wise to approach the urban poor first.

Verbal witness is indispensable in Christian evangelism, but by itself is not effective today, especially to the poor. The poor have been deceived too often by verbal promises from those who have exploited them politically or economically. Many of the urban poor are cynical about the empty words of their traditional religious leaders. Verbal witness may have some effect on the middle class, but not on the poor who tend to be suspicious of grand promises and theories.

Yet not all the poor are alike. If there is any sense in separating the poor for special treatment in evangelism, by the same token it would make sense to distinguish among the kinds of the poor. If we want to be effective in our evangelistic efforts, we cannot preach to paupers in the same way as to the relative poor nor to the involuntary poor in the same way as to the voluntary poor.

There are different kinds of poor people in the world today. Some are poor involuntarily and some others are voluntarily poor. Those who have chosen to be poor for religious convictions or for other reasons do not really suffer from poverty. They in a sense enjoy poverty. It is what sociologists call ethical poverty. Only the involuntary poor suffer from their poverty.

We may also distinguish between those who are poor objectively and those who are poor subjectively. Some people feel poor even in an affluent society and suffer a so-called relative poverty even though they are rich compared with others. Their suffering is not, therefore, always objectively justifiable.

Our concern for them may be different in kind and secondary in degree compared to our concern for those who are poor objectively. Those especially who have become poor involuntarily and are poor objectively require our compassion and evangelistic attention.

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<sup>9</sup> *Idem.*, p. 134.

The other kinds of poverty could also be serious. People who are poor in those senses also suffer in their own ways. But it is fair for us to be concerned with those who suffer most, and there are enough of them in the world today. Those who suffer [p. 112](#) absolute poverty demand our foremost attention.

### **1. Evangelizing the Paupers**

The paupers should be fed and clothed first before they are presented with the gospel message. Meeting the bare necessities of any life is a Christian obligation, and it should be given priority over verbal witness for Christ. The two can go together, but never the former just for the sake of the latter. Without meeting the absolute needs of life, talk of the love of God sounds hollow. Even political efforts to change social structures causing impoverishment can be postponed.

In order for Christians to meet this urgent requirement, the evangelists or the churches have to afford some extra expenditure. Churches with very poor members would not be able to bear this burden. This implies the enormous obligation of rich churches in evangelizing the poor. If God assumes the role of their protector, it seems plain that God's people should fulfil the function through his blessings financially.

The principle of equality between the poor and the rich taught in [2 Cor. 8:14](#) should be applied worldwide in this age of a global village and also not limited to the believers. Since there are more than enough starving people today, all the churches above subsistence level are obligated to save them. They should feel at least a moral burden if not willing to bear it in reality. No Christian in a reasonably well-to-do society is free from the sin of omission unless he or she feeds the starving people. The degree of guilt would be proportional to the prosperity they enjoy.

According to David Barratt, '52% of all Christians live in affluence. 35% are comparatively well off. Only 13% live in absolute poverty. The influential worldwide community of evangelicals alone has personal income totalling just under \$1 trillion a year.'<sup>10</sup> Evangelical Christians alone can save an enormous number of lives both in a biological sense and a spiritual sense.

Feeding the paupers is a great act of love, but it is not evangelism in the proper sense. It may introduce the poor to the gospel, but not to salvation. Verbal witness of Christ is indispensable in Christian evangelism because the gospel message is not human wisdom but God's revealed truth.

### **2. Evangelizing the Relative Poor**

The relative poor who live above subsistence level ought to be approached in a different way from the paupers. They would also welcome material support and other assistance which may enable them to climb up the social ladder to middle or upper class. But such assistance is not a Christian obligation either from the perspective of evangelistic strategy or from the perspective of social justice. Their immediate and primary need is restoration of their [p. 113](#) personal dignity and justice because they suffer more from social discrimination and injustice than from material destitution. Their desire for material self-sufficiency is also motivated by the desire to regain personal dignity and justice.

Rich churches or missionaries from prosperous countries may not be the ideal carriers of the gospel for the relative poor. They do not need the money of the rich or of

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<sup>10</sup> Quoted from Tom Houston, *Op. cit.*, p. 7.

middleclass Christians, unless the latter are in real solidarity with them.<sup>11</sup> Any impression that salvation guarantees material prosperity as preached by some success philosophers would distort the true gospel and most likely produce only 'rice Christians' rather than true followers of Christ.

The effective evangelists to the poor would be poor Christians or Christians who have suffered poverty in the past. The ideal ones would be those who have been poor and know what the suffering of poverty is like but have meanwhile improved their situation, or the ones who have been reasonably well-to-do, but have voluntarily become poor. What is important here is not the present economic status of the evangelists but their understanding of poverty and readiness to feel solidarity with the poor.<sup>12</sup> The poor who are cynical and self-pitying would hurt the other poor more than the rich who have voluntarily relinquished their middle- or high-class privileges and become poor.

The voluntary poor have an advantage over the poor who are also evangelists in that they have not only solidarity with the poor but also manifest the sacrificial love of Christ. It is true that the truly powerless would feel greater solidarity with other powerless people. In this, the poor evangelists would enjoy advantages over the voluntary poor. But the voluntary poor would be more able to evoke hope among the poor as an evangelist should do. The voluntary poor for the sake of the involuntary poor are following the model of Christ: 'For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich' ([2 Cor. 8:9](#)), and of the apostle Paul who is 'sorrowful, yet always [p. 114](#) rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything' ([2 Cor. 6:10](#)).

Solidarity with the poor is certainly important. Improvement of their status through their own efforts is honourable. It is an ideal goal that the poor restore their dignity and self-confidence. But these are closer to a Marxist model of spontaneous revolution than to Christian salvation through God's grace.

If the salvation which we preach is holistic, it would not only restore rights and a sense of dignity of the poor in the society but also improve their material conditions to a reasonable level. Except in unusual circumstances of persecution, new converts have achieved considerable improvements. Their new faith can create conditions favourable to making material progress and improving social status. It enables them to liberate themselves from the traditional taboos and superstitions which have hampered their creativity and free activities, to be trained to be sober and controlled, to receive encouragement and assistance in brotherly fellowship within Christian communities.

Where the main cause of the suffering is social in character, a significant solution would be a separate Christian community of the poor. A new convert may endure social discrimination and injustice for a while, but it will not be easy always to maintain

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<sup>11</sup> Samuel & Sugden, *Op. cit.*, p. 148. The reporters' conclusion that the poor do not need the money of middle-class Christians, but their power for structural change seems to be one-sided. There are not as many politically conscientized poor in the world as they imagine who desire structural change more than material assistance. The poor need money, too.

<sup>12</sup> Samuel and Sugden write, 'Probably the most fruitful strategies are where the poor themselves are the evangelists of the poor' (*op. cit.*, p. 149). They think that the approach of the poor would be holistic so that they can also grapple with social issues. But there is no certainty that the approach of the poor is always holistic and can grapple with social issues better than the former poor or those who have become voluntarily poor. According to Korean experiences, the social issues which the poor ought to wrestle with have been handled better by the preachers and still better by the former poor who have had the privilege of receiving higher education. The poor are in general unable to realize the importance of the social issues unless they are taught by outsiders. Furthermore, the social issues are not the only ones important in evangelizing the poor.

steadfast patience. A community of Christians could lessen the tension and enhance a sense of solidarity. The communities need not necessarily be separate from others geographically. Intimate fellowship and frequent contacts among believers may produce similar consequences. Fellowship of believers is precious for all Christians, but it has a vital importance for the poor Christians for they more than others need to preserve the sense of personal dignity and justice being done to them. This fellowship and solidarity among believers would be a great attraction of the gospel for the poor.

### **3. Structural Change and Evangelism**

From the sixties to the eighties, change in social structure was seen as a panacea for all the evils in the world. Progressive Christian theologians, both in the West and in the Third World, were among those in the forefront of the movement. To them personal witness to Christ looked not only outdated and irrelevant but also reactionary and nearly immoral. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the collapse of the communist states in Eastern Europe, their voice has been much subdued. This shows how much their views had been influenced by a Marxist interpretation of society and man.

It seems undeniable that their emphasis on social structure has been one-sided. Their theology has not encouraged evangelistic efforts of the Church worldwide and has not contributed much to church growth. Rather those who stubbornly adhered to the traditional method of personal witness have made some converts and planted many churches both in their home countries and on mission fields. Many traditional [p. 115](#) evangelicals would rejoice that the heat of structural change has been cooled down these days.

However, the traditionalists should not rejoice over-much and be too confident in their strategies. We cannot easily ignore the discoveries of many social analysts regardless of whether or not they have been influenced by atheistic Marxism. It seems to be beyond dispute that social structures under which some innocent people are forced to suffer and some are rewarded with undeserved privileges are immoral. More concretely the analysts have persuasively shown that some become poor not because of their moral failures but because of unjust social structures.

Believing Christians are, both for the sake of justice and of love, obligated to stand on the side of the suffering innocent and try to change the structures. It is true that active involvement in social issues as such is not apparently evangelism. This involvement is hardly sufficient to win suffering people to Christ. But it would be inaccurate to say that it does nothing for evangelism. In fact, it does contribute greatly to evangelism and sometimes much more than verbal witness without social concern. Active involvement for social justice may not bring forth fruits immediately, but it is an important way of planting seeds so that others in the future may harvest the fruits. It would be, therefore, short-sighted to underestimate the value of Christian involvement in changing unjust social structures. It is in itself a Christian obligation to stand on the side of the suffering innocent, but it is also an important preparation for future evangelism.

### **4. Evangelism to the Voluntary Poor**

Those most difficult to reach would be the non-Christian voluntary poor. Only people who are strongly motivated can voluntarily relinquish material well-being and conveniences for a certain conviction or cause. This is perhaps one of the reasons why so few Indian poor are reached by the gospel. Probably, they cannot be classified as poor at all because they enjoy the poverty rather than suffering it. Any strategy to evangelize the poor in general would be of no use to them. We can think only of approaches which should be avoided in our efforts to reach them.

The worst qualified would be rich evangelists. Only poor believers or the voluntary poor who are Christian can have any access to the Indian poor and find an initial point of contact with them. Since the voluntary poor usually have strong theoretical reasons for their asceticism, evangelists who are theoretically well equipped would be effective.

It should be pointed out to the voluntary poor who are also lazy that they do a great harm to others in society. Producing little for survival they consume what others have produced. Their asceticism impoverishes the community and thereby forces others who are not ascetic to suffer because of them. It should be pointed out that nobody has the right to force others to suffer involuntarily. This should be also a lesson for Christian ascetics. They have the right to be poor voluntarily, p. 116 but no right to be lazy and live on what others have produced without compensation.

From the discussion so far, we can make a general conclusion that the best strategy for reaching the poor with the gospel is for evangelists to become voluntarily poor. Those who have become voluntarily poor for the sake of the involuntary poor witness to the love of Christ and to the faith which empowers them to transcend material conditions. The voluntary poor are not ascetics but become poor in order to make the poor rich and respected. This is the model which Christ and the apostle Paul have set before us. Christ suffered not because suffering itself has any intrinsic value but because through his suffering he could deliver others from their sufferings. His model is most effective in evangelizing the poor, but also the most difficult for us to follow. Are we not really wasting our time and resources trying to find some other easier ways to follow?

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# **Incarnation as Relocation Among the Poor**

**Dorothy Harris**

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*In moving and personal terms, the author describes the successes and failures of the Servants missionary teams in living with the squatter community, beginning ten years ago, in Manila and now in Bangkok, Dhaka and Phnom Penh. She shares the experiences of members of Servants in working out incarnational 'ultimate relocation', community building and church planting among the poor and participation with the poor in a common discipleship of suffering and problem-solving. Through word and deed, the power of the gospel is being demonstrated in the Spirit's work of healing, exorcism and spiritual warfare. While ever seeking to be faithful to Scripture, this case study describes a powerful model of what incarnational evangelism among the urban poor really means.*

Editor

## **INTRODUCTION**



Servants was born out of a dream that the gospel would truly become good news to the poor.<sup>1</sup> Coming from an evangelical western heritage, the early workers were primarily concerned that the vast squatter areas were largely places of missionary neglect, written off as impossible for church planting. At this stage there was little emphasis on what the Holy Spirit was doing already without a missionary presence in the slums.

The context of renewal certainly awakened the first workers to God’s heart for the poor, to the need for their personal renewal to lead to mission, and to the call to make the Kingdom of God not only a future ideal but a current reality in the slums.<sup>2</sup> A Filipina’s resigned comment that ‘Jesus can’t live in the slums, but only in the nice big middle class churches’ was a sufficient spur to faith, vision and commitment to prove otherwise: ‘Jesus can live in the slums.’ After ten years of church planting, community development, health care, non-formal education, income generation, care for prostitutes and drug addicts etc, we are more convinced that the slums are not abandoned by the Father.

The principles of incarnation, community, servanthood, simplicity and holism gradually became the guidelines for mission. These were forged not only in pre-service idealism but more in the desperate reality of slum living—trying to be authentic friends of Jesus and of poor neighbours. This involvement with the poor continues to expand the implications of these principles so they are not mere theories but continuous challenges to holistic transformation. For in the evangelism process, we westerners need continuous conversion so that the Lordship of Jesus touches every area of our lives. The poor in the slums challenge this conversion process as their needs and sin mirror our own and their joy and despair challenge the basis of ours.

Here the focus is on incarnation. I cannot speak with authority on behalf of all workers but I can give snippets of the insights of some of the meaning of incarnation. It will be clear that for all Servants workers our incarnation process in mission is a journey, sometimes painful, sometimes joyful but always limited, desperately dependent on the enriching grace<sup>3</sup> of the only one to whom the word accurately applies.

Our steps along the journey are punctuated not only by experiences of living with the poor but by personal and community biblical reflection on those experiences. The

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<sup>1</sup> This paper draws totally on the notes and papers of Servants’ workers: Michael Duncan, Ashley and Paula Withers, Martin Auer (Manila), Patricia Green (Bangkok).

<sup>2</sup> Some data of Servants in Asia:

Where	When started	Number of expatriates in adult	Number of Children	Number of Asians as associate workers in 1993
Manila	1983	19	15	2
Bangkok	1987	12	3	3
Dhaka	1990	4	3	—
Phnom Penh	1993	10	1	—

<sup>3</sup> [2 Cor. 8:9](#).

multifaceted kaleidoscope of the meaning of incarnation for us in mission reflects the hard work, the wanderings, the despair, much listening, much confession, much forgiveness blended with the yeast of failure.

## I. REFLECTIONS ON INCARNATION ...

### 1. Not a Theological Prescription

For us in Servants, the principle of incarnation in mission means that we go and live with the poor, but we do not view this as a theological prescription. The Scriptures do not command everyone to live with the poor. We interpret incarnation in mission more as an invitation<sup>4</sup> than an ultimatum.

We are called first to Jesus then to [p. 119](#) the poor. His incarnation inspires us to consider fully the implications of the choices he made for the earth, for Galilee, for the poor, for the cross. In all of these power is divested not wielded, he is submissive not controlling. It is good, indeed necessary for us to follow him where such transformations can most readily occur in our lives and ministries.

### 2. Incarnation Means Relocation

John Perkins says, 'The incarnation is the ultimate relocation.'<sup>5</sup> Servants' workers (families, singles, older and younger), relocate among the poor. In some situations of political turmoil, disaster, closed conservatism, we are not able to do this. The poor have most reason to disbelieve the gospel especially as portrayed by rich westerners making forays into their home areas. Relocation engenders 'relational and compassionate solidarity as well as accountability'.<sup>6</sup> When we do not separate domesticity from mission we have more opportunity to demonstrate a harmony of our words, deeds and being (and to fail miserably at this). We need to see the slums as 'a place for therapy not discharge, a place of order not just of chaos'.<sup>7</sup>

A relocationist methodology<sup>8</sup> is at the heart of that favourite passage of incarnational missionaries, [Phil. 2:5-11](#). The call is to follow Jesus in costly humility and commitment to community both in our squatter communities and for the Servants team. Physical relocation among the poor is important to us but it must always be an expression of that inner descent which reflects the spirit of our Lord.

#### *Some Servants Workers Comment*

To reach prostitutes effectively in Bangkok, a Servants worker, Patricia Green, has set up a beauty parlour right in Pat Pong, the red light district. It has become a safe haven for women, as well as a place for training, medical care, teaching and joy. 'As I apply makeup to the women' says Patricia, 'I pray for them and anoint them in the name of Jesus.'

'I've seen Jesus', said a Filipino friend of Willy Williams in a Manila slum. Visions are common among such deeply spiritual people, so Willy barely commented. Then his friend said, 'I see Jesus in you as you live among us and share our lives.'

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<sup>4</sup> Michael Duncan, *Mission the Incarnational Approach*, Servants Journey Series, 1991, p. 13.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> Ashley Withers, Occasional Paper, Servants, Manila, 1993.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Duncan, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

Land is life for a squatter, so in living in Damayan Lagi, a Manila slum, it was natural for Michael Duncan to become involved in the coalition fighting demolition and eviction—justice for the poor house owners and renters. The protest process is tedious and distressing, but there is some hope as a greater unity develops among the poor.

‘I’m busy in my own squatter community,’ says Shirley Howden in Bangkok, ‘but when other workers need my help in sensitive negotiations, I’m there to serve them.’

### 3. Incarnation Means Participation

For Jesus, the incarnation meant identification. But we are under no p. 120 illusions that we can fully identify with the poor. Even our simplest lifestyle is excessive to the poor. We are temporary, even though we make long term commitments to mission. By living with the poor, we participate in the routines of life, of joy, despair as much as possible. In doing this we hope to engender in ourselves and in our poor neighbours that openness to ‘radical transformation’<sup>9</sup> which only the Spirit can complete. In participating with the poor, we deliberately take the position of learner as well as teacher, as those ministered to as well as those ministering. We never claim to be Jesus to the poor. But we can be on the side of the oppressed as he was. We can become gradually more of an insider than a prescriber of solutions. We can learn to value the contributions of the poor rather than focus on their deficiencies<sup>10</sup> and we challenge the trickle-down theory that influencing the mighty is the only route to liberation. Incarnation then becomes the model not only for lifestyle but for development, evangelism and training.

### 4. Incarnation Does Not Guarantee Evangelistic Success

After making the huge effort to live with the poor we assumed it would clearly make all the difference to evangelistic success. The key to evangelism is always repentance and faith—only the work of the Spirit. Living with the poor is not the key to evangelism. We focus more on making disciples than just making decisions. The reality of living together and of suffering the inconsistencies of one another guard against the deception of inflated results.

The key to evangelism is always repentance and faith—only the work of the Spirit. Our call is to obedience: to live and preach the gospel, to see what the Holy Spirit is already doing among the poor, to join in his stream of renewal for ourselves and for the community. As a participant in the Manila centre for mission studies recently said, ‘I found that the more I was vulnerable with my neighbours then the more opportunity God had for reflection with me.’<sup>11</sup>

### 5. Incarnation Expresses Holism

The process of living and working with the poor causes questions about priorities of evangelism over social action (or vice versa) to be unnecessary. The *word* of the gospel needs to be preached. Churches are planted as evidenced by the Living Springs association of squatter churches in Manila and burgeoning slum fellowships in Bangkok. The *deeds* of the gospel express God’s heart to transform the awful living conditions, to generate income, to feed the hungry, to oppose injustice, to network for resources for the poor.

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<sup>9</sup> Leonardo Boff, *New Evangelization*, Orbis, 1991, p. 75.

<sup>10</sup> This paper draws totally on the notes and papers of Sevants’ workers: Michael Duncan, Ashley and Paula Withers, Martin Auer (Manila), Patricia Green (Bangkok).

<sup>11</sup> Cecil Benjamin, *God’s Way of Change: An Encounter in a Manila Slum for Evangelism*. 1993.

Then the *power* of the gospel is demonstrated in healing, exorcism, spiritual warfare. Further, the Holy Spirit's power needs to be broadly applied to evil systems as [p. 121](#) well as evil persons. The call is to experience, live and demonstrate the whole of the gospel. The complexity and seriousness of life and death issues demand that we cannot have a limited mandate among the poor. In expressing holism Servants workers need to have the courage to become a people who we have never really been before <sup>12</sup>—'contemplatives in action'<sup>13</sup>—rigorously applying the Scriptures and creatively responding to the Spirit as each situation demands.

As westerners we bear the responsibility of not transposing the usual middle class, docetic message, which refuses to take sides. 'Having peeled off the social and political dimensions of the gospel, it has denatured it completely,'<sup>14</sup> says Bosch. The context of the particular slum determines whether the focus is justice, prayer, healing, well digging, medical care, evangelism etc.

In seeking to integrate the words, deeds and power of the gospel, Servants is one struggling attempt at a prophetic witness to the whole of the gospel.

## 6. Incarnation is Vital for Mutual Liberation

Living among the poor is the sure route to exposing the inadequacy of our motives. A common response among workers is, 'I came to teach but I have had to unlearn so much. I thought I knew what I believed, but now I have more questions than answers.' False securities are reluctantly divested and enemies become apparent not only without but within. Gradually we embark more unashamedly on the journal of mutual liberation, challenged by the poor to allow them to confront our poverty. An aboriginal leader is reported to have said:

If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.

We want partnership not prominence, community not individualism. We are always prone to focus on our own knowledge, systems and techniques. The struggle to be liberated into allowing the gospel to transform ourselves, our community development, our evangelism is painful. John McKnight is helpful in this:

Peddling services is unchristian—even if you are hell-bent on helping people. Peddling services instead of building communities is the one way you can be sure not to help ... Service systems teach people that their value lies in their deficiencies ... If the church is about community—not service—it's about capacity not deficiency.<sup>15</sup>

Living and working together in community force us to move towards valuing people more highly as [p. 122](#) well as repenting more thoroughly. Liberation is under way.

## II. PRACTICAL STEPS TOWARDS INCARNATION

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<sup>12</sup> Michael Duncan, *A Journey in Mission*, 1991.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Morton, *Contemplation in a World of Action*, Doubleday, 1973.

<sup>14</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, Orbis, 1992, p. 513.

<sup>15</sup> John McKnight, Why Servanthood is Bad, *The Other Side*, Vol. 25, No. 1, pp. 38–40, Feb. 1989.

How do Servants workers select a squatter area for residence? The following are some criteria.<sup>16</sup>

1. The community is of a size that can accommodate a Westerner. There is a danger that a Westerner may become too central, too noticeable in a slum. The bigger the slum the more this problem is minimized, though not eradicated.
2. The community is in need of a Non-Government Organization (NGO) working there.
3. The churches of the community are not in a position to assume the responsibility of reaching the people for Christ. But there are areas where churches are assuming that responsibility, where we may still move in. We will do this in the hope of bringing together representatives of the churches to form a core group to facilitate in the community.
4. The community is either considered a 'slum of hope' (ie. most people have income, the degree of poverty, vice and crime is not so extreme) or a 'slum of despair' (ie. many jobless people, a great number of very poor families, high prevalence of vice and crime). Servants families will usually move into the former and singles who are able and willing to live in very poor and hard situations into the latter.
5. The community is not too far away from a Servants retreat centre. If too far away, the workers' commitment to the Servants team becomes impractical. Servants workers join the mission with two commitments: to the urban poor and to the team.
6. The status of the land of the community is not so unsure that the Servants worker may have to leave the area after only one year or so. It usually takes up to two years for a worker just to be 'adopted' by a community.
7. The political council of the community has no real objections to a Servants worker moving into the area.
8. For Servants families with children in school age it is important that the community is quite close to a suitable school.
9. The leadership of Servants has no objections to the Servants worker moving into the particular community.

Once Servants is represented in an area it is the aim of Servants to *empower* the poor, ie. to help them to detect, develop and apply their own resources and abilities. We have come to believe that we must work from a resource-base and not from a deficiency-base. The tendency to see only problems and deficiencies in a community does not enhance community participation and development.

### III. PHASES OF INCARNATION

The Manila team can, after ten years of ministry and reflection, recognize **P. 123** four phases in the process of living and working with the poor. Martin Auer and Michael Duncan here outline these phases as they relate to health care (see Appendix 1).

#### Phase One

This phase was taken up with actually relocating into the slums. Our rationale for this move was not just theological but also contextual. The sick and the poor in these slum areas had grown disenchanted with professionals and experts coming into their

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<sup>16</sup> Michael Duncan and Martin Auer *Incarnational and Holistic Health Care in the Slums of Asia*. 1993.

communities on a nine to five basis. They were perceived as ‘outsiders’ who did not know their context. ‘How could the doctors treat and cure their complaints if in the first place these professionals didn’t even know the people, their culture of poverty, and their physical environment?’ the poor argued.

Slum dwellers, we understand, consider ‘insiders’ to be the best health care providers: those who live with the people, learn from the people, listen and understand the people. Insiders come not only to provide health care, but also to receive. They not only give but also receive.

In other words, the process of providing health care—or in a wider sense the restorative process—is better placed in a context of relational and compassionate solidarity with the sick and the poor.

Unfortunately, however, most professionals working with the poor in Asia live in first world suburbs in third world cities. And so from the comfort of their air-conditioned houses they go to the slums and do their ministry only to retreat again later in the day. This approach serves only to underline to the poor that yet again they are objects to be treated.

In western medicine the doctor commonly becomes the subject, the ‘healing agent’. The doctor writes the ‘healing story’ and not the patient. But this serves only to dehumanize the poor even more. By relocating into their context and coming alongside we communicate a joint or communal dynamic in providing health care. We act together hopefully to bring restored health. Thus our commitment to radical relocation.

In the process of becoming an insider, sometimes we get sick as they do. Our falling sick does not hamper our goal to provide health care, it enhances it. When the supposed providers of health care get sick, then some will begin to believe that we now understand them. And when this happens they will begin to be more transparent and vulnerable with us. Trust begins to develop.

## **Phase Two**

In this phase we found ourselves doing a lot for the poor. The emphasis was on curative medicine and providing free drugs. For many of us this was our first real exposure to actual poverty. It was quite different from the ‘textbook poverty’ that we had read about from the comfort of our living rooms at home. Living in the slums day and night intensified our deep sense of shock. Although we noted that the poor had resources and abilities, the deficiencies and urgent needs around us left a stronger input in our hearts and minds. We became deficiency-oriented. Our response was to birth [p. 124](#) all manner of ‘dole-out’ mercy ministries.

We were also active in evangelism, birthing churches supporting these numerous mercy ministries. We discovered the so-called power dimension of the Holy Spirit to heal and release as well as forgive and cleanse. As the poor were often unable to buy medicines or go to hospital, we could draw on the power of the Holy Spirit to give them what they had been deprived of by others.

However we were very much like other aid organizations: motivated by compassion and in need of money, medicines and organization. It was very much our ‘curing the poor’, top down method. We, the professionals and experts, had come into their communities in order to do much for them. This had two results: first, it created a spirit of dependency among the sick; second, it inhibited community health. Individuals were being made whole, but the community was left untouched.

## **Phase Three**

The third phase began with apparent failure. The poor asked us to stop our mercy ministries. They argued that much of what we were doing for them was in fact causing relational and communal breakdown. In other words, the social effect of all our programmes was proving harmful. Our individualistic approach to health care, in choosing one person over another, was creating jealousy and misunderstandings in the community. Our top down approach was alienating the poor. They did not feel an active part of the health care in the community. They were simply beneficiaries of the process, not managers of the process. They had little to do in its implementation. This demeaned their spirit. So in healing some aspects of the body we made their spirits sick. Holistic health care was not occurring.

We reflected on the consequences of our initial approach to health and health care in the slums:

1. We came into the slums with medical practitioners, medicines and money. The poor were attracted to these. The starting point in this health care delivery moved away from the people. It focused on the western medical practitioner, who defined, assessed and reacted to the health problems of the people for his or her perspective. It was not of the people nor with the people.
2. In basing health and health care on us and our resources we communicated to the poor, unintentionally, that they and their resources did not count for much. Not only did this deal another blow to their already fragile self-esteem but it also reinforced in their minds that foreign and white were superior; local and brown, inferior. Unwittingly we aligned ourselves with the media bombardment of multinational drug companies. Our holistic approach was being subverted by our own best efforts.
3. The medical practitioners became the élite of the slum, the patrons, the upper class of the community. Through being the providers we were elevated to the status of the benefactors. The poor became [p. 125](#) the inevitable beneficiaries, reduced to being just patients.
4. Our money made it possible to do much immediately for the sick. We were so swept along by what our western money could do that we paid less attention to the suffering. The sick began to disappear behind the piles of aid funds. Again, all of this was unintentional and was not noticed at first! We had not spent the necessary time just sitting with the sick so as to get an insider's view of community health. We had not considered carefully which approaches were the most appropriate options. We did not think through the consequences of our approaches, nor learn about folk medical practices.
5. We did not take the time to discover their worldview and values. Instead, as medical practitioners, we communicated the primacy of physical well-being through western medicine. We devalued spiritual values and the spiritual component to health and thus our gospel message. Having set this expectation in place the poor then discovered that they could not afford the medicines. Thus they became victims of the promised fulfilment gap. What was promised could not be delivered.
6. These starting points not only affected the poor but they also caused some damage in us the medical practitioners. We became tired servants, all 'stressed out'. It stands to reason that if we become the focus, the providers, the 'healers', the experts, then, something had to give under the strain of being all those things. We couldn't cope with not helping everybody. We were trying to be saviours.

Having realized the consequences of our approaches of phase two, we engaged ourselves in community development and preventive health care. It was a shift away from 'one to one' relief projects to projects that would benefit the whole community. We finally took to heart what we had already noticed while in phase one, namely that the poor are able to contribute a lot. We shifted from being deficiency-oriented to being resource-oriented. Ministries were now developed *with* the poor and not so much *for* the poor.

Before we started a new programme we asked the poor to discuss it among themselves. They had to own it, contribute towards it or ultimately it would not usher in community health. They struggled to integrate their faith with medicine and care for the sick. Programmes arose incorporating preventive health care, health education and spiritual renewal in the communities. An example is the 'child to child' health clubs in Manila.

### **Phase Four**

Now we aim for a more integrative approach. The emphasis on preventive health care does not mean that we are no longer interested in curative health care. The context has to be taken into account. For example, we are running a hospital in Cambodia using it as a base for community health. This country has been ravaged by war for about twenty years. There is a high deathrate and the existing health services [p. 126](#) are not sufficient. Curative health care is vital. Furthermore, factionalism and fragmentation plague its communities. With so much distrust and fear, we have to demonstrate that our communal preventive health schemes have no racial or political agenda. The location of our workers among the poor is beneficial to this process.

Moving towards holistic ministry is not a matter of mercy ministries or community development, learning from the health professional or learning from the sick, working for the poor or with the poor, curative or preventive health care, western or folk medicine, secular or spiritual approaches. Rather, we have to make room for all these emphases when delivering health care. Each has its own particular contribution to make. It is a question of 'both and', not 'either or'. The context determines the sequence, timing and emphasis as the needs and resources of the community should direct in this matter. But this study cannot be done from a distance. It must be done in the community. We have to have eyes to see and ears to hear in order to determine communal priorities. We have to become insiders. This must also be done in coordination with the people themselves and in relocating with others in the wider community. We then become advocates for the poor working for justice and more equitable health care systems. Only then can the Spirit invade all processes and truly achieve the fruits of the Kingdom.

## **CONCLUSION**

Our mission is multidimensional, multi-mandated. The incarnation is our inspiration. But we need to go on to reflect the whole ministry of Jesus. His incarnation led to the cross. This is 'the only place where it is ever safe'<sup>17</sup> for mission says Bosch—death to self and evil. But the cross leads to resurrection, renewal in the Spirit which in turn energizes further incarnation. For the sake of the poor, for our own sake, we continue to attempt to walk the path Jesus walked. [P. 127](#)

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<sup>17</sup> Bosch, *op. cit.*, p. 519.



## APPENDIX 1

The four phases of the ministry of Servants in urban poor communities in Manila

<i>Phase and time</i>	<i>Main features</i>	<i>Activities/Approach</i>	<i>Lessons learnt</i>
Phase I 1983 to 1987	Adjustment to slum life  Acceptance community	Move into slum  Listen to the people Share daily struggles (e.g. power and water shortages)	Slum inhabitants have much to offer and teach  First world medicine and practice often divorced from slum life  The slum inhabitants are alienated by outside professionals
Phase II 1987 to 1989	Work FOR the poor	Dole out  Focus on curative medicine  Top-down; we are the professionals	Dependency created  Dole out and top-down enhances the slum inhabitant's sense of weakness and creates new power structures under the control of benefactor  Does not effect long term changes or address the reasons for ill-health  Money does not solve everything  Sickness not only physical but also social and spiritual
Phase III 1989 to 1992	Evaluate the past  Work WITH the people	Consult with people  Community development	The slum inhabitants want to participate  They have many skills in community development and health

Preventive health care Preventive health care  
not sufficient in itself  
(curative also needed)

Phase IV 1992 Integration of above Community health Approach used in  
Onwards into holistic model offocus health care dependent  
health care and on stated needs of  
mission community

Integration of spiritual Timing of approach  
and physical also important

Clinics with partial  
payments for  
medicines

Cooperative drug  
stores that are  
community based and  
initiated

Networking with other  
agencies

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Dr. Dorothy Harris is Australian Director for Servants in Asia. [p. 128](#)

# **Christ as Saviour from Sin and Death and as Liberator from Socio-Economic and Political Oppression**

Chris Sugden

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*How do Christian evangelism and social concern help rather than hinder the poor in overcoming their poverty? The author of this perceptive article argues that both freedom from sin, death and evil and liberation from poverty and oppression have their source in a*

*biblical theology of the Cross. He sees divine forgiveness in the atonement as the antidote to the bondage of fate and the basis of a new and transformed community in which the poor find their identity. This brings a release of creativity in self-respect, family relationships and in overcoming economic oppression. In a penetrating analysis of ecumenical theology of the poor, Sugden shows that it only reaffirms the sense of victimization and powerlessness and deepens the gulf between the private and public spheres of living.*

Editor

## INTRODUCTION

A recent survey funded by a Christian philanthropist suggests that religious belief and evangelistic activity hinder the process of development among poor communities. An earlier survey in India suggested that if a community has a good people's organization built around issues concerning the community, and then a Christian organization comes to take up the concern, the people's organization eventually withers.

There is therefore an important challenge to address—that Christian evangelism and social concern actually hinder the development of poor people. Of course this begs the question of what sort of evangelism and social concern we are talking about. We must address the issue of the form of evangelism and social concern that really does promote the all-round best interests of poor people in their relation to God, each other and the material world. [p. 129](#)

In bald terms the question is, 'How does belief in a transcendent reality and a new identity in relation to reality help the poor in combating poverty?' In addressing this question this paper will assume the existence of the coherent evangelical theology of Christian involvement with poor people that was developed in international discussion, especially in the years from Lausanne 1974-Wheaton 1983, in which the World Evangelical Fellowship Theological Commission played a significant role.<sup>1</sup>

The paper will ask the question 'How does a good evangelical theology help the poor?'

'The poor refers to the manual worker who struggles to survive on a day to day basis, the destitute cowering as a beggar; the one reduced to meekness, the one brought low ... those weak and tired from carrying heavy burdens, the leper and very often "the common people".<sup>2</sup> Poor people should within their own terms and expectations discover the news to be good, not just within the terms defined by systematic theologians. For Jesus set good news to the poor alongside the blind seeing, the lame walking, and the deaf hearing ([Luke 7:22](#)). For a deaf person to regain their hearing was in their terms good. Theologically evangelical theology has sought to be an experiential theology, drawing from the pietist and latterly the pentecostal traditions. Faith must issue in new life and in good works. Faith is not separate from life here and now, or from Christian practice here and now.

The paper will answer the question also by comparing evangelical theology with the theology generated in the World Council of Churches' networks. Enough material and experience has been generated over the last 20 years of involvement by Christians across

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<sup>1</sup> See for example *Evangelicals and Development* edited by Ronald Sider (Paternoster 1981); *In Word and Deed* edited by Bruce Nicholls (Paternoster 1985); *The Church in Response to Human Need* edited by Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden (Eerdmans 1987); *How evangelicals endorsed social responsibility* Rene Padilla (Grove Books 1986).

<sup>2</sup> *Christian Witness to the Urban Poor* (LCWE) quoted in Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden, *Evangelism and the Poor—a Third World Study Guide* (Paternoster, Third Impression 1987), p. 2.

the theological spectrum with poor people to be able to generate an adequate comparative study.

It is recognized that there has been an overlap between some evangelicals and some ecumenicals on issues of evangelism, but this has not applied to all aspects of theology of mission in the last twenty years.<sup>3</sup> p. 130 This article will consist of theological reflection which arises out of reflection in the light of scripture on the experience of many involved in ministry among poor people. It is not a theoretical reflection.

## **FORGIVENESS AND FATE**

Fundamental to evangelical theology is the atonement. How does that impact poor people? First, in many contexts, the fact of divine forgiveness is an effective antidote to the concept of fate. Part of the culture of poverty, which enables poor people to cope psychologically with the harshness of their existence, is that it is their fate, that they are paying a price for somebody's action somewhere. In religious terms it may be a price for the past sins of their family; or in anticipation of future blessedness. In secular terms it may be the price for past structural oppression, or in anticipation of national economic recovery. Whatever the source, the impact is to reinforce in the poor a sense of victimization at the hands of forces they cannot control. They attribute to these forces enormous power before which they are helpless. Thus fate also stifles creativity and responsibility. This false consciousness is an expression of sin and death that destroys God's purpose of life.

The atonement announces that the price is already paid for the past, and that the price of the future is secured. This releases in people a new sense of identity. They are somebody. By grace they are not damned or damnable and useless people. They are called to be sons and daughters of God. As his creation they are called to have dominion over the earth and are accountable to him. As his children they are forgiven and restored to this position despite their supposed and real demerits, because of the cross. Indwelt by God's Spirit, they have access to the power of God through prayer, to the armoury of God against evil, and to the resources of God which are far more than economic.

Much evidence from the history of the Church in India indicates that for decades the contribution of the mission of the Church has been to bring poor people a sense of their identity and worth. Let M. M. Thomas speak for all in saying: 'Considering the fact that the Christian Missions were the first in many parts of India to treat the untouchables as human beings, and to bring them the gospel of their dignity in Christ as well as education, Christianity has played a part in arousing and strengthening Anti-Brahminism. Further, the climate created by Anti-Brahminism about the necessity of the depressed classes to leave the Hindu fold for the sake of their human dignity, paved the path of Christian

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<sup>3</sup> The 'overlap' between some evangelical and some ecumenical involvement in issues of the church and its mission can be seen in for example Vinay Samuel and Albrecht Hauser, *Proclaiming Christ in Christ's Way* (Regnum 1989) which reports the Consultation on Evangelism sponsored by the W.C.C. in 1987. At the Canberra Assembly in 1991 Evangelicals produced a letter in response to the Assembly, published in Bruce Nicholls and Bong Rin Ro, *Beyond Canberra* (Oxford, Regnum/Lynx, 1993). There was also a warm welcome at the Wodd Evangelical Fellowship Consultations on The Church in 1983 for the World Council of Churches' Commission on World Mission and Evangelism Report on Mission and Evangelism which was commended to the Consultation by Arthur Glasser. [*Mission and Evangelism—an Ecumenical Affirmation* (W.C.C. Geneva 1962)]. The Commission on World Mission and Evangelism does not represent all the activities of the W.C.C., and a considerably divergent theology emanated from the Unit on Urban and Industrial Mission, the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation process and other groups primarily related to issues of mission in the context of poverty.

evangelism and mass conversion among them.<sup>4</sup> In other words, the gospel has been the source of a new consciousness among poor people.

This new identity is in sharp contrast to the identity shaped by ecumenical p. 131 theology of the poor. This latter identity is primarily shaped by an analysis of the role of the poor in the global community defined in economic terms. Ecumenical theology stresses that the poor in and of themselves experience salvation, will be saved, and bear salvation to others. This affirms the poor in their poverty and reinforces their sense of victimization. It is a secular version of fate.

It also creates a sense of conflict with those who are the non-poor. The non-poor are those possessed of this enormous power to which the poor have no access. The only relation the poor can have with them is therefore one of conflict, whereby the rich are demonized.

A particular example of the strategy which this view generates is that of Christian Aid UK 'To strengthen the poor'. The only way forward is for the poor to become as strong as the rich. But the poor have already tried and failed to do this. That is why they are poor. They probably know better than others that such a struggle is hopeless.

Evangelical theology based on the atonement frees people from the destructive power of sin and death on their own perception of who they are; it gives assurance of a new identity and creative responsibility in contrast to the identity of economic powerless victimization which can be resolved only by victory in conflict with the powerful. Those who were no people become God's people, children of God, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. While the atonement itself may not be the point of entry into a community, it is the presupposition for the new identity which often is the point of entry.

## VICTORY OVER EVIL

The atonement brings the good news that the victory over all opposing and evil powers has been won. Evil is located in the transcendent realm in the evil one, not in evil people as such. The victory over evil is declared in the Cross as Christ led the powers in his triumphant victory procession ([Col. 2:15](#)). Thus the poor person, in whom the risen Christ dwells by his Spirit, is encouraged to see himself also as seated with Christ in the place of victory over evil ([Eph. 1:20](#)). The poor person can know that the victory over all the forces that oppress him has already been won.

In contrast, where this victory is not experienced or expressed, an unresolved conflict remains between the poor and those they perceive as their oppressors, as the locus of evil, and even as those who are demonized. People cannot easily let go the sense of wrongs they have suffered or that they have been party to inflicting on others. Victims continuously present themselves as victims. They take on an heroic, even Messianic role. A competition emerges to demonstrate that one particular group is undergoing the worst suffering. Thus a division emerges among the poor. And on the other side the guilty have continually to express their guilt and atone for it by keeping silent or by a self-righteous posturing on behalf of the oppressed.

Self-assertion by poor people is p. 132 one of the fruits of the new identity, that people realize they do not deserve their fate. John Perkins writes: 'Victims need always to come to a place of such self-assertion in order to overcome powerlessness and fully experience their indignation. But once such self-affirmation occurs, forgiveness and healing

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<sup>4</sup> M. M. Thomas, *The Secular Ideologies of India and the Secular Meaning of the Gospel*, (Madras, Christian Literature Service, 1976), p. 152. See further Chris Sugden, 'What is Good about Good News to the Poor?' in *AD 2000 and Beyond—a Mission Agenda* edited by Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden (Regnum, Oxford, 1991).

reconciliation must take place in order for community to grow.’<sup>5</sup> Reconciliation, often following repentance and restitution where appropriate, must follow because the purpose of justice is community.

The biblical view of justice is the correction of the situation in which the strong have exploitative power over the weak. In deliverance, the people are returned to the situation of life in community which God intends for them. Participation in community has multiple dimensions—its spheres include physical life, political protection and decision-making, social interchange and standing, economic production, education, culture and religion. Community membership means the ability to share fully within one’s capacity and potential in each essential aspect of community.

The cross made community between hostile groups possible. The cross broke down the barriers between hostile groups to create new humanity, according to Paul in Ephesians ([Eph. 2:13-22](#)). For this reason the evangelical’s first instinct is to partnership, convinced as he is of the unity of the body of Christ. Therefore Vinay Samuel points out, ‘Because the evangelical sees as the prime categories those saved by Christ and those as yet unsaved, he does not think of rich and poor as the primary divisions or categories. The understanding that the poor has of the rich is not of a powerful oppressor, but of a person. The evangelical never feels powerless against the rich. He still feels that he has the gospel to share with him. The slum dweller may lack much, but he has the priceless treasure of Christ in him, the hope of glory. Therefore the poor need never accept the rich as people who cannot change. They can confidently, not arrogantly, share something with the rich that the rich need.’<sup>6</sup>

In the process of this sharing, the rich also come to a new realization of the basis for their identity—the grace of God in Christ and not their riches. Jesus points out in his teaching in [Luke 12:31](#) that people are to seek first the kingdom of God, and everything else will be added to them. So changes are needed among the rich.

The evangelical believes in a personal force of evil and therefore does not need to demonize the powerful. The evangelical believes in the power of the cross to overcome evil, change the life of the oppressor and create the possibility of fruitful partnership.

## RELEASING CREATIVITY

Evangelical theology also enabled poor people to develop creatively. **P. 133** First they could bring change into their own situation, into their personal and family lives. In the evangelical view, personal change has eternal worth. In a hierarchy of values where all the emphasis is put on social change, personal change with eternal consequences is regarded as at best a sop, at worst a dangerous diversion.

Second, with their primary identity thus shaped by their identity with relation to a transcendent God, evangelical theology saw the poor as those who were to develop their role as his creatures, called to exercise stewardly dominion over creation. There was no disincentive to engage in the entrepreneurial activities at which many discovered the poor to be so adept. This has led to an explosion of involvement by evangelicals in micro-enterprise business schemes. These appeal to business people in the West who perceive

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<sup>5</sup> ‘From Proclamation to Community—The Work of John Perkins’, Stephen Berk, *Transformation* Vol 6, No 4, October, 1989, p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> Personal conversation.

poor people making investment, developing skills, and creating wealth. They appeal to the natural entrepreneurial talents in many of the poor.<sup>7</sup>

By contrast 'ecumenical' theology came in the context of an ideology which strongly distrusted any involvement by poor people in what were perceived to be capitalist schemes. Their ideology led to a more politicized approach. In many cases 'people's movements' were encouraged. However these failed to produce the expected result in political influence at a local or national level, because at the critical moments the people placed their vote where they knew where power lay. Worse, these movements often defined themselves in opposition to the Church, which was seen to have compromised with the powerful. They criticized the local churches while drawing their funds from western partners of those churches. Worse, in many cases these political movements were infiltrated by specifically non-Christian forces and have been forced to follow their agenda.

These approaches nurtured different styles of leadership. The evangelical approach nurtured those who could develop skills which built up economic and business bases. People were able to give concrete expression to their sense of identity by expressing themselves and contributing to the wealth of their family and community. They were delivered from a self-image of being useless. By contrast ecumenical theology encouraged a political form of leadership.

## PEOPLE-FOCUSED

Thirdly, evangelical theology was essentially people-focused. Thus new converts were encouraged to create new disciples and to create families. The work of Jorge Maldonado shows that Pentecostal Mission in Latin America has had a phenomenal success with its focus on the family and emphasis on the family model as the model of the Church. This has given expression to and met P. 134 popular aspirations more than sociopolitical activism.<sup>8</sup>

Maldonado writes: 'The new evangelical communities offer hope and a positive solution to some of these problems. Among believers the terms "brother" and "sister" are not empty words. A lifestyle "different from the world" as evidence of conversion and a new life is reinforced by a strong sense of communal belonging and networks of mutual support. In conservative evangelical and fundamentalist church communities, family life is the primary focus of sustained concern—the *raison d'être* of the church community itself. The "fundamentalist" message is one of family as defined by love, responsibility, commitment to the education of children, abstinence from alcohol, and marital fidelity. The community, most often represented by lay church members, is the living assurance to believers that they have someone on whom they can count when financial, personal or emotional needs plague the family.... This characteristic of the Pentecostal churches is one of the main keys for understanding the receptiveness that Pentecostalism has in popular sectors, constantly threatened by meaninglessness of life, [an existential condition] caused by a life of need and loss.'

He continues, 'There is considerable debate about the extent and influence of Catholic liberationists in their attempts to address these conditions and serve the masses, but

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<sup>7</sup> See a collection of articles published in *Transformation* on this topic gathered in *Christian Action Journal* Autumn 1993. 'Charity which gives nothing away—small business development amongst the poor' available from Opportunity Trust, 103 High Street, Oxford, U.K.

<sup>8</sup> I. E. Maldonado, 'Building Fundamentalism from the Family in Latin America' in *Fundamentalism and Society* ed Marty and Appleby (University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 214–239.

there seems to be a growing consensus that the liberationists who emphasise socio-political activism and corporate solidarity against unjust institutions and structures have not been able to compete with Pentecostals who took a firm doctrinal line and construct social networks of support for born-again Christians.'

He concludes: 'Pentecostals built communities that feature strong leadership, encourage full participation of women and men in the higher calling of church, and inculcate a work ethic suitable to the economic system. The hope of personal salvation, the forgiveness of guilt, the affirmation of personal worth, the provision of an encompassing surrogate family to serve as a Christian model for the nuclear family ... are communicated in the common language of the people. "Transformation", "new life" and "power" over one's personal and familial life and destiny are the key words in the discourse of those who convey the message.'<sup>9</sup>

From India Colleen Samuel points out that in the ministry of Divya Shanti in Bangalore to over 10,000 families in a slum area 'focus on families has given us a framework of action ... the vision that seeks to reconcile families, to attempt to bring wholeness of relations to the whole community as the family of families. Class struggles, justice fights, liberation language are all subordinate to the vision of building community as a family and building p. 135 families in the community.' Colleen Samuel then points out most interestingly that 'The poor family also has resources to share in rebuilding families in community and does not participate resourceless.'<sup>10</sup>

Vinay Samuel holds that 'A mission emphasis of rebuilding families will be able to address the issues of authority: How is power gained and used for the benefit of all? ... the area of responsibility: what are my obligations as a member of the family ... Morality especially in the context of poverty will not be ethical ideals but obligations to care for children and spouse. Sexuality will be to show marital fidelity—and order sexual behaviour to build rather than break families. The challenge of responding to family needs adequately will reveal the helplessness of fallen humanity and open families to the Gospel of Grace in Jesus Christ.'

By contrast Samuel notes 'Other Christians stressed the priority of community action and action groups. Action to transform communities by addressing political and economic structures dominated the scene. Focus on family was viewed as palliative action, a relief mode and not liberating and transforming action.... It is my contention that evangelicals were principally motivated by the needs of the poor. They did not impose an ideology of community transformation of the poor. In their exposure to the poor they saw family as the basic unit among the urban poor ... Mission inevitably responds to the needs of women and children. It also seeks to enable men to learn responsibility. It stresses economic support and marital fidelity, seeks to restore the breadwinner to the home, and protects women and children from the ravages of male desertion and violence.'<sup>11</sup>

Thus evangelical theology by focusing on the ability, power and value of personal change through the atonement and the gift of the Spirit has enabled the reconstruction of families as viable economic units as the basis for rebuilding communities. By contrast ecumenical theology perceived a focus on the cross, personal change and the family as necessarily belonging to the private sphere. Where they adduced these theological themes they were interpreted in primarily political terms. These evangelical foci were therefore

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<sup>9</sup> Maldonado, *op. cit.*, p. 222–223.

<sup>10</sup> Vinay and Colleen Samuel, 'Rebuilding Families—A Priority for Wholistic Mission' in *Transformation* Vol. 9, No. 3, July 1993, p. 6–7.

<sup>11</sup> Samuel, *op. cit.*, p. 6.



regarded as irrelevant to and of considerably less significance to changing the situation of the poor than public action. This assumption they derived from the western liberal enlightenment intellectual separation of the private from the public sphere.

### **FROM THE HEART OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH**

Evangelical theology which makes the atonement itself central has an impact on the poor from the very heart and sources of the Christian faith. It is important that the whole of the message of that faith impacts the poor. For example the nature of **P. 136** much involvement with the poor is determined by an analysis of their condition. Samuel noted above that some people imposed ideologies of community on the poor. Some theologies identify the poor as poor because of their sin, other theologies identify the poor as powerless and therefore needing to gain power. May I suggest an analysis prompted by the fact that Jesus' death inaugurated a new covenant. Covenant means commitment, grace (unmerited favour) empowering and intimacy. The concept of covenant may help analyze the situation of the poor and a Christian response. For the poor are disempowered, unable to develop their potential; they are denied grace and evaluated by the law of works and status to have failed and to deserve failure. Jesus' grace and forgiveness empowered people to live without fear or stigma. Regardless of their social origins or the stigma that society attached to them, Jesus' actions gave them new beginnings and by grace a new identity as the people of God.'

In contrast, there are views, espoused both by ecumenicals and also some evangelicals that Christian faith can only provide a religious motivation for Christian good works. In this case the outcome is that the practical action to assist the poor has often been the same whatever the source of the motivation, biblical or secular. The Christian contribution will not inform the actual practice which may well be determined by secular agendas for society.

A clear example of this is the ideology discussed in this paper of creating 'political awareness' which became the overwhelming agenda of development for Christian and non-Christian groups in the last two decades. This exposes a dualism in Christian faith and thought that confines the Christian contribution to the private world of inner motivation. This is the classic expression of western liberal thinking that divides the public and the private into two separate spheres. If Christian action is reduced to conscientisation and Christian spirituality is omitted, then the contribution of the Christian faith is only to bring the ideology that has informed its adherents in the public sphere—either of welfare or political involvement.

Evangelical theology that has refused this separation of private and public spheres, and has sought to apply the atonement, personal change and development of people as disciplinarians, and wealth and family creators, has arguably brought news to the poor that they have received as good.

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# Ethical Issues in Evangelism and Justice Among the Poor

Alan Nichols

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*In this article the author reflecting on the biblical text and his own involvement with Asian refugees, draws attention to a number of ethical issues in evangelism and justice among the poor—issues that some evangelical evangelists and development workers either ignore or evidence little sensitivity to. His interpretation of the much discussed passages in [Acts 17](#) and [Matthew 25](#) in the context of witness to Buddhist refugees raises important questions on the relationship between world views and cultural behaviour and in pressing for a religious response from the powerless. He suggests areas where Christian credibility is at stake.*

Editor

The thesis of this paper is that it is unethical for Christians to pressure for conversion in situations where the poor are completely dependent on foreign support, such as refugee camps or communities heavily sustained by development projects; and that Christian witness by aid and development workers is undermined where foreigners breach the hospitality of a host country by challenging its cultural norms, or by using conversion as the image of belief in Christ when preaching to people in a non-Christian religious context such as Buddhism. Proclamation of the gospel is best done by local churches who are in partnership with development or relief agencies.

## A MODEL FOR ENGAGING WITH LOCAL CULTURE

[Acts 17:16–34](#) gives us a clear example of the apostle Paul’s strategy to build on the culture of his hearers (by quoting their poets) and on the religion visible locally (the altar ‘to an unknown god’). Is this [P. 138](#) story included in The Acts merely as part of a narrative about Paul’s flexibility in preaching the gospel as a primary evangelism, or is it there as a model for the Church facing similar cultural situations?

I want to argue that this narrative is there for our learning, and I have the support of F. F. Bruce and others for this view.<sup>1</sup> The Athens address is a significant model for interacting in a positive way with existing local, history and religious awareness, and working towards a sharing of the gospel of Jesus and his resurrection.

Paul did not always reach the goal of actually discussing the resurrection (some thought anastasis was another god<sup>2</sup>), but that does not invalidate the model. This way of approaching the audience was presumably used by Paul throughout his 18 months in Athens, and in Corinth subsequently. As a consistent style of apologetics, it must have produced conversions, for Paul is able to say later<sup>3</sup> that the gospel is bearing fruit and growing ‘all over the world’, and this cannot just be with Jewish conversions.

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<sup>1</sup> p. 354, F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Eerdmans, US.

<sup>2</sup> [Acts 17:32](#).

<sup>3</sup> [Colossians 1:6](#).

In [Acts 17](#), Paul is selective in quoting well-known local poets, and his religious quote is an odd graveyard inscription which suits his purpose. Both are inoffensive, and both suit his purpose as building-blocks for presenting a gospel which engages with the culture without undermining it. Of course, in the longer view, we know that Christianity can act in a counter-cultural way, and that civil disobedience is envisaged in [Revelation 13](#) and other places as a gospel duty in certain circumstances. But, in the preaching of the gospel this model says you can engage positively with elements of culture and worldview which do not conflict with Christ.

## THE CONCEPT OF CONVERSION

Conversion is a highly controversial concept in the modern world. Some Christians hold back from any evangelism and fall in the trap of syncretism, implicitly affirming that all religions lead to God.

In the case of Hinduism, relatively few have been converted to Christianity. In the view of David Burnett, this is because the worldviews of Christianity and Hinduism are too different, and because Hinduism has a capacity to absorb religious insights from other faiths.<sup>4</sup>

In the case of Islam, the understanding of revelation is quite different from Christianity's. 'In Islam, the inspiration came directly to Muhammad and was transmitted orally and eventually written down in the Qu'ran word for word, in a manner similar to dictation ... Christianity, on the other hand, has considered that the Bible as the revelation of God has been expressed through human writers.'<sup>5</sup> This, plus the central place of Muhammad himself, marks out Islam as a religion obviously resistant to conversion. Muslims are in fact possibly more evangelistically minded [p. 139](#) than most Christians. As a result, the impact of renewed Christian mission on Islam has been small, partly—in the view of Burnett<sup>6</sup>—through cultural insensitivity on the part of Christian missionaries, and partly through association with European colonial powers.<sup>7</sup> By contrast with Islam, Christianity has shown itself to be eminently transferable by having the Christian Scriptures immediately translated into local languages.

However, it would be misleading to attribute Islam's rejection of Christianity largely to clumsiness by missionaries and the colonial legacy. The first and foremost reason that Christianity has got nowhere in converting Muslims derives from the fact that because Islam post-dates Christianity, there are a number of anti-Christian statements in its scripture. For example, Chapter 114 of the Qu'ran, which plays a similar function within Islam to the Lord's Prayer and is as widely known, includes a negative reference to both Christianity and Judaism at verse 7. Elsewhere throughout the Qu'ran, there is an abundance of references which are directly and overtly critical of Christianity. Thus in order for Christianity to appeal to Muslims, it needs first to cast doubt on the credibility of these references in the Qu'ran, which is of course unacceptable to Muslims.

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<sup>4</sup> p. 79, David Burnett, *Clash of Worlds*, MARC, Eastbourne, 1990.

<sup>5</sup> p. 109, Burnett.

<sup>6</sup> p. 115, Burnett.

<sup>7</sup> William R. Shenk supports this, in 'Moving beyond word and deed', in *Missiology: an International Review*, Vol. XX, No. 1, Jan. 1993.

So, in the three major world religions, it can be said that the idea of conversion can be said to be offensive to people already satisfied with their own cultural religion. The idea of salvation is not necessarily offensive.

## BIBLICAL METAPHORS FOR SALVATION

It is interesting how varied are Paul's metaphors for salvation. In [Acts 17](#) in Athens he uses 'repent' as the foundational idea. In Romans, it is 'justified by faith'. In 1 Corinthians it is 'calling on the name of the Lord.' In 2 Corinthians it is God 'setting his seal of ownership.' In Galatians we are 'rescued from this present evil age'. In Ephesians and commonly in Paul's writings, people simply 'believe'.

It may well be that Paul chose the image of justification by faith because of his preoccupation with Jewish hearers who were fixed on the Law of Moses as an immutable point of God's revelation, and because he needed a legal concept to transform their understanding. Jurgen Moltmann<sup>8</sup> goes further: he claims that the Christ event is much greater than the doctrine of justification by faith as it has come down to us, and so it reaches 'beyond the present of word and faith, opening to man the future of salvation and the lordship of Jesus Christ by securing for him, in his transitory existence, the hope of a new life, thereby setting him in eschatological liberty'. Moltmann will not be shut up into legal definitions. Nor should we. So justification by faith is appropriate for some audiences; other concepts work better in others.<sup>9</sup> p. 140

Elsewhere in the New Testament, other images for salvation are new birth,<sup>10</sup> members of God's house-hold<sup>11</sup> and branches grafted onto the main tree.<sup>12</sup> These illustrate the diversity of terms used to express the moment of putting personal faith in Christ as Lord and Saviour, what the preachers of yesterday used to call 'closing with Christ'. This diversity demonstrates that today's preacher or missionary has plenty of flexibility in choosing terms and promoting ideas which do not offend, or—to put it positively engage with local known understanding.

Conversion as an image is used in [1 Thessalonians 1:9–10](#) ('turning from idols to the living God') but seldom elsewhere. In today's international environment the word conversion is usually negative, implying proselytism. True conversion is a deep inner spiritual change; proselytism is change of religion under pressure, or to gain an advantage. But the ideas are often confused. In my view belief in Christ or following Christ are much better biblical images to use. This does not mean that the concept of conversion is invalid; just that it may be inappropriate.

There is an exegetical point here. F. F. Bruce points out<sup>13</sup> that Paul's reference to the Athenians being religious was not necessarily complimentary: 'Paul is stating a fact, not paying a compliment; we are told that it was forbidden to use complimentary exordia when addressing the Areopagus, in hope of securing its goodwill.' F. F. Bruce also points out that Paul demolishes the false idea which the Athenians held that God was somehow

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<sup>8</sup> P. 149ff, Jurgen Moltmann, *The Future of Creation*, SCM Press London, 1979.

<sup>9</sup> P. 152, Moltmann.

<sup>10</sup> [John 3:3](#).

<sup>11</sup> [Colossians 2:19](#).

<sup>12</sup> [Romans 11:17](#).

<sup>13</sup> P. 355, Bruce.

dependent on his creatures for their worship and service. So it is not as though Paul necessarily agreed with everything in the culture, even the selective bits he quotes; but he does engage with it, comment on it, take his audience from their known position towards the truth which Paul himself has apprehended. John Stott elaborates this in his commentary.<sup>14</sup>

This playing with terms is on the surface of a much deeper question: that behind any options for the term conversion lies a fundamental theology of salvation. Belief becomes possible only because there is an incarnate God to believe in. God is portrayed through the Bible as saving and redeeming in nature. God is revealed in creation (all human beings are in God's image), in the covenant with Abraham (through him all nations will be blessed), in the liberating of a group of slaves from Egypt (leading them through the Exodus experience to the promised land), in the proclamation and action of the prophets (showing God's justice and love), and supremely in Jesus Christ, Word made flesh, and the gift of the Holy Spirit, who made of fearful disciples the seed of the Christian Church. Beatriz Melano Couch<sup>15</sup> writes: 'There is a steady, p. 141 consistent line of action in God's dealings with a particular people, Israel, and then the new Israel, towards the salvation of the universal family.' Couch then argues that God's promise in [Isaiah 61](#), affirmed by Jesus in [Luke 4:18-19](#), shows the God of Justice and the God of Love. Justice without love may mean human fairness but without opening spaces for reconciliation and redemption. There is a whole argument here about the holism of justice and love displayed together in the Trinitarian nature of God.

Christ came not merely to 'change souls' but to save and transform the whole of humanity. Political structures—indeed, everything—comes under the judgement of Christ. And within the range of his redemption.

## IS THE CROSS BY DEFINITION OFFENSIVE?

Within the biblical revelation, the Cross of Christ is described<sup>16</sup> as a 'stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to Gentiles'. In Greek, stumbling block is *skandalon* (origin of the English word scandal), and it meant a rock to fall over, or a means of trapping someone, but this does not imply offence in the sense of deeply wounding or being personally offensive. It would have to be said, in terms of missionary history, that any offence given by the gospel has usually been due to missionaries' insensitivity and naivety, rather than to any offence inherent in the gospel itself. Having said that, we do not need to whitewash the host communities, who sometimes deliberately misread the message. An example is found within Islam. Try as Christians may, we cannot get across the notion of Trinity to Muslims, who are convinced it refers to God the Father, God the Mother, and God the Son. This offends them for two reasons: firstly it implies that God committed the unspeakable—indulged in sex—and secondly it proves in their mind that Christianity is polytheistic.

Sometimes offence is given because Christians will not engage in the local culture, believing that the Cross implies rejecting 'the world'. But, as Lesslie Newbigin writes,<sup>17</sup> 'In

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<sup>14</sup> P. 280-291, John Stott, *The Message of Acts*, IVP London 1990.

<sup>15</sup> Beatriz Melano Couch, 'Theological Perspective from the Point of View of the Oppressed,' in *Journal Towards a Liberating Spirituality: Voices from the Third World*, Vol. XIII, June 1990.

<sup>16</sup> [1 Corinthians 1:20-25](#).

<sup>17</sup> p. 194, Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, Eerdmans, US, WCC Geneva 1989.

the resurrection of Jesus, the original covenant with creation and with all human life, the covenant with Noah and his descendants, is reaffirmed. The world of human culture rejects God and is under God's judgements. But God in his patient and long-suffering love sustains the created world, and the world of human culture in being, in order that there may still be time and space for repentance and for the coming into being of the new creation within the womb of the old.'

But Paul avoids offence in the language he chooses. He uses the image of 'being ambassadors for Christ',<sup>18</sup> and this suggests diplomacy, commending a position without offending the locals, arguing a case rather than compelling by force. It comes down in the end to consistent ethical behaviour by p. 142 Christians: we are to 'make every effort to do what leads to peace'.<sup>19</sup> We are to be peacemakers. In commending the gospel, as in all we do, we do it peacefully, inoffensively, keeping in good relations with other people and with a 'good reputation among outsiders'.<sup>20</sup>

In using the language of diplomacy, do we have to compromise the uniqueness of Christ, by appearing to be too positive about other religions? Not at all. But it is more than a question of language; it is also a question of belief. Newbigin argues<sup>21</sup> that if we believe in God as Saviour of the world, we should be looking for signs of his salvation everywhere—in the lives of people who do not yet know Jesus as Lord; and in the acts of politics and development which transform communities. 'The Christian,' he writes, 'will be eager to cooperate with people of all faiths and ideologies in all projects which are in line with the Christian's understanding of God's purpose in history.'

There will be struggles for justice and freedom in which we can and should hold hands with those of other faiths and ideologies to achieve specific goals, even though our ultimate goal is Christ and his coming in glory and not what our collaborators imagine. It is in the process of this spiritual journey that the context for true dialogue is provided, as we work together with people with other commitments but with a common task of salvation and redemption of people and communities. This is not to assume that there is a universally held view of the nature of justice. There is the John Rawls view of justice as fairness, assuming individuals will make disinterested judgements about the common good. And there are many other views of justice which hold the community as supreme. Nevertheless, when a common view of justice is held, then Christians can work together with others in achieving common goals for society, which for the Christian will be the kind of transformation into the Kingdom of God which the Scriptures envisage.

### **A Case Study in Working with Buddhists**

The heart of Buddhism, according to Buddhadasa Bhikku, one of the famous interpreters to westerners, is: 'a religion based on intelligence, science, knowledge, whose purpose is the destruction of suffering and the source of suffering.'<sup>22</sup> Buddhism is not prayers, or Buddha images, or merit-making. These are abuses, what Bhikku calls 'tumours' which obscure the good material. It is wrong, he says, for foreigners to come and point to these

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<sup>18</sup> [2 Corinthians 5:20](#).

<sup>19</sup> [Romans 14:19](#)

<sup>20</sup> [1 Timothy 3:7](#).

<sup>21</sup> p. 180ff, Newbigin. See also *The Unique Christ in our Pluralist World*, WEF Manila Declaration, 1993, World Evangelical Fellowship Theological Commission, Seoul.

<sup>22</sup> p. 2ff, Buddhadasa Bhikku, *Handbook for Mankind*, publ. Buddhasadasa Foundation, Thailand, 1988.

shameful and disgraceful growths as being Buddhism rather than novelties and accretions.

In my two years in Thailand, working alongside Buddhists to meet the humanitarian and spiritual needs of 70,000 refugees from [p. 143](#) Burma, I came to admire those trying to follow pure Buddhism, practising the noble paths of virtue and working to relieve suffering. Their motives were as good as mine; their dedication no less.

What is more, when you sit alongside the refugees and to some extent share their suffering, you meet Christ face to face. That is what Jesus said in [Matthew 25:31–46](#) and I testify that it is true. But in my case the refugees were mostly Buddhists. Did this mar the image of Christ in their face? No, in their suffering, they shared more than I ever have. I gave a coat once to a refugee, feeling good that I was actually obeying the scriptural injunction rather than building my fashion wardrobe, and then to my astonishment, the young student to whom I gave the coat was not wearing it two weeks later—he had given it to someone who needed it more. This coat has been up and down the Thai-Burma border ever since!

In a long term civil war, with vicious elements such as forced labour for portering food and arms, women used frequently as rape victims, and ethnic villages destroyed, I saw their suffering as like the suffering of Christ. Is this not how we are meant to see it?

In the above exegesis of [Matthew 25](#), I acknowledge selecting a particular view. Alfred Plummer's classic commentary<sup>23</sup> says that Christ's claiming of the poor and needy as his brethren was quite in keeping with his character as Son of man and Son of God. But some evangelical commentators have interpreted this passage as though it applies only to the 'brethren'—that is, Christians. This presupposes a later editing of Matthew reflecting the persecution of Christians a generation later. I do not subscribe to this later dating.

If I am right in my understanding of [Matthew 25](#), I can then identify not only with the extent of their trauma, I can also sympathize with their religion which has a slogan 'smoke by night, fire by day,' which describes a spiritual restlessness reflecting a person who has not achieved tranquillity and has been deprived of spiritual nourishment. Is this not similar to Jesus' command not to 'quench the smoking flax'?<sup>24</sup>

Buddhism like Christianity has many varieties. The kind I came into contact with most, because they were active in helping refugees and rescuing women caught in prostitution, is called 'The Network of Engaged Buddhists', which promotes social justice and equality for every person. Their views are very like those of Christians who understand that the gospel is holistic, concerned about social inequities.

The particular group of young Burmese students with whom I was associated in Bangkok, all refugees from an oppressive military regime back home which did not allow dissent of any kind, had embraced a form of Buddhism based on nonviolent principles, emerging from Aung San Suu Kyi's teaching, which was in turn based on the religion and [p. 144](#) philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi.<sup>25</sup> Their commitment to non-violence had a cost: they engaged in unarmed struggle against a regime with 400,000 soldiers, so you had to have a strong view of truth winning. Each of this group in fact had been arrested back home, tortured for information, and had been on the run in exile for five years.

This is not to suggest that Buddhism has truths equal to Christianity. What is interesting is that there is little scope for forgiveness in the Buddhist tradition. The

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<sup>23</sup> p. 351, Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, James Clarke, London.

<sup>24</sup> [Isaiah 42:3](#), quoted in [Matthew 12:20](#).

<sup>25</sup> Aung San Suu Kyi, *Freedom from Fear*, Penguin, UK 1992.

Christian focus for forgiveness and reconciliation, the Cross, is missing.<sup>26</sup> Here is something positive and extra Christians can offer to the Buddhist tradition, without necessarily trampling on their principles or their path of virtue. Much of the practice of virtue is consistent with Christianity; but there are some missing pieces—to Christians, vital pieces—of the spiritual puzzle which we can supply.

Nor does this imply that Christians are more consistent in applying their own principles of, for example, peacemaking and reconciliation. We can point to the incapacity for forgiveness among Burmese in their long-running civil war, and we might blame their internecine strife on the Buddhist lack of forgiveness. But they could equally point to the grudges held for generations among the various brands of nominal and cultural Christians in Ireland or Yugoslavia, resulting in the current civil war and strife in those places. We can show you ‘a more perfect way’, but can we live it out ourselves?

## **ETHICAL QUESTIONS IN JUSTICE AND EVANGELISM MINISTRIES**

If my thesis holds that the New Testament leads us away from offending people’s culture or religion as we proclaim the gospel, can we identify more closely the situations when this offence might occur? And can we separate the concept of conversion from the pressure by which we seek to press conversion upon others? Both the concept and the pressure have the possibility of giving offence in different environments.

First what does it mean to ‘give offence’? We can distinguish between provoking a consciousness of shame, regarding the lifestyle and values of the community and their identity within it, and provoking a consciousness of guilt, which suggests failing God’s standards. These days being hurt or feeling shame is often expressed by anger. To provoke either response by our proclamation or by attitude is obviously to invite a negative response to our message. Let me test four ethical issues.

### **1. We Offend if We Manipulate People’s Dependence on Our Support to Get a Religious Response**

It is always unethical to manipulate other people or pressurize them to [p. 145](#) act against their will or their own interests. It is also contrary to the spirit of the gospel. There are two common environments where this may occur these days: refugee camps, and community development projects which are resourced from outside the community. My experience with refugees is that they are so conscious of their powerlessness that they are likely to accept any conditions attached to aid to keep alive, or to feed their children. Their situation is so desperate that they will even flee from Burma to Bangladesh, the least developed country in the world, to seek help.<sup>27</sup>

This pressure can be on individuals, or on partners in the development project. C. B. Samuel<sup>28</sup> writes: ‘In terms of partnership in mission there are some key issues that we need to look at if we take Christian spirituality seriously. What are the important components in the relationship between partners? Since spirituality is central in transformation, how do we translate spiritual standards into practical requirement in the partnership? Pharisee’s or Jesus’ options? What is the place of money in this relationship?’

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<sup>26</sup> Salvation in Buddhism is through awakening rather than through any act of atonement. See p. 56–60, *Love Meets Wisdom: a Christian Experience of Buddhism*, Aloysius Pieris SJ, Orbis Books, New York 1990.

<sup>27</sup> At the time of writing, 230,000 Muslims (who call themselves Rohingyas) are in refugee camps near Cox’s Bazar in Bangladesh, exiles from ethnic genocide by government troops in Burma/Myanmar.

<sup>28</sup> C. B. Samuel, *Spirituality in Transformation*, Paper in World Vision Australia Library.



Would it be right to say that the importance of the spiritual is often inversely proportional to the importance of money in our partnership?' The answers are self-evident on the field. If the whole basis of the relationship is one-way financial dependence, then you will never know what their spiritual life would be like without that dependence. It is certainly not an equal partnership.

To avoid the danger, one needs to adopt some quite different practices, such as those of the Burmese Border Consortium<sup>29</sup> in Thailand, where they provide rice and other food, and medicines, to the gate of the Karen and Mort refugee camps, but the elected officials of the refugees themselves take over from there, administering everything according to need—food supplement to pregnant women, etc. There is a dignity to the self-administration, even if they cannot be self-supporting. The partnership then is: we have the money to buy the food, but the equal and fair distribution without corruption is entirely up to you.

The danger of religious manipulation is evident from the reputation of certain North American fundamentalist groups who, once peace was declared in Cambodia and the refugees went home, flooded into Phnom Penh to 'preach the gospel', having done nothing for the Cambodians during the whole time of their crisis over 18 years. Prince Sihanouk, seeing the danger with great clarity, immediately registered the Catholic and Anglican churches so he could reject applications from the rest for official registration. Such is the awareness in the 'Third World' of the risk of being manipulated by [p. 146](#) religious interests who care nothing for the history and culture of the people. This danger is elaborated in Nichols, 'Refugees Religion and Politics', and Cameron, 'Necessary Heresies'.<sup>30</sup>

## **2. We Offend When We Pressurize People Towards a Religious Response When They are Powerless in the Face of Much Greater Social and Political Powers**

In the week after the October 1993 earthquake in Maharashtra state of India, one Indian Christian agency printed and distributed to survivors of the earthquake, 50,000 tracts urging conversion to Christ. Understandably, the people rejected the message as irrelevant to their condition.

In [Ephesians 6:12](#), Paul writes, 'We are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly place.' The common evangelical view used to be that these were personal spiritual powers, part of the struggle of flesh and spirit. But today many Christian commentators view the 'powers and principalities' as representing structures and institutions which those in power may use for the public good or may manipulate for their personal benefit. This is consistent with [Romans 13](#), where governors are ordained by God for the common good.

What we have to do is work through what this means in Christian ministry and outreach. It is particularly complicated in foreign countries, whether one is a missionary or a development worker, for we come up face to face with truly powerless people, where we feel we can do virtually nothing to change their economic, political or social situation. Westerners are so accustomed to having political power—at least by casting a vote from

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<sup>29</sup> Report by Jack Dunford, chairman, Burmese Border Consortium May 1993 to Australia-Burma Conference, Sydney, Australia.

<sup>30</sup> p. 20, Alan Nichols, *Refugees Religion and Politics*, Acorn Press, Melbourne, 1993, and p. 32ff and p. 170ff, Peter Cameron, *Necessary Heresies: Alternatives to Fundamentalism*, New South Wales University Press, 1993.

time to time—that we are shocked when we have to relate to people who have no control whatever over their circumstances.

If those circumstances are clearly the result of oppression, corruption, fraud or feudalism, what can the foreigner do? For that matter, what can the local do? If, what's more, the majority culture is Buddhist or Hindu or Muslim, so that Christians form a tiny minority, what can the Christian do, whether a local or a foreigner?

This becomes a time for what are sometimes called middle axioms—strategies for living with situations which are less than ideal but which put your principles into practice as well as you possibly can. In a country where corruption and fraud are endemic, your middle axiom might be: 'I will never knowingly engage in corruption or support the system', but another might be, 'For the greater good of the people I serve, I will pay the fee demanded if it is the usual fee.' Or your own conscience may reject abortion, but your middle axiom in a refugee camp might be, 'For the present p. 147 time, another child for this woman would be an utter disaster, so I will facilitate it.'<sup>31</sup>

Someone somewhere must begin to deal with corrupt or oppressive powers. So my most important work as a refugee or development worker, viewed over time, might be advocacy with foreign embassies to create international demand for human rights to be observed, or for corruption to be dealt with as a condition of foreign aid. This is dealing directly with the powers and principalities.

There are some Christians who take an alternative position: that, if Christians sit alongside and share the suffering of poor and marginalized people, that action itself confronts powers and principalities on a spiritual level which is at a more profound level than secular advocacy. The two approaches can be combined, as they are quite deliberately in the work of the Jesuit Refugee Service worldwide. Their motto—and their practice—is to 'share the journey of the refugee', but sometimes this involves interventions with embassies and media to highlight the suffering going on. World Vision staff around the world are facing the same dilemmas. The issue of confronting secular power is explored in some depth by Thomas McAlpine in his book 'Facing the Powers: What are the Options?';<sup>32</sup> However we approach this question, Moltmann reminds us that 'the power of sin is also the divine lament of all senseless suffering in the world, the suffering and, injustice that cries out to heaven.'<sup>33</sup>

### **3. It is Unethical and Offensive to Offer to People a Gospel Which Undermines or Despises or Denies the Validity of Their Culture, and When we Preach That to be Christian They Have to be Converted Away From It**

The trouble is that Christian conversion often becomes synonymous with cultural conversion. This was the issue which led to the Council of Jerusalem ([Acts 15](#)), the result of which was that Gentiles were not required to become Jews in order to become Christians, but were free to respond to the gospel in accordance with gentile cultural norms. Burnett writes:<sup>34</sup> 'A cultural transformation will undoubtedly occur, but it will be one from within their own culture, rather than conversion to a foreign culture.' A paradigm shift is necessary. Christians need to understand the essential nature of the worldview themes revealed in the Bible. This process is helped when we interact with

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<sup>31</sup> For more discussion, see Nichols, *Refugees Religion and Politics*.

<sup>32</sup> Thomas McAlpine, *Facing the Powers: what are the options?*, MARC, US 1992.

<sup>33</sup> p. 164, Moltmann.

<sup>34</sup> p. 227, Burnett.

Christians from other cultures, so that areas where we are ‘culturally blind’ may come under reexamination.

It may be helpful to distinguish between a worldview which includes social structures of law, education and family, and culture which expresses itself in behaviour, dress and customs. Conversion often starts out at the edge of culture, then moves into social structures.

The biblical worldview of God as Creator can relate to the worldview p.148 of creation expressed within another culture. The aboriginal peoples of Australia, for example, have a Creation myth about the Rainbow Serpent which created the dreamtime landscape where they lived. What Paul would do at an Australian Areopagus today would be to place the two worldviews alongside one another, and let one transform the other. Ultimately then we are talking of a Christian transformation of culture, not a denial or abrogation of it. This idea of transformation is argued classically in Charles Kraft’s ‘Christianity in Culture’.<sup>35</sup> He includes the idea that some parts of national culture are not integrated (such as witchdoctors who are unpopular) and are ready for transformation. There are of course aspects of culture such as oppression of women which no Christian can support. You cannot build the gospel on oppression.

We can go further. David Bosch says, ‘The Christian faith never existed except as “translated” into a culture.’<sup>36</sup> So in the early days Jews, Greeks, barbarians, Thracians, Egyptians and Romans all felt at home in the Christian Church. Later, the faith was ‘inculturated’ into Syrian, Greek, Roman, Coptic, Armenian, Ethiopian and Maronite liturgies and contexts. In the twentieth century, as both Catholic and Protestant missionaries became conscious that their own versions of Christianity were culturally conditioned, the whole area of mission had to be re-defined. Inculturation has become the way Christian mission is now being explored. And the evidence is that the spread of Christianity has not led to a vast monoculture. Conversion has often meant adding another layer of cultural influences on existing cultural norms. Bosch argues for a ‘double movement’: both inculturation of Christianity and Christianization of culture. All I have argued about ethics is consistent with this current theological exploration.<sup>37</sup> And it is all the more powerful when the culture is poor, economically dependent on the West or on foreign aid.

#### **4. The Credibility of Our Witness is Undermined if pastors and Development Workers Engage in Inconsistent or Immoral or Extravagant Behaviour**

Whether the Christian is an evangelist, a missionary who plants churches, or a development worker constrained by the limits set by a hostile government, consistency of life is the key indicator of effective Christian witness. Somewhat surprisingly, this is agreed by a sample of Evangelical lay people’s attitudes in the United States to development work overseas.<sup>38</sup> It might be expected that they would support only direct proclamation, and that if this were forbidden by the government of a particular country, they would not p. 149 support working in that country. But 92% still supported going

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<sup>35</sup> William Kraft, Orbis Books, US, 1979, p. 343.

<sup>36</sup> p. 447, David Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, Orbis, US 1992.

<sup>37</sup> p. 454, Bosch. This is supported by Charles R. Taber in *The World is Too Much with Us*, Mercer University Press, Georgia, 1991, p. 183ff.

<sup>38</sup> p. 48, ‘What do Christians expect from Christian Relief and Development?’ in *Stewardship Journal*, Vol. 2, Nos. 3–4, God’s Word Publications, Nashville, 1992.

there. It might also be expected, given the option, that Evangelicals would blame poverty on the individuals. But instead they blamed political and economic structures within the poor countries. 'This,' commented economist Kurt Schaefer, 'was a more finessed and historically literate interpretation of underdevelopment than most academics have been able to muster over the past generation.'<sup>39</sup>

Another commentator on the survey, Tetsunao Yamamori, said: 'Clearly, both ministry to the soul and to the body are integral to the Church's work. But they are different tasks. Evangelism includes those efforts devoted to the proclamation of the good news of God's salvation in Jesus Christ. These activities bring men and women under the Lordship of Christ and result in a vertical relationship with God. Social action encompasses those efforts devoted to the liberation of men and women in social, political and economic shackles. The results of these are peace, order and harmony on the horizontal plane.'<sup>40</sup> Some would express this connection in an even more integrated way, by using a different metaphor of the Kingdom. The simplest expression is 'love your neighbour', as in [1 John 3:16](#), 'If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?'

The American survey is paralleled by a recent sample of Australians, responding within the National Church Life Survey in 1991 to questions about their attitudes to international aid and development.<sup>41</sup> Church attenders in Australia, half of whom already have a link with work overseas, prefer to support activities such as sponsorship and overseas aid which encompass the meeting of physical and developmental needs through the provision of food, shelter, health care and education. They are not content to support proclamation only. It is also true that overseas activities focusing on environmental, justice or human rights issues were not nearly as well supported as development activity.

So Christians in home countries in the First World expect their representatives in developing countries to be consistently ethical in their behaviour, and expect them to be serving the human and developmental needs of the communities where they are located.

## WORKING WITH LOCAL CHURCHES

While it is true that there are still some unevangelized areas of the world, the overwhelming majority of relief and development work occurs in countries where there is a Christian church. It may be a tiny minority in a hostile environment; it may be Catholic, Protestant, independent Evangelical, Coptic, Pentecostal; **P. 150** outsiders may consider the gospel to be cursed by liturgy or tradition. But the Church, whatever state it is in, remains the historical agent for the completion of the eternal purpose of God—his kingdom. As Pedro Arana Quiroz writes: 'The reality of the true Kingdom is the divine perspective it allows us to have with regard to human problems; its gives us another way of speaking about theology. Consequently, the mission of the church consists in giving witness to the kingdom of God in God's world.'<sup>42</sup> The Church's mission among the poor will include worship by the poor, prophetic action on injustice, service among the poor and saving actions.

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<sup>39</sup> p. 91, 'What do Christians expect ...?'

<sup>40</sup> p. 91, 'What do Christians expect ...?'

<sup>41</sup> p. 12, 'Christian Responsibility Towards People in Developing Countries', Occasional Paper No. 4 from 1991 *National Church Life Survey*, publ. Dec. 1992 by Uniting Church Board of Mission, NSW, Sydney.

<sup>42</sup> 'The Integral Mission to the Poor', Paper presented to the World Evangelical Fellowship Consultation 'Evangelisation of the Poor', Delhi, October 1993.

A difficulty in the evangelical Christian world is that many overseas mission agencies and relief agencies originate from the dreams of individuals and tend to develop independent styles of operation. They attract local Christian talent to staff programmes, and again, tend to act independently of local Christian churches. There is an inconsistency here: our ecclesiology says that the Church is God's agent for mission, but our behaviour often demonstrates a different belief, that God is impatient with the local church and chooses to use other agencies. A consistent behaviour would be for Christian relief and development organizations to act always in cooperation and partnership with local churches. The agency then can express accountability to the local people of God. It can be a mutually beneficial relationship: the agency can become more sensitive to local subculture; the Church can be propelled into mission.

## CONCLUSIONS

1. Several things clearly undermine the credibility of Christians witnessing to the gospel among the poor: immoral or insensitive behaviour; paternalism; ignoring the culture and environment of the people.
2. Several things clearly reduce the likelihood of the Christian message being accepted: asking people to jettison their culture. It is not only a matter of being sensitive. It is also engaging positively with the culture and leading people towards the God of creation and redemption.
3. Several things get a response to the gospel which is illegitimately based and will fade with the first wind of hostility or difficulty: 'rice Christians' born out of dependence on foreign interests.
4. The approach in development work which commends the gospel is the presentation by word and life of a holistic mission, where the workers restrain themselves from direct proclamation, commending the gospel by personal ethical behaviour, and avoiding the pitfall of creating dependence.
5. The role of the local church can be important in the direct proclamation but it would also have to be sensitive.
6. If this seems negative, then the [p. 151](#) positive: we don't take Christ out with us; he is already out there in his world, and we meet him in the face of the refugee and the poor whom we are called to serve ([Matthew 25](#)). We also stand ready to explain the faith that is in us, when those watching our lives are sufficiently impressed by our accompaniment with them in their suffering.
7. In ministry to the poor, our Christian witness in this holistic sense is best done by cooperating with local Christian communities of faith. Where the Church is, missionaries are no longer needed (except in technical areas); and the Christian development agency can happily restrict its activity to that part of holistic mission which complements the evangelistic work of the local church. That then eliminates the possibility of 'rice Christians'; more positively, it portrays the gospel in its cultural context, where the local people interpret and live out what it means for Christ to be Lord of their world.
8. It may be that each world religion needs a separate approach with regard to offering the gospel when it comes to the point of proclamation. Certainly Islam presents more difficulties than Buddhism or Hinduism. But certain principles and ethical questions are universal when seeking to evangelize the poor.
9. There are many remaining questions: What if there is no local church? Or if there is a church but the gospel is obscured? Or a local church under oppression or

limited by law? What if you cannot find Christians to staff development projects?  
Can non-Christians of goodwill contribute to the Christian mission?

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The Rev. Alan Nichols is an executive with World Vision Australia. [p. 152](#)

# The Tribe of Martha and Priscilla

Beulah Wood

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*As a mother of four daughters and with wide experience in ministry to women and men in Asia, the author writes with feeling on the suffering of the disadvantaged half of humanity. The clarity of her case, enhanced by telling stories and statistics needs little introduction. Her plea that women be given a greater role in friendship evangelism, discipling and in shared church leadership cannot be ignored by our readers (who are mostly men!).*

Editor

I speak to you today, a product of my own western background, with the additional advantage of years living in Asia, of studying the word of God, and of travel and reading through working for an international aid organization. I cannot escape my cultural bias. None of us can or needs to. Your perspective enriches me, as I hope my perspective enriches you.

Ever since I first reached the shores of this great country of India as a newly-wed 25 years ago, I've been on a journey of discovery on how life is for women, here or anywhere else in the world, and looking at whether the actuality is what our loving God intended.

## I. THE DISADVANTAGED HALF OF HUMANITY

The first time I saw women planting rice I reacted as a tourist. 'Oh, isn't that pretty with all the brightly coloured sarees of the line of women in the paddy field! Where's my camera?' Later I understood the mud, the heat, the back-ache, the perspiration, the repetitive drudgery. I pitied the women in the fields.

Then, years later, one July in Nepal, I watched young women [p. 153](#) pass my door with back-loads of rice seedlings to plant that day. Martha who worked in my house chatted to them. 'Isn't she lucky to have such easy work with me?' I thought. 'Or, no, perhaps I'll ask her. "Which would you rather do, Martha?" ' 'Work in the fields,' she smiled. And my respect for the women of Asia grew. They can work excessively hard and be proud of it.

When my husband Brian and I went walking in Nepal, one conversation was repeated over and over. It was our best opener as a chance to talk about our God. 'Is this your family? Daughters. Ek, dui, tin, char,' the people would count. 'No son?' 'No son,' Brian would reply. 'We love girls as much as boys and we have a God who loves girls as much as boys.' And the questioner would look blank, thinking we had our Nepali words muddled. That was two incomprehensible statements—a God who loved, and a God who loved girls as much as boys. Not possible.

A year later, back in New Zealand without Brian, who lost his life in Nepal, I had cause to think further. 'Does God really love girls as much as boys?' It doesn't look like it in our churches. When few women move beyond the servant, or less responsible, or behind scenes roles, how can women know that God loves them as much? We need both serving Martha, and scholar Mary. We need social worker Dorcas, and also Bible teacher Priscilla.

Where women fit is a consideration for societies and churches everywhere in the world, and I choose this topic because it so closely concerns the whole thrust of this consultation on evangelization of the poor.

If we discuss poverty, women are the poorest. If we discuss social or economic or political oppression, women are more oppressed in every society. If we discuss responding to the gospel, women are 51% of the target group and often over 50% of the human resource to carry out the task. If we discuss servant models of Christian leadership, women have thousands of generations of expertise in serving.

Yet if we ask whose voice is heard in the strategizing for evangelism, the voice of women is least often heard. At a conference on evangelism in New Zealand in January 1993 I counted 27 women and then counted the total participants—270. Is it any different here?

Yet when one half of humanity, the women, is poorer than the other half, while living in the very same houses and communities, then we who claim to care about the oppressed and the poor must be aware, and target our assistance to the most needy.

And if in some societies half of humanity, the women's half, faces enormous barriers to hearing or responding to the gospel of God, we as strategists need to know.

And if the growth of the kingdom of God is curtailed by limitations on half its potential work force, we who desire the growth of the gospel need to change our strategy.

And if our practical understanding tells us something needs to change but our theology restricts us, have we got our theology right?

Oppression of women by societies, and discrimination against women by [p. 154](#) churches, are issues we must consider in nearly every deliberation and recommendation on our agenda this week.

## **II. WHERE ARE WOMEN AMONG THE POOR?**

### **Among the Poor of this World, Women are the Poorest, Because of the Oppression of Women, Whether by Individuals or by Social Structures**

Poverty comes in many shapes. Anything that deprives a person of resources and decisions basic to life's functions is poverty. Men and women can be deprived of education, health, nutrition, income, social status, political power, the opportunity to make decisions, religious equality, and even personal safety, and these are deeply interconnected.

I plan to show that on all these counts women are poorer. These may appear merely an accident of society until the reader analyzes the consistency with which one group is the oppressor and the other the oppressed. Such oppression may be unconscious, but it is not unavoidable. I believe it's time for retraining.

#### *Economic Oppression*

In a coffee plantation in Papua New Guinea a woman does the work and her husband takes the coffee beans to market, and buys treats like radio, bicycle, and alcohol. The woman receives no reward for her work.

In Senegal good land, on which women used to grow the family food, now grows crops of peanuts for sale. A woman works the peanut gardens and must still grow the family food on the less fertile uplands. Her workload is doubled. Her menfolk sell the peanuts.

In Bangladesh a 10 year old girl does not go to school because the family wants the economic asset of her work at home. Her brother has attended school since he was five, and she will forever live with exploitative labour rate of 1 maund of rice for every 40 maund she husks for a rich farmer. And even that is unequal work since an illiterate man can still earn more than an illiterate woman.

In the high school system of many western countries the majority of teachers are women but the heads of departments and principals are men.

These examples are repeated thousands of times over in the countries of our world. They constitute oppression of women.

### *Sociological Oppression*

A family can oppress its women and girls without ever realizing it. Father's don't think, 'I will oppress my daughter and make her work harder than my sons.' They merely expect daughters to work while sons fill in free time playing marbles.

Or a peasant man does not think, 'I shall take life easy while my wife slaves,' when he lounges in the tea shop, or the arrack shop. Yet the average peasant man in India works 8-10 hours a day while his wife works 17 hours. And when a young woman gets no say on when she will marry, or whom, she and her family may think that's just the way things are.

A teacher in Nepal finds the girls p. 155 all think they are useless at school work and the boys agree. But the teacher found boys write their homework lessons while girls carry water, bring firewood, sweep, care for animals, and grind curry.

Developed nations have their own sociological oppressions of female. Boys and men think themselves better than girls and women, annoy, tease, and put them down. Television channels are dominated by male sport.

Around the world, with the exception of Australia and USA, women work longer hours than men because they carry the burden of nearly all family and household chores, and often the double burden of paid work as well, while paid work is a survival necessity for many. The International Labour organization says the inequity is almost the same in rich industrialized nations as in the poorest countries. In Cuba, where a law requires men to help with housework, 82% of women still do all the domestic chores, while Japanese men spend only 15 minutes a day on tasks around the house. In Scandinavian countries, where men's workload has been reduced, they use their spare time for leisure instead of helping around the home.

	<i>Weekly Average working hours of men</i>	<i>Weekly Average working hours of women</i>
Africa	53	67
Asia	48	62
Western Europe	43	48
Japan	54	56



There is equal inequality in wages. Even in the country with the smallest gap, Australia, the average wage of a woman is 88% that of a man. In every country of the world men earn more pay for less work. The estimate is that women do 62% of the world's work hours yet own 1% of the world's property. Women form 75% of all sick people, 70% of all the poor, 66% of all illiterates and 80% of all refugees.

And then there are the double standards. I talked to Erica last year in Tanzania. It was acceptable to her society that her husband consorted with a prostitute. It was not acceptable for her as a wife. Yet Erica was dying of AIDS because of her husband's freedom.

### *Educational and Health Discrimination*

Here's a conversation from Guatemala, though it could be found all over the developing world. Martha (13) runs the house and hardly ever goes to school. Neither does Aluvia (8), though school is near, free, and only 7 to 11.30am. Martha is in Grade 1.

'Jose, education is so important for your daughters. Why don't you send them to school?'

'Martha has to look after the younger kids so her Mum can earn money. Anyway, Martha will only be a mother. She doesn't need to read. She needs to make tortillas, weave and sell at the market.'

Yet educational deprivation leads on to many of the other oppressions of women. It's a proven fact that literate women care better for their children, have fewer children, can take part in their own health and economic development and that of their community, and are less prone to fall into the traps of those who [p. 156](#) prey on simple people, such as money lenders or brothers-in-law who deprive a widow of her husband's assets.

Western countries have their own ways of favouring males in education. In UK parents pay for more than five times as many boys as girls to attend fee-paying highly regarded boarding schools, and in New Zealand boys' grammar schools are often better endowed than the sister schools for girls.

Not enough data is kept on women's health, but the very high levels of anaemia among women, indicating poor diet, worse than that of men, are an indicator of neglect. So is high maternal mortality when families take too little care of women in labour.

In fact neglect may be one of the highest factors oppressing women, starting with neglect of baby girls at feed time and when they are unwell, so that in India the estimate now is that every sixth female death is due to gender discrimination. The problem is so marked across east and south Asia with female foeticide, female infanticide, neglect, poorer diet, health neglect, overwork, destitution and bride burnings that experts consider that in 1993 there are 76 million women not alive who should be alive.

In Africa and Latin America the contrasts similarly mark the neglect of women.

In its Human Development Report of 1990, UNDP quantified human development on a scale 0.11 to 0.99, using three basic variables—life expectancy, literacy, and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita—to provide a Human Development Index (HDI). This gave a tool by which to rank the countries of the world with an approximate quality of life.

Then they compared the Human Development Indices of males and females. Where there is greater equality women survive longer than men. The extent of the oppression of women comes into sharper focus when, even in spite of this natural advantage in life

expectancy, the HDI of women is lower than that of men in most countries of the world. That is, women are worse off.

#### *Violations and Violence Against Women*

In former Yugoslavia rape is an instrument of war. In Thailand girls are sold and tricked into prostitution. Male tourists from the West and elsewhere create the demand. Pakistan won't allow a rape case in law without four male witnesses. Could a case even come to court?

Battered wives troop to women's refuges all over the world—shamed, disillusioned, broken. Many more remain in abusive situations. Little girls get sexually abused in their own homes. Australia and New Zealand have the highest levels of recorded rape anywhere in the world. In Asia battery acid gets thrown by men on women. Brides get burnt.

Some Christian men physically and emotionally abuse their wives and daughters. Some tell you it's God's will that they should keep their women under control by such means.

These are matters for us as Christians to face and fight. How can we otherwise even begin to talk of justice? [p. 157](#)

### **III. WHERE ARE WOMEN IN EVANGELISM?**

#### **The Oppression of Women Decreases Their Ability to Respond to the Gospel**

##### *Hours*

If women are required to work longer hours than men in nearly all countries, and some work excessively long hours, my question is, 'How can these find the energy or the time to look at an alternative world view such as the gospel presents?' Many are forced by the very hours they work to have no time or energy left to looking at new ideas like a different God to worship.

##### *Education*

Some illiterate women become Christians, but many are prevented by the under-development of their mental power from weighing up the welcome of a loving God, when they've had never a day in school. If they do wish to choose Christ as Saviour, they often lack the self worth and confidence to defend their choice.

##### *Personal Freedom*

For a woman whose husband does not want her to consider a new religion, there is often no freedom to attend Christian meetings or even visit a Christian woman to learn. The ramifications of this stretch from the slum woman of Madras who reads and prays in the toilet in order to get some privacy, to the western woman who hides her Bible because if her husband finds it he'll beat her when he's drunk. Thousands of women in the world today won't take the risk of displeasing their husband or father.

With the above facts in front of us, we may wonder that young woman living at home or married woman attends church without the wish of father or husband. Yet, although we may know of women whose Hindu or Muslim or atheist husbands won't let them attend, we still find some doing so.

A friend observes that in Pakistan most women converts are single, widowed or divorced, indicating that these are more likely to be free to make such a choice. And in the

West too I note women who have been hurt by their marriage and left it, who choose to follow Christ. The reverse also is true—women who once followed Christ but were hurt by dominating men turned their back on Christ.

### *Isolation*

This factor results from both the cultural context and the decisions of the men of a household and occurs both in the East and in the West. Women may be kept at home, isolated, either by their workload because no-one else shares the responsibility of keeping the family together, fed and clothed, or by a too possessive husband or father. Where there is verbal or physical abuse a woman becomes ashamed, loses self-esteem and social skills. Or a jealous husband may believe that if a wife is not at home doing domestic chores, she is not doing what she should. Such a woman is frightened of upsetting her husband, and, because he holds the economic power, dares not cross him. How can such a woman seek the gospel? Isolated women lack support for even the idea of change. *p. 158*

One of the first recorded women to stand alone against a husband who wished to exploit her beauty before other men, was thrown out of home by a husband and his friends who feared that other women would follow her example. Her name was Vashti.

### *Christian Culture*

In some cultures which have repressed women, Christianity releases women to a freedom they never had before. Asian women speak of the liberating effect of the gospel.

Yet Christianity has often been used to support male privilege, a belief that wives and children are there to make a man's life more comfortable. As a result, for some women the experience of living in a Christian family, with a husband who believes he must exercise a patriarchal role, or a church that allows only a restricted role to women, is a narrowing of function and diminishing of worth. Many women in the West now will have nothing to do with Christianity because they believe it puts women down.

### *Yet Women are Often the Back-bone of a Church*

Given the above discrimination against women, there should be fewer in church. But the opposite is true in many countries of the world. Why?

The gospel affirms the value of the individual. Every person has worth and Christ died for all, men and women. More than in secular society, more than in animism, more than in Islam, Hinduism or Buddhism, each person has enormous value, each person is loved by God and by Jesus Christ. Small wonder that women, so often counted as nobodies in other contexts, love to follow Jesus.

At least that is the theory of Christianity. What we need to keep examining is whether we carry it out in practice. Do we accord equal value in terms of status, salaries, decision-making, ministry tasks, to women along with men in our homes and churches? Are women visible as spiritual role models, leading worship, preaching and praying? Are they affirmed in more than their Sunday School teaching, feast preparation, singing and service to the sick and elderly?

Even in a New Zealand evangelical church which does include women in leadership, statistics kept this year showed that men dominated the air time of corporate worship and teaching at a rate of 75% to 25%.

If women received the equal standing that Jesus gave them, perhaps even more women would crowd our churches.

*So, What is the Good News for Women?*

- Jesus said ([Luke 5:18–19](#)) that he came to preach good news to the poor. This means women too. Will the gospel bring them out of poverty and economic oppression?
- Release to the captives: will women be free from physical and emotional oppression in the community of God on earth? Will they be first class citizens, equally free and responsible with their husbands before God?
- Recovery of sight to the blind: will [p. 159](#) women be free from the blindness of narrowed horizons and restricted views of what they may do?
- To set at liberty those who are oppressed: Will women be free from social oppression put on them because they're women?

#### **IV. DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN IN THE CHURCH DECREASES THEIR ABILITY TO PROMOTE THE GOSPEL**

Women's lower standing may make their message less authoritative, so people choosing preachers usually select an authoritative sounding man. Women often have less freedom to be out of the house because of child care. And women with less education may have fewer skills with which to evangelize.

But over each of these factors is the reluctance of many churches to train, use or pay women as evangelists or church leaders, or to strategize with women, even when the good Lord has seen fit to give them the talents needed for promoting the kingdom of God.

Most high visibility evangelism is done by men. Most paid church work is done by men.

Yet recent research in UK showed two interesting points about the main factors leading to conversion.

- (i) Men were most influenced by their wife.
- (ii) Women were most influenced by friends.

Put these two facts together and you have the astonishing information that women were, behind the scenes, doing more evangelism than anyone ever realized, perhaps more than men.

That's food for thought. Perhaps we should put more effort into women's methods of friendship evangelism and perhaps less effort into TV and radio and evangelism. The personal factor seems highly significant. That's why I've brought as a case study the story 'Love Link in New Zealand'.

If women, despite all the limitations currently on them, are already such good evangelists, perhaps the kingdom of God would grow faster if the church included more women and women's methods in their evangelism strategies. To do that, we'd have to look hard at our theology of women.

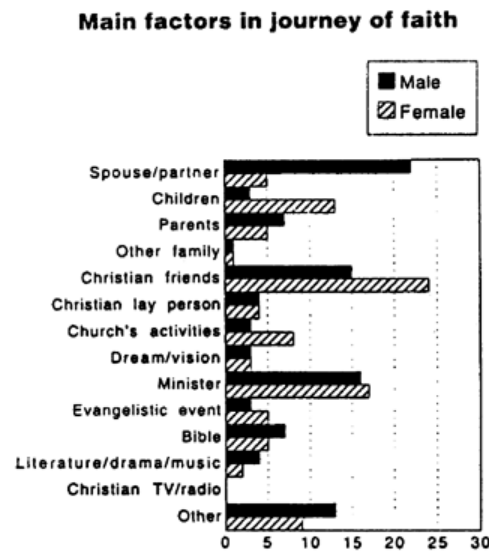
#### **V. HOW THEN SHOULD WE STRATEGIZE FOR WOMEN AND MEN TO ENLARGE THE KINGDOM OF GOD?**

I have a few pointers here. You'll have more as you talk and discuss. A mission leader from Pakistan suggests men and women should always work together, equally, to model the value God places on both women and men, and reflect the intrinsic image of God.

Another leader, a worker throughout Latin America, finds the fastest growing churches are *charismatic*, using all the gifts in their congregations. Some evangelical and pentecostal churches, not using the gifts of women, are not growing.

A missionary from Zaire reminds me women work harder and longer and can do two jobs at once.

When women are over half the church's human resource, it makes [p. 160](#) sense to use their creativity, their energy, and their gifts for both leadership and service. And when women are half the church's target group, it makes sense to use their insights to plan the task.



A proverb on a calendar in Kenya:

Educate a man and you educate a person.

Educate a woman and you educate a nation.

Here are some strategies to consider

1. Work for equality and against male domination in our theology and then in our churches.
2. Put a high priority on friendship evangelism to use well both men and women as effective evangelists.
3. Put appropriate resources of time, people and money into helping women from oppressive situations to find freedom in Christ.
4. Offer training bursaries to women. Offer salaried positions.
5. Use the God-given gifts of both women and men for evangelism and discipling.
6. Encourage men and women to model the acceptance Christ gave to women in the gender equality of their evangelistic outreach and pastoral care.

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# Exodus: A Paradigm of the Salvation and Liberation of the Oppressed

D. Jebaraj

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*The author reflects with deep feeling on the Exodus Event in relation to the condition of the Dalit poor of India—those who are outside the caste system and who are oppressed by the caste communities. He contrasts the message of the Old Testament prophets—Hosea, Amos, Micah, Jeremiah and Isaiah—with the ideological use of the Exodus by the Liberal theologians, especially A. P. Nirmal of Bangalore, to mobilize the poor to resist their oppressors. He concludes that our task is to help all people, including the poor, to discover their latent spiritual resources to overcome their suffering and oppression in dependence on God's Spirit.*

Editor

## I. EXODUS FROM A LIBERATION THEOLOGY PERSPECTIVE

The growing poverty around the world and violation of human rights by oppressive regimes have challenged Christian theologians in the last few decades as never before. As committed Christians and theologians they try to motivate the Church to get involved in the praxis of liberation. For them, if the Church is to be true to her call and identity, she must be involved in the struggle of the poor and the oppressed for full humanity. Such a stand is legitimized with the axiom: 'God has a preferential option for the poor.' The urgency of the problem and a new understanding of God has forced some theologians to plunge headlong into the revolutionary praxis. Then theology becomes the second act, a reflection of the liberative praxis. This, of course, does not mean a theological justification of ideological positions already taken. But it means a new way of doing theology. Theology, to be **P. 162** able to address the ever-changing situation, has to be innovative in three areas: in understanding the Bible; in understanding the context; in finding a new way of relating these two. Liberation theology is innovative in all these three areas and thus the focus is on the hermeneutical and contextual nature of theology. The liberation of theology becomes an imperative. For the liberation theologians the hermeneutical task begins with an ideological suspicion of earlier readings. The hermeneutical circle provides the theologians with the needed interpretation of the Bible to undergird their theologies. Moreover, the analysis of their contexts by marxian tools inevitably led to an eclectic interpretation of the Bible, as in the case of one Indian theologian who announced that marxism had opened his eyes to the questions of justice. Though some of the liberation theologians claim that their reading of the Bible is the only right way to read it, some have tacitly agreed that a neutral reading is never possible and liberation theologians take an advocacy stance. The Bible is read from the perspective of the marginalized and the oppressed. Two concrete examples of such a reading are the Gospel of Mark and the book of Exodus.

For all types of liberation theologies the Exodus has become a paradigm. A 'paradigm' as a historic exemplar determines the further development of theology. In fact a paradigm does not only set the pattern but it also sets the rules for further development. This understanding of Exodus as a paradigm for liberation theology is both a wrong reading of

the Bible and a wrong understanding of theology. If theology is the second act as the liberation theologians claim then a paradigm is never possible. Moreover, the paradigmatic method equates theology with ideology: theology has to motivate and move people into action. Consequently the Church becomes a revolutionary party fighting for the poor and the oppressed. The ambiguities in this method is far greater than what we can see. This can be shown by a reading of Exodus with fresh eyes.

## II. EXODUS IN THE THEOLOGY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETS

The Exodus is the foundational experience for the people of Israel in the Old Testament, never to be erased from their memory. God takes them out of the cruel bondage of Egypt and leads them into the promised land. But the Old Testament never presents the Exodus as the all-important central fact in the life of Israel. On the contrary it is presented as an aspect of the promise-fulfillment scheme of the history of Israel. Exodus demonstrates that the God who has given a promise is able to fulfil it.

The prophets in the Old Testament use the Exodus tradition widely and with important emphases which are peculiar to their own situations. Their overall position is that God who freed the 'Hebrew' slaves to make them 'sons of Israel' did not do it for their economic and political freedom alone. The promised economic prosperity (promised p. 163 land) was an incentive to achieve something more than that. God's action demanded more in anticipation than the Israelites were ever ready to acknowledge. In referring again and again to the Exodus tradition the prophets place before the people the question: 'Why did God liberate them from the bondage of Egypt?'

The prophet **Hosea** sees the decay in Israel as a result of the loss of love for God. Israel is an unfaithful wife. As the nation grew in prosperity her love for God kept diminishing. The solution given by the prophet is to 'come back to the wilderness'. *I will allure her and bring her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her ... And there she will answer as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt (2:14-15). I will again make you to dwell in tents ... (12:9).* Exodus was the time when Israel learned to walk holding the hands of God ... *it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my arms ... (11:1-4).* The whole significance of Exodus for Hosea is its reflection of the youthful relationship between God and his people. It was an experience through which the people were taught to depend on God alone. *You know no God but me, and beside me there is no saviour, (13:4).*

For the prophet **Amos**, Exodus means confirming the people into responsibility. Election—Exodus—Responsibility is an integral scheme. *I brought you up out of the land of Egypt, and led you forty years in the wilderness ... (2:10). O people of Israel, ... the whole family which I brought up out of the land of Egypt: You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities. (3:1-2).* In chapter 3 the prophet continues to argue as to whether God does anything without a purpose or not. The liberation from Egypt and the forty years in the wilderness has a definite purpose. When injustice grows in the country this purpose is defeated. Amos' complaint is that the people have understood their liberation from Egypt in a narrow way, for their own protection and welfare only. He emphasizes that though they are like any other nation (9:7) they have the specific role of a living model of God's saving power and justice.

The prophet **Micah**, in 6:4-5 says that the Exodus is for the people to know the saving acts of God. The reason why God saves people is that they might *walk humbly with their God* (verse 8). For both Micah and Amos, the Exodus is a dramatic manifestation of God's saving power. Through this act of liberating a slave people God wants to establish a sure sign of justice and righteousness.

The prophet **Jeremiah**, like Hosea, reminds the people of their youthful love when they came out of Egypt during their wilderness days (2:2-3). He also calls them to the faith of the wilderness days (6:16). The purpose of the Exodus was that they might become a covenant people. *In the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, I did not speak to your fathers or command them concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices. But this command I gave them, 'Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people; and walk in all the ways I command you, p. 164 that it may be well with you' (7:22-23).* Thus, by reminding the people of the Exodus, the prophets want them to reestablish the loving relationship they had with God, to confirm their responsibility and to encourage them to be a living sign of God's justice and righteousness. Exodus is indeed a saving event. The fact that a slave people is brought out of oppression is well attested. But for the prophets it is only a beginning; a mere choosing of a servant. Their real emphasis is on the purpose of Exodus, of liberation, and in assessing whether the people have achieved it or not. Once the nation lost sight of this essential vision God does not hesitate to denounce them. *They shall return to Egypt (Hos. 8:13-14).* The prophets not only condemn the people but also look forward to a remnant who will be a witness to the Lord by keeping its relationship with God. The Exile is seen to be a punishment from God. But more than that it is a necessary purging of a nation. As Hosea had predicated, the nation which was liberated from the bondage of Egypt has been sent back to bondage. But God's purpose and action do not stop there. He will find a remnant to carry on with his work. The promise to Abraham will not be wasted. The remnant nation will come forth in joy from the present bondage. This is the message of **Isaiah**. He is sure that this new Israel will carry on with the Lord's work. He advises the remnant not to think of the first Exodus because God is doing a new thing. *Thus says the Lord, who makes a way in the sea, a pathway in the mighty waters ... Remember not the former things ... behold I am doing a new thing ... I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert (43:14-19).*

What is the purpose of this liberation? Isaiah responds: *I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness ... (42:5-9; 49:8-13).* Here the prophet does not distinguish the liberative act of God from the responsibility of the liberated people. People are liberated so that they can in turn liberate others.

In the book of Exodus God informs Moses that he has already made a covenant with their fathers and that is one of the important reasons for him to act on their behalf. *I will take you for my people (Ex. 6:2-9).* Moreover Moses informs the Pharaoh that they are going to worship the Lord in the wilderness (Ex. 5:3). Liberation and the identity of a people is determined by how they worship and whom they worship.

### III. EXODUS: A DALIT THEOLOGIAN'S PARADIGM

When the people reach the promised land they are commanded to remember how God liberated them. The ancient confession in the book of Deuteronomy (26:5-10) which is used by almost all the theologians looks back at the Exodus with thankfulness. Though Gutierrez or Cone can be referred to here as examples I prefer to refer to A. P. Nirmal, a Dalit theologian of India who has made *the wandering Aramaean* a paradigm on which to build his theology. P. 165 He makes four points out of this passage.

#### 1. Historical Consciousness

*A wandering Aramean was my father; and he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number; and there he became a nation great, mighty, and populous (v. 5).* He calls



the Dalits to develop a historic consciousness of their suffering. This creates a 'Dalit consciousness'. He claims that this can make the Dalits proud of themselves.

## **2. Pathos of Suffering**

*The Egyptians treated us harshly, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage. Then we cried to the Lord the God of our Fathers, and the Lord heard our voice, and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression ... (vv. 6-7).* He asserts that the Dalits alone know the depth of their suffering. He distinguishes three modes of knowing: sympathetic, empathetic and pathetic. Any one can sympathize with the Dalits for their suffering; few can really empathize with them; only the Dalits know the pathos of suffering. This mode of knowing is essential for the formulation of Dalit theology.

## **3. Liberation with a Mighty Hand and Much Terror**

*The Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror, with signs and wonders ... (v. 8).* As God liberated the Israelites with a strong arm and with much terror the Dalits are also advised to liberate themselves through violent struggle. They should not think that their suffering is a result of their bad karma or fate.

## **4. The Promise of a Land Flowing with Milk and Honey**

*He brought us into this place and gave us this land flowing with milk and honey ... (v. 9).* The promise of a land flowing with milk and honey does not mean mere economic prosperity but the establishment of the Dalits' full humanity. It is finding God's image in them.

Nirmal's reading is certainly motivated by his ideological stand. His real concern is not to awaken the Church to identify with the struggle of the Dalits but to formulate a theological basis for the general Dalit movement. He merely chooses a biblical passage to build his ideology on.

An accurate reading of the passage reveals that it is a thanksgiving confession. Von Rad says that this confession is just a matter of fact narration of the history of the people of Israel. All the supernatural events are omitted. The man who comes in the presence of the Lord looks back to his own history with amazement and thanksgiving. The point to note is that every Israelite is exhorted to 'remember' what God has done in his life. He was a nobody, a wandering Aramean. But God has made the wanderer a nation, 'a people'. The real point is that this 'remembrance' should move every Israelite to compassion for others, to bring a concrete symbol of God's justice for righteousness.... *you are a people for his own possession ... to keep all his commandments ... that you shall be a people holy to the Lord your God ... (Deut. 216:16-19).* Though this confession makes them look back at their history with thankfulness, p. 166 their eyes are really set to the future. The past is a celebration but the future holds immense responsibility. The courage and strength to act in the future come from thankfully remembering the past.

Nirmal's reading of this passage along with the suffering of the Dalits is a very limited one. It is certain that the situations of Israel and the Dalits are not similar. While Israel has already seen the mighty acts of God the Dalits have yet to see the acts of God. In fact, they are asked to act on their own. This reading advises the Dalits to look back at their own history with *bitterness* and to act in *anger*. This is a misreading of the passage.

## **CONCLUSION**

From the prophets' and the Deuteronomic understandings of the Exodus we find that it is not the event of Exodus which is important but its purpose. It is not a mere political

liberation leading to economic prosperity but it is an investiture of responsibility. Exodus reveals that God can undertake the running of our lives if we become a light to the nations, a sign of God's justice and righteousness. Thus understanding of the exodus experience is needed not only for the poor and the oppressed but for everyone. God liberates us from all kinds of bondage so that we can take up the responsibility of being God's light to the world.

Exodus leads to the wilderness, to poverty. But this is a poverty everyone has to accept voluntarily. When the people of Israel were about to enter the promised land they were warned by Moses that it was not going to be easy. *The land which you are going over to possess is a land of hills and valleys, which drinks water by the rain from heaven, a land which the Lord your God cares for* ([Deut. 11:11, 12](#)). The promised land will not produce anything if the Lord does not keep his eyes on it.

when we talk of evangelism to the poor what do we mean? The critical questions are who are the poor and why are they poor. We cannot think of poverty in vague terms or describe it in a fluid manner. Talking from an Indian view-point the Dalits are the real poor. Poverty is not mere lack of economic growth or political power. The basic problem faced by the Dalits is the lack of spiritual resources for them to fight oppression of the caste system. They left Hinduism because it subjugated them. Buddhism has not given them anything. We do not have to hide behind 'social involvement'. Despite the policy of Reservation the Dalits have achieved very little. The real fight is in the area of theology and spirituality.

Our role is not to create needs for the poor but like the prophets to bring out the latent spiritual strength in them to fight their own battles and overcome their suffering and oppression.

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Mr. D. Jebaraj administers the *Theological Book Trust*, Bangalore, India. p. 167

# Training the Poor for Ministry to the Poor

Agnes Liu

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*The Jifu programme in Hong Kong, sponsored by the China Graduate School of Theology, is one of the most innovative and successful attempts to train the poor to minister to the poor in Asia today. The Director of Jifu gives a clear and honest evaluation of the programme, preceded by theological reflection on the hindrances to the effective training of the poor and the goals and methods needed for this ever-increasing task.*

Editor

**HINDRANCES IN TRAINING THE POOR**

**The Middle Class Captivity of the Church**

In many parts of the world, the church is largely made up of the upper middle class. Even though the blue-collar workers constitute 60% of Hong Kong's labour force and the illiterate amount to 10% of the population, in the Church only 16% are blue collar workers; 24% are managers, administrative and professional people. This situation is in stark contrast to the makeup of the followers of Jesus—fisherfolk, tax-collectors and sinners. In light of the fact that Jesus evaluates people visa-vis how they treat the naked, hungry, thirsty, sick, imprisoned and sojourning ([Matt. 25:31-46](#)), the Church needs to be delivered from this captivity in order to be an authentic Church of Jesus Christ.

### *Structural Grievances Requiring Structural Redress*

In his article entitled, 'Good News for the Poor: Mission priority for world evangelization', Raymond Fung (1989) points out the problem of the middle class domination of the world Church whereby it claims and *p. 168* exercises total power over the Church and deprives all others of the openness to participate (p. 25). Without agreeing with the spirit of class struggle which lies behind this statement, we must at the same time say that evidence of this phenomenon does exist. According to a survey of blue-collar Christians in Hong Kong, only 2.3% of them have group life in the Church and only 2.5% of them serve as laypeople. Most of them are marginal in the life and work of the Church. When this happens, significant resources are lost.

Culturally speaking, this domination is even more severe. The Christian poor take the middle class Church's worship, instruction, organization, spirituality, rituals, ministerial style as the norm to which they aspire. They identify with the middle class Church to the neglect of their own people's needs and culture, making the gospel contextually irrelevant. Though some of the poor manage to climb the social and structural hierarchy of the Church, once up there, they are mostly oblivious to the needs of the poor. Hence, in many ways, the resources of the poor are drained off to fulfil the needs and concerns of the middle class. The poor remain poor, hopeless, hurt, forgotten and neglected.

Thus the progress of the gospel among the poor is hampered not only by lack of manpower, resources and opportunity, but more importantly, it is impeded by the inability of the gospel to take root in the context and culture of the poor. This situation cannot be rectified by a patchwork of good will on the part of individual Christians. A comprehensire scheme creating structural alternatives for the Christian poor is needed.

## **THE UNRECOGNIZED RESOURCES OF THE POOR**

The great resevoir of potential of the poor to meet the needs of the poor needs to be unleashed. Many people patronizingly feel it is up to the rich to help the poor. Without denying the responsibility of the rich and powerful, we would say that the poor can also help themselves. Despite their lack of education and resources, they are in many ways more suitable to minister among the poor. We should not see the poor pessimistically. Do not say that their needs are grave, their numbers are great, hence our load is heavy. Rather, look upon them as the Lord did, as potential soldiers of the Kingdom of God. If their numbers are great, praise the Lord, that means we have a great reserve army which can be put into active service.

Our Lord not only identified with the poor, he allowed them to have important roles in his Kingdom: in the Nativity and in the earthly ministry of Jesus. Even in the early Church, not many of his followers were wise, not many mighty, not many noble.

The poor are able to identify with their own people's needs. They know the culture and ways of the poor, making it easier to build rapport and to contextualise the Christian Faith. The recognition of their leadership builds a positive self-image among the poor and

generates more leadership from among them. Hence this leadership development process will be self-perpetuating.

Middle class Christians can have a [p. 169](#) secondary role in helping the poor. But the centre of the stage needs to be reserved for the poor themselves. This would help break the middle-class domination of the Church.

## **GOALS IN TRAINING THE POOR FOR MINISTRY AMONG THE POOR**

### **Building Churches of the Poor, for the Poor, by the Poor**

We must enable the poor to build Christian communities where the poor can increase their dignity, independence, freedom and self-determination and contribution. Not only must the poor be brought to faith; they must be gathered together so that a powerful witness can be present among them. These Christians would be mature enough to determine the forms and direction of Church life most suitable for the poor. These churches are to be proud of their own identity as the Churches of the poor because they have an impact on their community that is dynamically equivalent to that of the early Church.

Financial independence is important for fostering positive self-image and for contextualization. Ultimately, these churches can generate their own experts in evangelism, biblical studies, mission, training and church planting so that they need not depend on the middle class Church to lead them in these areas.

The Church of the poor can become full contributing members of the universal Church in terms of mission, spiritual vitality, of knowledge of God and of the Scriptures, of a variety of rituals, music and church forms.

## **TRAINING CULTURALLY ADJUSTED LEADERS**

We need to know that leadership ideals are culturally determined. Among the upper class, the ideal church leader must have management abilities, must be eloquent, learned, able to teach, have formal qualifications. The role model is a business executive. However, among the poor, the role model of an ideal leader is that of a gang or community leader. The leadership traits among the poor are as follows: authority, ability to prove one's worth by what one can do rather than what one can say or think, self-sacrifice, experience, wisdom, maturity, ability to work well with others, and to win trust and allegiance, insight. Such leaders should not be evaluated from the standpoint of the middle class but rather be judged according to the impact they make upon the poor.

We should not be training them to minister in non-poor situations but training them to fulfil the physical, spiritual and socio-emotional needs of the poor.

We need to remember that often such leaders evolve without our assistance or interference. Our tasks are to affirm and recognize such natural and proven leaders. But in order to speed up the process, we can mark out potential leaders who are committed, available, respond to our challenge and facilitate their development through formal or informal means.

The most important obstacles facing potential leaders of the poor are as follows: low self-esteem, fear of failure, fear of innovation, living in too narrow a world. We should note that lack of education or resources [p. 170](#) are not major obstacles to full-functioning in the world of the poor.

### **Distinctive Methods in Leadership Training**

In light of the above facts, leadership training methods should have the following distinctives:

a. **Andragogy (adult learning process) rather than pedagogy:**

Andragogy, in contrast to the schooling method, focuses on helping the individual become a self-directed human being rather than a dependent person. In andragogy, the accumulated reservoir of experience becomes a rich resource for learning. Development of readiness to assume social roles, immediate application of knowledge, performance centredness are some of the more important focuses.

b. **Non-formal rather than formal:**

Formal education is controlled, structured, teacher-centred, future-oriented, passive, other-directed, compartmental, individual, theoretical and informational. But non-formal education is spontaneous, free, student-centred, present-oriented, self-directed, participatory, holistic, corporate, experiential and transformational.

### **Multi-level Models of Training**

Different types of leaders are needed. Some need only to lead small groups or engage in visitation: others need to organize the community; still others need to pastor churches. All these need different types of incentives and models of training.

### **Nurturing and Cultivating**

The facilitator of leadership development must build self-esteem through love, respect, acceptance, dialogue. He needs to introduce the potential leader to different worlds, plan manageable learning activities and experience. He needs to demonstrate and provide safe opportunities for experimenting, give feed-back and affirm. When the time comes, the facilitator should let the individual receive his/her own vision and release the person into his future ministry.

## **THE JIFU PROGRAMME OF CHINA GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY: A CASE STUDY**

### **A Short History of Jifu**

Jifu came into existence 10 years ago through the joint efforts of several para-church organizations that ministered among the poor. Their ministry has turned out Christians who had a great desire to serve the Lord full-time. Yet there was not a single seminary in Hong Kong that would be suitable for them. They jointly approached the China Graduate School of Theology, asking the school to consider starting such a programme to train the people from the grassroots to serve their own people. After two years of pilot courses, a full-time, three year programme named Jifu was installed. Four years later, Jifu became an independent department. Jifu now has 102 graduates working in different sectors and regions among the poor.

### **Programme Distinctives**

#### *1. Unique Courses and Teaching Methods*

The programme consciously deemphasizes systematic theology and church history since the content of *p. 171* these are less relevant to the Church among the poor. Rather, greater emphasis is given to biblical studies. Of the thirty courses in the programme, several

courses are unique to Jifu: grassroots evangelism, grassroots follow-up, folk religion, social resources, folk culture and church life.

Because the poor are more practical than theoretical, the content of the courses slanted towards implications of the biblical truths on daily life and church life. Because the poor are more corporate in their thinking, classroom activities and course projects are designed to be done by groups. Instruction often takes the form of role play, case studies, simulations and group discussions.

### *2. Practicum, Internship Style*

Jifu's practicum is designed with an apprenticeship model and internship system in mind. Many of our students learned their former trades (as carpenters, seamstresses, machine operators, etc.) on the job, through observing a master craftsman at work and then trying it themselves. Hence, our practicum is designed as follows: For the first two quarters, the objective is to put some fire for lost souls into their bones. Hence, besides teaching them personal evangelism, they get to minister to the poorest of the poor—street sleepers, cage-dwellers, hawkers, prostitutes, drug addicts and so on. By helping them remove lice, praying for them throughout the night, helping them wash and so on, they get a feel of how the Master ministered by the shores of Galilee. The second two quarters, they are sent out to work in several of the fastest growing cell-group churches that are ministering among the poor. There they learn how to nurture new converts as well as observe inner healing, power evangelism and deliverance ministries. The next six months, the students go back to traditional churches where they came from. This helps them decide whether they want to help traditional churches start a ministry among the poor or whether they want to plant churches themselves. The last quarter before their final year is usually spent overseas in Indonesia, Malaysia or other countries where they can work with local church planters and see for themselves seasoned servants of God, extending his Kingdom among the poor. This experience has proven to be the most formative of their three years of practicum. It is here that their vision is crystalized and their commitments are made. In their final year, the students begin their future ministry. With teachers still watching over their shoulders, their mistakes can be corrected early on.

### *3. Personal, Spiritual and Group Growth*

The poor come from broken families. Sexual bondage, demonic influence, emotional trauma from rape, incest and child battering abound. We have found that unless we help the poor break through such socio-emotional and personality problems, their ministry does not last very long. Hence, a very intense personal and spiritual growth system is developed. The students attend a weekly group session where they progressively focus on topics such as prayer, personal discipline, life in the Holy Spirit, meditation on the life of *p. 172* Christ, family life, church life, developing one's spiritual gifts, vision and its actualization, the character of a Christian worker. Besides these group sessions, spiritual formation is facilitated by weekly worship and praise sessions, monthly all-night prayer and quarterly days of prayer and retreats. Although these are not given academic recognition, they are a very important part of Jifu's training.

## **EVALUATION**

Our criteria for self-evaluation is two-fold: internally, according to the ideals of andragogy, non-formal education. Secondly, the external evaluation according to how much impact our students are making among the poor. Based on this criteria, an honest evaluation of Jifu is as follows.

## 1. Internal Evaluation

- a. A lot of the courses are still future-oriented, other-directed, structured, informational and theoretical. The students do not have free choice and do not participate in the learning process.
- b. There is not enough manpower to monitor the performance of the students in actual field work. Hence, we have no guarantee as to the skills of the students.
- c. Multi-level teaching has not been attained. The uniqueness of each student in potential and learning methods has not been taken into account.
- d. The curriculum design still succumbs to the pressure of the middle class seminary. In this sense, the middle-class domination of the Church has not been broken.

## 2. External Evaluation

- a. As of September 1993, there are 102 graduates, 15 of whom are no longer in the ministry due to health, family and backsliding problems. 47 of the alumni (45%) are ministering among the poor, 38 of whom work in church settings, 9 in parachurch organizations that minister among the poor.
- b. Of the 12 churches that the alumni have planted among the poor, the majority of them are rather small (about 40–50 people). Nonetheless, they are vibrant and growing.
- c. Two of these churches have come full circle—they are able to produce their own full-time workers as well as plant churches themselves.
- d. These leaders are beginning to contribute to overseas mission both in terms of money and manpower.
- e. The problem of redemption and lift is still very much with us. 39 of the alumni are doing regular church work that is not particularly geared towards the poor. They have successfully climbed the social ladder and are no longer burdened for the poor.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Despite all of our shortcomings and inadequacies, Jifu is a living proof that the potential of the poor to minister among the poor is great. The churches worldwide cannot afford to neglect this store of hidden treasures.

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# The New Delhi Statement

## INTRODUCTION

We gathered as seven women and fifteen men from ten countries in New Delhi, India from October 17–23 1993 within a fortnight of the Latur earthquake in Western India. All of us are personally involved in or reflect on ministries to the poor in many parts of the world. We visited a number of Christian ministries among poor people in Delhi, received case

studies of Christian ministries among the poor in different parts of the world, and debated papers on theological issues in connection with evangelisation of the poor.

The poor live in every culture and country, whether absolutely poor or relatively so. The 'AD 2000 and Beyond' Movement has identified latitudes 10 north and 40 south as a 'window' to identify the unevangelised of the world. The majority of the poor live in this region. Despite advances in technology, the number of poor in the world is rapidly expanding. 50% of Bombay's ten million people live in slums. By 2020 the percentage will be 75%. More than 50% of the Indian population of 860 million live below the poverty line. Among this 50%, at least in the cities, there are very few churches.

We have sought to build on the evangelical theologies of evangelism and social concern in the mission of the Church and Christian involvement with poor people that were developed in the years from the Lausanne Congress 1974 to the Wheaton Consultation on The Church in Response to Human Need 1983 in which the Theological Commission of the WEF played a significant role.<sup>1</sup>

At this consultation we sought to discern the theology of evangelisation that is expressed in the practice of Christian ministries among the poor, and the practice that best expresses a biblical theology of evangelisation among the poor. All participants, development workers, evangelists, pastors and theological p. 174 educators, contributed to and wish to share their theological reflection in the light of scripture through this report.

## **1. THE NATURE OF THE GOOD NEWS**

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the good news of the Kingdom of God for the whole created order. Jesus called this 'good news for the poor' ([Luke 4:8](#); [7:22](#)). God has established his Kingdom of righteousness and peace through the incarnation, ministry, atoning death and resurrection of Jesus. The Kingdom fulfils God's purpose in his world by bringing wholeness to humanity and the whole creation. In the kingdom, people receive by grace alone a new status before God and people, a new dignity and worth as his daughters and sons, and empowerment by the Holy Spirit to be stewards of creation and servants of one another in a new community.

The Kingdom of God will be fully revealed in power in a new heaven and earth at the end of the age when Jesus returns. It will be a Kingdom where justice and peace are at home.

## **2. EVANGELISATION: EXTENDING THE KINGDOM OF GOD**

### **a. Signs of the Kingdom**

The Kingdom of God will be peopled with those who will live with Christ for ever. As the Kingdom was proclaimed by Jesus and is proclaimed by the church, it calls into being God's people now. Those who will live with God forever are enabled to live together now across all the barriers and divisions which divide humanity now. In Christ, there is to be no Jew or Greek, no slave or free, no male or female ([Gal. 3:28](#)). These divisions form a framework to describe the nature and causes of poverty.

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<sup>1</sup> See especially *Evangelicals and Development* edited by Ronald Sider (Paternoster/ Westminster 1981) *In Word and Deed*, edited by Bruce Nicholls (Paternoster 1985) *The Church in Response to Human Need* edited by Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden (Eerdmans 1987) *How Evangelicals endorsed social responsibility* Rene Padilla (Grove Books 1986).



## **b. The Kingdom at Work in People**

Both Jesus and Paul emphasised that the gospel addresses both physical and spiritual relationships (relationships between people and creation, each other and God). The Bible views human life as part of eternity, so Christian work with the poor must include an opportunity for people to discover eternal life through Jesus Christ ([Matt. 10:28](#); [1 Cor. 9:19-23](#)). Any lasting hope for the poor depends on discovering this.

The good news addresses the fundamental needs of the poor. In their struggle against injustices and poverty, poor people are encouraged to be bold because God in Jesus stands by them ([Ps. 10:14](#); [Ps. 72:12-14](#)).

DIVINE FORGIVENESS addresses the concept of fate that often imprisons poor people. This may be a sense of religious fate or secular determinism imposed on them by others, it may be the power of numerous deities or a sense of powerlessness over against the rich or the structures of society that deceive the poor into believing they are non-persons with no control over their lives. The atonement announces that the price is already paid for the past, and the price of the future is secured. It addresses the p. 175 poor's identity as victims, and gives them a new identity as sons and daughters of God, with access to his power and indwelt by his Spirit.

THE ATONEMENT FREES people from the destructive power of sin and death on their own perception of who they are, and from the bondage of sin and evil. In Jesus and within the Christian community, the Christian poor experience true love. Reconciliation between God and humanity is brought about ([Eph. 2:1-10](#)).

The atonement brings the good news that the VICTORY over all opposing and evil powers has been won ([Col. 2:15](#)). The poor person, in whom the risen Christ dwells by his Spirit, is encouraged to see him or herself also as seated with Christ in the place of victory over evil ([Eph. 1:20](#)). The poor person can know that the victory over all the forces that oppress him or her has already been won.

SPIRITUAL CONVERSION therefore gives poor people faith, patience and courage to endure physical and spiritual suffering, and the confidence that God will provide for their basic human needs ([1 Pet. 3:19-21](#); [Mt. 6:30-33](#)). It also liberates people to stand with others in resisting the oppression they suffer ([Is. 1:16-17](#)).

NEW LIFE IN CHRIST brings about a purpose in life. Personal change has eternal worth. People are encouraged to change their lives, to seek to change the lives of their families and neighbours, and to create families, disciples and wealth. Thus the Christian poor becomes a person for others, enabled to transform the community in which he or she lives.

### **Story**

*A group from the consulation visited the Gramin (Village) Banks run by EFICOR in two Delhi slums. Project staff including residents of Nehru Place slum of 16,000 people explained how loans of up to 100 dollars are made to a group of 5 households, 2 households at a time. The households are responsible for the loans to be repaid on time so that the next two households can have access to their loans. The leader of the group receives the loan last. The repayment rate thus far is 98%, three times better than any commercial bank, who would never have considered them as candidates for loans. Residents are welcome to pray with the staff at the beginning of their day's work, and a prayer fellowship has emerged from the whole programme.*

Personal salvation enables the poor to experience God in concrete ways; prayers are answered, evil spirits are cast out, physical and emotional healing is experienced.

### **Story**

*Mrs K was the only Christian in her village in South India. A few years ago she was miraculously healed of a serious illness. Recently, when one of her neighbours was sick, she made an important experiment. She told the sick lady that if Jesus was the person who healed through p. 176 prayers, he can heal now. So Mrs K prayed. And the lady was immediately healed, and became a Christian. Since then Mrs K has brought many to the faith.*

Thus conversion is comprehensive. If any dimension is missing, the process of coming to faith in Christ is anaemic. The poor need to experience God as Enabler, Lord Almighty, Love, Shepherd, Liberator, and Saviour. Conversion should lead to improved social relationships and a sense of responsibility for fellow sufferers ([Gal. 6:2](#)). Personal, cultural and community integration should result.

In order to facilitate this process, it is important that in the process of discipleship Christian poor not be separated from their own community. Christian fellowship with people of similar situations is to be preferred, while opportunities to celebrate new life with Christians from all walks of life are not to be neglected.

### **c. The Kingdom at Work in Society**

The Kingdom brings into being a new community of God's people which is to express the right relationships of the Kingdom of God ([Matt. 6:33](#)). This community of justice is made possible by the death of Christ which breaks down the barriers of division between Jews and Greeks, slave and free and male and female ([Eph. 2:14-22](#)). In Christ, there is to be an end to division because of race (Jew and Greek), class (slave and free) and gender (male and female). The kingdom community is to be marked therefore by multi-cultural relationships, equal access to power and resources, and appropriate family relationships between male and female.

In all these fundamental relationships (Jews/Greek, slave/free, male/female) there is an issue of power. Oppression of ethnic minorities has led to civil wars in the former Yugoslavia, Sudan and Burma. Industry restructuring, government policies and land development create unemployment. In cultures across the world men have permission to oppress women and deny them opportunities. The cross of Christ not only makes all people equal under God and in the world; it also condemns all oppression and exploitation. Much poverty in the world is in reality powerlessness rather than lack of resources; the Cross calls on the powerful to share their power with the powerless. As this occurs, the liberated can experience full humanness for the first time in Christ.

### **Story**

*For years, Christians in the slums of Manila have worked for justice so that whole slum communities can get legal water and power and not be at the mercy of rapacious landlords. They continue to unite their communities in the struggle for legal land against those who exploit these resources for rich minorities.*

### **d. The Kingdom at Work in Combating Evil**

Evil is at work in persons and in structures. The misuse of power described above is an expression of p. 177 evil in institutions. This is seen when decisions relating to public life are made for personal gain. The poor often suffer most from these decisions. Personal evil becomes a corporate system which can become a national culture. Public office is often

the key to personal wealth. The poor are always the victims of corporate and national injustice.

### **Story**

*Peasant farmers are forced to relocate because central authorities decide to place a dam at the head of their valley; refugee camps are moved without notice because they are in the way of illegal logging on the nation's border; slums are cleared for new high rise luxury apartments and people are made homeless.*

Such exercise of power is an expression of the principalities and powers of evil. Through Christ's death on the cross these principalities and powers have been disarmed and no longer have the last word.

Another expression of evil is the power that demonic forces exercise often in the context of poverty. These are a further expression of the principalities and powers ([Gal. 4:8-11](#)).

### **Story**

*In Minakyar village in Gujarat, India, Jeyakumar Christian found a conflict not only on social, political, bureaucratic and economic fronts; it was also spiritual.*

*Large family size followed from inter-family and inter-clan feuds where people cursed children. The curses were fatal or at least caused illness. So families had more children who were needed for their family farming work.*

*Thus, in addition to the power issues of political, economic and caste exploitation, spiritual power also held the villagers in bondage.*

## **The Church as Agent of the Kingdom**

### **Story**

*The Evangelical Church of West Africa, a denomination of two and a half million members, mainly in northern Nigeria, developed four years ago, a 'people oriented development programme' with a goal of facilitating the process of meeting the needs of underprivileged people in rural areas in a wholistic manner so that they are 'enabled to improve their quality of life by taking increasing responsibility for themselves and others.' Using training principles based on See/reflect/act/evaluate, Community Development Officers facilitate rural people towards self-help. Each project officer has fifteen villages to work with, selected on a cluster basis, and with a church in at least half the villages. Three major needs are now addressed in over four hundred and fifty villages through this programme. Water supply (both quantity and quality), preventive health care and improving soil fertility. The denomination sees this programme as a bridge to evangelism, a consequence of evangelism and a partner to evangelism. p. 178*

THE CHURCH IS THE HISTORICAL AGENT for the fulfilment of the eternal purpose of God: his Kingdom. The reality of the Kingdom is the divine perspective it allows us to have with regard to human problems. Thus the mission of the Church consists in giving witness to the Kingdom of God in God's world. That testimony is made tangible through the permanent functions of the church, each of which has an eternal dimension because to be human means to have an eternal destiny which is determined by our response to the gospel.

THE SOTERIOLOGICAL function of the Church consists in bringing the salvation of God to the world through the preaching and teaching of the gospel of the Kingdom, with the purpose of building the new community, the church. The Church is a faith to confess and a fellowship to live. She confesses and lives the salvation which is in Christ.

THE PROPHETIC function of the Church consists in conveying God's word to the nation and its rulers, becoming its moral conscience. The Church should question each national situation with the word of God, and denounce sin and evil in society. The Church is to announce the judgement and grace of the Lord with voice, gestures and actions.

THE ECUMENICAL function of the Church means guarding, building and protecting the unity of the Christian church. The Church, which is one, should guard and demonstrate its unity. The unity of Christians has an end in evangelism 'that all of them may be one, that the world may believe'.

THE PRIESTLY function of the Church consists in being a worshipping, intercessory and healing community. She is the communion of the saints. They are sinners saved by God's grace, through faith in Jesus Christ and sealed by the Holy Spirit.

THE KINGLY function of the Church is expressed through service, which is the manifestation of the love for God and one's neighbour. The model is the Servant Lord, who had for his throne a cross, which speaks to us of love, service and sacrifice. These are the permanent triad in order that the Christians and the Church may live and exercise its royalty.

The local church also models a new community where the barriers are down and all are welcome.

Each of these functions can be related to ministry among the poor. The priestly or worship function creates styles of worship which suit the poor. The ecumenical function creates true unity as we have ministry presence with the poor. The soteriological function relates to evangelism by the poor of the poor. The prophetic function challenges unjust structures which oppress the poor. The kingly function relates to diaconal and community development ministries with the poor.

This means that ministry among the poor lies within the historic mission of the Church. The Church of God is less than complete until the poor come in and become fully participating members. [p. 179](#)

### **3. PRINCIPLES FOR MINISTRIES OF EVANGELISATION OF THE POOR**

#### **a. Partnership in Ministry**

We recognise that we meet as middle class Christians from predominantly middle class churches. Evangelicalism as a movement in many parts of the world is among the middle class. We seek therefore to discover how we as such Christians may engage in and partner with others in evangelisation of the poor.

The most appropriate evangelists of the poor are poor Christians from the base of poor churches. Partnership between such churches and middle class churches should be a two-way relationship. The poor who turn to Christ are to be a resource to the whole people of God in their knowledge of God and the scriptures and spiritual vitality. At present many churches and denominations lack poor people. Jesus' parables of the kingdom emphasised the importance of urgently inviting the poor and oppressed to join the feasting in the Kingdom of God ([Luke 14:12-24](#)). When the poor come into the church, the existing middle-class members can be transformed by a new understanding of the gospel.

Another form of partnership is to share financial resources to facilitate bringing the good news of the kingdom to the poor. An affirmation of our final destiny in the Kingdom of God should enable a freedom from bondage to mammon. Today many Christians still live like 'the Gentiles' in storing up their treasures on earth ([Mt. 6:19](#)). Jesus calls those with material resources to use them to lay up treasure in heaven by making resources

available to the poor. Giving alms is in Jesus' words 'treasure in heaven' ([Luke 12:33](#) and [1 Tim. 6:18-19](#)).

Another partnership is between the Churches as institutions and parachurch organisations. Wherever possible, Christian relief and development work best expresses the Good News when it is done in active partnership with existing local churches.

### **Story**

*In a time of great political turmoil in North Eastern India, Krickwen Marak and his wife Hmingi, who are themselves members of the Garo ethnic people, went to the Karbi District of Assam to reopen a Christian school. Although missionaries had contacted the Karbis as long ago as 1850, very few had become Christian.*

*In five years to April 1992 the Maraks reconstituted and rebuilt the Union Christian English School, but in the process faced many local difficulties. Their land had been gradually encroached upon and the school building had been overtaken by the jungle. Their call from God was to the 'rural-born' and 'to our own backward tribals in North-East India'. At one stage they were taken to court over the land reclamation and at another time had night visitors who came with daggers and sticks to frighten them. Harassment continued for about a year. But by quiet Christian witness and diplomacy they took up again their old land allotment, attracted students, and p. 180 commenced rubber and pineapple plantations, fishery ponds and piggeries to make the school self-supporting.*

*They helped establish the Karbi Anglong Baptist Convention which brought together many churches into partnership with one another and with the community.*

A third partnership is transnational and cross-cultural. Korean missionaries are serving as evangelists in Japan; Indians of one ethnic origin are evangelising in other ethnic areas of India.

### **b. Incarnational Ministries**

The poor have most reason to disbelieve the good news. Evangelistic forays into poor areas sometimes confirm the remoteness of the gospel from their desperate situation. The whole gospel must be expressed in word, deed and power to transform their daily lives. Jesus's life is our model for incarnational ministry.

### **Story**

*Servants to Asia's Poor is one expression of an incarnational ministry. Multinational teams of workers actually relocate into squatter communities of Manila, Bangkok, Phnom Penh and other large urban centres. [Families and singles, younger and older workers form the teams]. The principle of incarnation, community, servanthood, simplicity and holism (the word, deeds and power of the gospel) are their guidelines for mission. While workers can never fully represent Jesus nor totally identify with the poor, they attempt to participate in some of their joys and sorrows and share the love, power and justice of Jesus. The expression of ministry (e.g. church planting, community health, drug rehabilitation, training mechanics) reflects a response guided by the Spirit to the specific context rather than a pre-determined programme. Working with the poor leads to transformation in communities as well as in the lives of Servants' workers.*

Incarnational ministries attempt to offer prophetic witness of God's heart for the poor to the wider church. This witness calls at Christians to listen and learn from the poor and work together in evangelisation which demonstrates the poor as a priority in the mission of the church. It can also articulate to the wider church knowledge of the life of the poor so that their partnership may be with more knowledge.

### **c. Ethical Issues**

It is always unethical to manipulate other people or pressurise them to act against their will or their own interests. It is also contrary to the Spirit of the Gospel. Yet in refugee camps, in post-disaster situations and in communities dependent on development projects resourced from outside, it is common to see agencies and individuals pressuring absolutely powerless people to make some religious response in return for food or medicine. Christian agencies need to find ways of supplying aid without creating a level of dependency which allows this to happen. **p. 181**

### **Story**

*Once a peace was declared in Cambodia in 1992, and refugees started going home, some Christian groups flooded into Phnom Penh to 'preach the Gospel', having done nothing for the Cambodian people during the whole time of their crisis over 18 years. Prince Sihanouk, seeing the danger with great clarity, immediately registered the Catholic and Anglican churches so that he could reject applications from the rest for official registration as churches. Such is the awareness in developing countries of the risk of being manipulated by religious interests who care little for the history and culture of the people.*

It is unethical and offensive to preach a gospel which undermines or denies the validity of their culture, and which requires that to be Christian, people have to reject their culture. The trouble is that Christian conversion often becomes synonymous with cultural conversion. Of course, a popular culture may not be integrated within itself. Witchdoctors may be unpopular and people may want to escape them. Also, some aspects of culture such as the oppression of women no Christian can support. The gospel may not be built on oppression. Nevertheless, Christian mission has a history of insensitivity and of causing offence.

In [Acts 17](#), Paul demonstrated in his speech in Athens that it is possible to quote positively from local poets and local expressions of religion, and so engage with the culture, in order to preach Jesus and the resurrection.

Another form of manipulation of the poor happens in the way missionary and development agencies report to their supporters 'back home'. Statistics of 'converts' are often greatly inflated to satisfy the western demand for measurable success, where the real progress might be in transforming local communities and empowering the poor.

A further ethical issue is the behaviour of Christian pastors, missionaries and development workers. If their lives are extravagant, immoral or inconsistent, the credibility of Christian witness is undermined.

### **d. Entry Points**

In the sovereignty of God there are many possible entry points to a community for Christian development workers/missionaries. These may include disasters, the invitation of a community leader, church or government, or an offer to provide water.

As workers facilitate communities in the name of Christ to meet their needs, the signs of the Kingdom are demonstrated through or associated with the workers. This activity can prepare the way for opportunities to move directly to sharing the gospel.

### **Story**

*In an Islamic country where Christians are a tiny minority, a remarkable ministry has developed over nine years so that there are now sixty one couples in nine different parts of the country living among the poorest village people, giving out seeds, tending the sick, and, with the women, visiting **p. 182** houses. They also conduct simple surveys of existing social and economic conditions, and when they feel accepted they work towards long term transformation and change. All the couples were recruited from Christian churches, have*

*trained in community development, and work as virtual volunteers. A recent evaluation by their partner World Vision, says ‘They have demonstrated the gospel by their Christian lifestyle, patient relationship building and committed service in community development. In this way they have earned the right to share more of themselves and their faith with their village communities.’*

*In most centres the main activity has been establishing a pre-school to introduce village children into basic literacy and numeracy skills, using dance, story-telling and play. Women’s savings groups have been developed which provide small loans to start up small enterprises. This has brought many women out of domestic seclusion as well as developing their self-esteem and social skills. The couples are animators and educators in primary health care, early childhood development and family planning.*

*Over time, the couples are often called on to mediate or settle disputes, to comfort and advise. As a result of their caring ministry, their prayer for the sick and other misfortunes, the couples are frequently asked about their faith, and people often express interest about coming to faith.*

Such opportunities may be triggered by invitations to workers to pray for the sick, to give reasons for their presence or behaviour, or to help solve community problems.

Westerners who have grown up in secular societies find it very difficult to understand cultures that are religious in every aspect. Yet religion especially of the monotheistic kind can provide an entry point to valuable dialogue in discussing the uniqueness of Christ in a non-confrontational way. Occasions for prayer where the poor are welcome to share in prayer provide especially valuable points of entry.

### **e. Community Building**

The gospel is not to be lived in isolation. The work of the gospel must be visible in relationships and on at least three levels.

- (i) Confirming family ties and parenting skills.
- (ii) Increasing co-operation in communities especially those that are splintered by urbanisation and ethnic differences.
- (iii) Engendering peace in both national and international relations.

#### **Biblical**

**Luke 4:14–21; 18:9–14**

#### **reflection:**

*The focus of Jesus’ brief years on earth was on relationships in God’s kingly reign. The Good News was about transformed relationships with God and with neighbours, reconciliation and peace.*

*Surprisingly the kingdom was to be introduced ([Luke 4](#)) to the wider community through the poor. Today the same priority is before us. Ministry to and with the [p. 183](#) poor authenticates the gospel to the whole community.*

*The tragedy of the poor is that too often they have been imprisoned by their leaders who wish to hold on to religious or political power.*

*The tragedy of the church is that too often it has succumbed to the secular spirit of the European enlightenment which has stripped community from the gospel by using cold logic, exclusively scientific models and the abuse of individualism. The secularisation of the gospel has reduced the good news for the poor to economic and political liberation. It has ignored the moral dimensions of poverty and trusted in human resources to liberate the poor.*

*A secular gospel deprives the church of the power of God to transform human relationships. Christian community should provide a contrast to secular salvation which posits individual freedom and individual rights as the highest value.*

#### **Stories**

### **a) Lovelink—New Zealand**

*This programme built community caring in an urban community where few people had anything to do with their neighbours. This addressed the problem of the poor in a city of the West where frequently parenting failed, alcohol increased, unemployment was common, and budgeting too infrequent. It provided a central clearing house where people could request help and receive caring assistance from church members. Lovelink enabled widely diverse churches to co-operate to contribute into the lives, not merely the physical needs of families or individuals with any expressed need. It was informal in style, developed and affirmed the skills of thousands of lay people, cost almost nothing to run, and confirmed the eighteen churches as relevant in the life of the neighbourhood. It empowered Christians to build friendships and strengthen the caring in the community.*

### **b) Community Development efforts in the Third World**

*Case studies from Nigeria, Kenya, Ethiopia, India, Philippines and Bangladesh show that community development releases a process of community co-operation among the poor to meet their needs. While most poor communities are deprived of and spend much time in obtaining basic needs like clean water, food, shelter, medicine, they seldom cooperate in gaining them.*

Christian ministries have the opportunity to

- (i) Foster co-operation in Community development associations so that people work together and take responsibility for their own development.
- (ii) Foster sectoral co-operation of farmers, women, youth etc.
- (iii) Bring the love and reconciliation of Christ into the community to deepen the commitment to co-operation and caring as a new church develops. p. 184

### **f. Guidelines for Christians in Community Development**

- (i) Community development is a process rather than a canned programme of direct services. It is not merely a mechanical process of applying technical solutions.
- (ii) All aspects of this process (e.g. building unity, working for justice, and spiritual renewal) must express the work of the Holy Spirit. The goal is transformation in every area of life.
- (iii) Building these relationships within the community and between the development workers and the community is essential. Through these relationships the people discover their dignity and ability to work together for change. This is vital for communities which have been powerless for generations. Hope is created instead of despair.
- (iv) The development of the community should be based on the situation, orientation and culture of the people. People have to decide what they want to change or develop in this area. Development workers need to learn from the people and not dominate the process.
- (v) Decisions are to be made locally and to be based on what the community identifies as needing to be done.
- (vi) The development process should focus on the abilities rather than the deficiencies of the people. Their contribution (in wisdom, time, energy, material resources) can contribute to the effective implementation of development. The community can identify the resources available at hand. Participation, planning and management are necessary to maintain sensitivity to the needs and ideals of the people.



- (vii) An appropriate structure should be developed to encourage local leadership. Local leaders can effectively mobilize the community to develop specific plans to implement and sustain change.
- (viii) The process is value based rather than issue based. As people experience the development process, new value systems emerge, often including a growing concern for those who are poorer than they are and the ability to trust others. These are kingdom values which the community is drawing direct from Scripture.

### **g. Training**

Training the poor is essential to partnership with them in mission to the poor. Training leaders among the poor increases the self-image, independence and freedom of poor communities. This produces indigenous leaders who identify with their own people's needs, and releases the latent potential of the poor to meet their own needs and build their own communities.

When such leaders are produced, the building of Christian communities of the poor, for the poor and by the poor is made possible. The gospel takes root in the context and culture of the poor and becomes a permanent source of inspiration and invigoration, even for the non-Christian poor. [p. 185](#)

#### **Story**

*Through the ministry of FARMS India, a young man from Nagaland, North East India, started a dairy in order to augment his income as a pastor. It worked well, gave him a stable income and allowed ample time for ministry. This encouraged other young evangelists to take up dairy work as an effective income generating programme.*

*A young family in Bangarapet, Karnataka, took on a piggery to augment their income. As a result villagers learnt the work from them as a profitable project. The family supplied piglets for them to start with and continues to act as a guide and counsellor to them.*

Leaders of all kinds should be trained. Those who are Christians develop churches which can turn their community upside down. Such churches contribute equally in mission, spiritual vitality, knowledge of God and the Scriptures and a variety of rituals, music and church forms.

Methods of training the poor vary. Some advocate solidarity, mutuality and dialogue. Others do it through structured learning.

Our case studies show that nonformal education and adult learning are most important. The learner should be a self-directed person drawing on past experience, learning to assume social roles, apply knowledge and perform.

Non-formal education is spontaneous, student centred, participatory, wholistic, corporate, experiential and transformational.

Christian agencies sponsor a variety of patterns of training the poor to minister to the poor. Since education is one of the most powerful means of upward social mobility, if the poor are to improve themselves they must become part of the formal educational system. Those who take responsibility for training the poor must be aware of the context in which they operate and beware of training that would further marginalise the poor from the main stream of society. This entails a long term commitment to enable the poor constantly to upgrade their skills. However, we must be careful that leaders not become irrelevant to their poor community.

#### **Stories**

**JIFU Department of the China Graduate School of Theology**

*Several parachurch organizations working among the poor in Hong Kong saw the need of training the poor to minister among the poor and approached the China Graduate School of Theology to start JIFU in 1982. It has a unique type of curriculum and teaching methods where role play, case studies, simulation and group discussions are often used. Field work on an apprenticeship model and internship system is carefully implemented. An intense personal counselling and spiritual programme help the trainee break through social, personality and spiritual bondages.*

*In 10 years, 102 people have graduated. 47 are ministering among the poor as church planters, evangelists, pastors and staffs of agencies. p. 186*

### **ACTS Ministry, Bangalore, India**

*ACTS is an acronym for Agriculture, Crafts, Trades and Studies. It combines theological and vocational training. Trained in the Bible in the morning, in skills in the afternoon and evangelism and church planting. In its 15 years, 300 students have graduated. Many have planted vigorous and growing churches.*

## **4. SPIRITUAL RESOURCES FOR THE EVANGELISATION OF THE POOR**

### **a. The Use of Scripture**

Scripture is the Word of God written, and is authoritative for faith and practice. Scripture is a treasure store of spiritual resources on which the struggling masses can draw. God points us to the Scriptures. They are the basis for a contemplative dialogue with God in relation to the context. As poor people read the Scriptures, they are enlivened by God and his word. However, this treasure store is often locked up firstly by the middle class filter through which it is read. Secondly, we have not enabled and encouraged the poor to see themselves as the audience to which the Scripture is addressed.

The situation needs to be rectified in the following ways:

The poor are not literate, and their culture is not a reading culture, while the knowledge and correct understanding of the Scriptures are central to the Christian faith and necessary for their spiritual growth. Therefore literacy and biblical education are crucial aspects of empowering the poor so that they can confidently read and interpret Scripture from their context, without being dependent psychologically or intellectually on those who have never experienced poverty.

Secondly, we must realize that grammatico-historical exegesis is necessary but not sufficient. The context of the poor must constantly be brought to the text so that the text will be correctly and fully interpreted. The study of the book of Ruth as the life story of a migrant farm worker is a case in point.

Contemplating and reflecting on the Scriptures with the context before us and the Holy Spirit beside us, will enable the text to illumine significant facts in the context, and the context to bring new light into the text. This will enrich the Church in knowledge of God and of Scripture as well as providing the spiritual resources for evangelising the poor.

### **b. The Holy Spirit**

Poverty can be understood in terms of economic deficiency, political, cultural, spiritual and supernatural oppression. Spiritual and supernatural oppression works through economic and political oppression, but also through idol and ancestral worship, spiritism and oppression from religious leaders.

Because we work against both the human structures and the spiritual powers ([Eph. 2:2](#); [6:2](#); [John 8:44](#); [Matt. 23:23-25](#); [Luke 21:46-7](#)) that hurt the poor, we humbly acknowledge our need of the power of the Holy Spirit. We need to bow our human efforts

and listen for the Spirit's wisdom. We need to seek [p. 187](#) the dynamic power of the Holy Spirit to work in us and in the communities where we work. We need to fast before God for the unholy powers to be vanquished.

## Stories

*In Minakyar village in Gujarat, India, which was under bondage of curses on the children, the evangelistic/development workers had no clue without the understanding and power of the Holy Spirit, of how to work in this spiritual realm.*

*A further step showed in the many ministries which with the power of the Holy Spirit, ministered physical healing to bring the grace of God to the poor community.*

*The power of the Holy Spirit to mend broken lives showed in the ministry where each organisation brought individuals for spiritual, social and emotional healing.*

*In Paratek, Bangladesh, a village of over 20,000 people, a clear demonstration of the power of the Holy Spirit to bring reconciliation came when Christian development workers joined local Christians who were five per cent of the village. In 1986 there was wife and child beating, and fighting between Muslims, Hindus and Christians. In 1993, the wife beating has almost ceased, the children are happy and healthy, and the three religious groups cooperate on community development, celebrate Christmas and pray and read together. The pathways and homes are transformed with peace.*

### c. The History and Tradition of the Church

The Christian Church in time and space has maintained ministries of compassion and justice. The Church made its impact in its first three hundred years because of its welcome to and concern for the poor. The gospel may not always have been clear, but the example of Christ has always been held up as a model. This tradition, from alms houses through hospitals to modern development work, has led the church to its present re-examination of the situation of the poor and how they may be spiritually transformed. These examples from all branches of the Church act as an inspiration and resource for present involvement.

## 5. CALLS ON OUR CONCERN

### a. Women

#### Story

*A group from the consultation visited Dakshinpuri slum in Delhi. The following problems in the slum were identified as arising from gender imbalance and oppression of females.*

- *Less schooling for girls leads to less self-esteem; less initiative; false dependence on others; low productivity.*
- *More children (due to early marriage and desire for sons) leads to malnutrition and lower productivity.*
- *The burden on males to provide for females leads to long hours of work with little to show for it; frustration which leads to drink, violence against [p. 188](#) wives; irresponsibility expressed in the fact that men do not save while women must feed the children.*
- *Some women are not in the workforce; women lack income and feel a burden.*
- *The dowry system denigrates women; parents pay to get rid of daughters; births of females are unwelcome.*
- *Neglect of female health; high maternal anaemia and death; high child mortality and morbidity.*

- *'Protection' confines women to a limited area; any work is for a low wage; fear and lack of co-operation with neighbours; male sexual irresponsibility.*

Women also face violence, violation, rape, abortion and prostitution.

The extreme vulnerability of slum women shows in rape, including rape by the police, neglect of girl children, child rape, dowry deaths (and perpetrators go free) female foeticide, divorce of Muslim women leaving them totally defenceless, prostitution (in which the profits go to pimps and police). In fact there are laws against prostitution. The prostitute goes to jail, the client and pimp go free. Women prisoners are the worst treated often with no legal aid.

### **Story**

*Tuk was raised by her grandmother in North East Thailand, as her poor family abandoned her. She longed to escape poverty and go to Bangkok to get pretty clothes. Life was hard in Bangkok. She worked in poorly paid jobs as a maid and waitress. Then her boss raped her to allow his party guests to rape her. Suicidal, she decided her only future was as a prostitute in Pat Pong. She hated her work, but began to repay her grandmother for all her years of care. Some Christian women offered to pray for Tuk at their weekly meal for prostitutes in a Pat Pong restaurant. She was suspicious but she wanted peace. Gradually her life was full of joy instead of guilt. The new friends arranged for her to train as a seamstress as she needed an income to continue helping her grandmother at home. Tuk has been strengthened in her faith by a short Bible college course. Life is still not easy but she knows God is greater than her problems. Her friends gave her a new name—Joy.*

### **Biblical Story:**

*With the book of Ruth to guide us we observed:*

1. *The vulnerability of refugee and migrant women*
2. *The dispossession of widows from their land*
3. *The economic precariousness and exploitation of poor rural women*
4. *The limitations of paternalistic charity without security*
5. *The shock tactics of Ruth to call for change by sleeping near Boaz*
6. *The blessing of God on her actions a) in 'happening' to work in Boaz' field b) in granting a child p. 189*
7. *The efficacy of a woman as observed by the women of Bethlehem*

### *Theological Reflection*

The facts of the oppression of women in society stand as witness: economic oppression (e.g. long hours of work for little reward); sociological discrimination (e.g. in health and education), violations and violence against women.

The church adds to the problem with its unequal treatment of women and in not more openly condemning mental, physical, sexual abuse in the home and their lack of control over their lives.

'Freedom in Christ' should apply equally to men and women. Failure to bring about freedom in churches and homes brings shame on the name of Christ who valued every person. Discrimination against women in the Church decreases their ability to promote the gospel. The Church recognises public evangelism done by men, yet friendly evangelism, done privately by women, is often more successful.

### *Conclusions*

- (i) We need to affirm the theological basis of the equality of women and men.

- (ii) We must work for justice for women in society and the church.
- (iii) The Church must recognise and use fully the gifts of women.
- (iv) We must model in our structures the love and responsibility God gives to women and men.
- (v) We urge processes that will enable men to recognise their responsibilities to be faithful to and care for their wives and children.

### **b. Children**

In his ministry to children, Jesus emphasised their vulnerability, the responsibility the adult world has towards them, and their special place in his kingdom. Thus we judge a society on the basis of its treatment of children.

Yet in our world, 13 million children die yearly from preventable diseases, and hundreds of millions suffer the most abject poverty and malnutrition. The sexual exploitation, homelessness, war, child labour, and violence against them are all a blight not only on our world, but on future generations. In times of social distress those who suffer most are children. We note that lack of protection of a family renders such children especially vulnerable.

#### **Story**

*Even before birth, poor children in Calcutta suffer from their mothers' neglect of pre-natal care and inadequate diet. Few are born in hospitals, most in very unhygienic surroundings. So infant mortality is high, newborn children are sickly and undeveloped and often deformation occurs.*

*Children are at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Girls as they reach puberty are often the objects of rape. Fifty per cent of the one hundred thousand prostitutes in Calcutta enter the profession between 11 and 18 years of age, while their brothers become pimps.*

*There are half a million child p. 190 labourers in Calcutta who often begin working at the age of five. They earn about ten to twenty per cent of the adult wage. This contributes to adult unemployment. They work fourteen hours a day for less than 3 dollars a month. Fifteen per cent of India's child labourers receive no wage but are bonded labourers.*

Therefore such children's needs, both materially, socially and spiritually, especially their need to hear the good news, should be given much higher priority in our churches and in world mission. Work with families will be an important part of this.

### **c. Ethnic and Class Issues**

In many societies, poor groups, especially indigenous people and ethnic minorities, are marginalised because of race, caste, tribal discrimination and social position. Any attempt to reach such groups for the gospel must attend to the reasons for their marginalisation. We particularly considered the example of the Dalits in India.

#### **Example:**

*Dalits (who now number 130 million people) have been continually present as a group of poor throughout Indian history. Their poverty is caused by socioreligious marginalisation through codes of purity and pollution, Karma-Samsara theology, and total obliteration of their native cultures and religions. In recent centuries they have sought to liberate themselves through political and economic action. In the early nineteenth century, thousands of Dalits embraced Christianity to achieve social mobility and human dignity. However, through the nationalistic pretensions of church leaders and the blindness of high caste Christians, the church also proved to be a trap that lacked equality.*

*Many Dalits want to come into the Church as a political protest against their situation. The Church has a double burden in reaching the Dalits: a majority of the Indian Church are from the Dalits; the very identity and mission of the Church is defined by how it serves the downtrodden and suppressed. Thus the Church and parachurch mission agencies have a tremendous role to play in coming years in evangelising the Dalits. The Dalits' present need is for spiritual resources which can strengthen them in their struggle.*

*The Indian Church must face the specific challenge that God who liberated them from bondage in previous years has to liberate their Dalit brothers and sisters as a covenant responsibility to God. We should also condemn casteism in the Church and call members to repentance.*

#### **d. Latin America**

Poverty is a reality in this subcontinent of America. The population explosion, economic deterioration, political instability, guerilla and terrorism, social upheaval and cocaine trade are realities there. The social awareness of the Roman Catholic Church, and the evangelical **p. 191** churches is a sign of the work of the Holy Spirit in these lands. Two countries call our attention to the fact of poverty, Haiti and Cuba.

Haiti demonstrates that poverty is an interwoven material of social discrimination, economic decline, political confusion and spiritual struggle. Yet in this situation the Christian Churches give a reason for hope.

#### **Story**

*We affirm as Christians our commitment to freedom, democracy and human rights and therefore call attention to the impoverishment and unnecessary suffering of eleven million people of Cuba during the last thirty four years due to internal and external political decisions.*

*We see in the Christian solidarity of the Churches and organisations of the United States a sign of the reality of forgiveness and good will, and the same Spirit in the Christians of Cuba in spite of the hostility that the Christians experienced in the last three decades. We also praise God for the diaconal spirit of the Cuban believers in loving and serving their countrymen in spite of ideological differences.*

#### **e. Africa**

Strategising to evangelise the poor in Africa must take seriously their socio-political-economic and cultural context. And conversely any attempt to liberate the poor in Africa in terms of their physical, social and cultural needs must be within the context of the gospel of Christ. While our primary agenda is the salvation of the poor by the gospel of Christ, their liberation from oppressive forces should be our ultimate concern. This social concern gives credibility to our witness to the poor in Africa.

As we engage in evangelising the poor in Africa, we must do so through the following concerns:

- (i) Liberation from spiritual forces of darkness and bondage to Satan and satanic or demonic forces. Ultimate salvation is in the Lord Jesus Christ.
- (ii) Liberation from wicked and oppressive socio-political-economic and cultural forces including unjust national and international structures.
- (iii) The socio-economic uplift and development of the poor through practical projects designed for and with the poor.
- (iv) The world Christian community in partnership with African Christians to further evangelisation and alleviation of suffering.

#### **f. Victims of Natural Disasters**

Natural disasters hurt all classes of people, rich or poor, who will initially be left alone with themselves and God. Loss of loved ones and property brings sorrow and mourning to survivors. Churches and Christian organisations join many others in giving food, clothes and medicines. Disaster situations certainly justify the use of relief aid. But even this relief should be for a limited period of time and not create dependency. Comfort and counselling are also important to remind **p. 192** victims that Christ is sovereign even over the calamity.

After relief, rehabilitation should follow. Chronic depression can continue among the victims, so continuous counselling and spiritual help is vital.

### **Story**

*'Seed of Health' is a network of Filipino health workers bringing self-managed health care to their own poor communities. They are trained to provide basic preventative and curative care and work in a community drug insurance scheme providing self-funded low cost drugs for community members.*

*Members of Seed of Health responded to the earthquake disaster in Northern Luzon in 1985. Health workers in poor communities worked alongside doctors in relief, training new health workers and setting up the process for communities to provide ongoing low cost medical care.*

*Seed of Health workers continue to empower members of other poor communities by training people to replicate self-managed, self-funded health care. Health workers in poor communities are empowered to overcome health problems not only in regular life but also in disasters among their people.*

### **g. International Factors Hurtful to the Poor**

Foreign debt increases poverty. In some cases this amounts to up to 50% of a country's National Budget. It is one of the most severe hindrances to development in many countries. This prevents countries from investing in education, social welfare, health and communications. At the same time it exploits natural resources aggravating the degradation of the ecosystem.

We call Christians of the six Continents, politicians, economists and sociologists, together with pastors and theologians, to seek solutions with depth and wisdom, both biblical and theological. The universal Christian Church can demonstrate active solidarity and unity.

Many other factors impact the poverty of the poor which we could not address but which require further study: the burden of personal debt; the power of multinational companies; environmental degradation, war and the arms trade. Human greed adds to the imbalance between rich and poor.

## **CONCLUSION**

Today the primary challenge for the church in evangelising the world is the effective evangelising of poor people. The poor are with us and near us in every country. Our Lord, Jesus Christ, is their hope. We add to their oppression if we deny them his good news.