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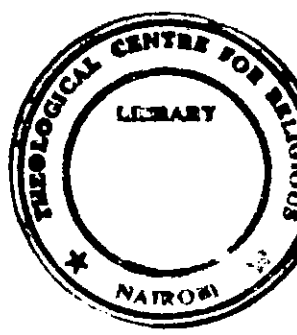
THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA

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Luke's Teaching on Poverty in his Gospel and Acts.

STUDENT: Marek Stybor, OFM Conv.

TUTOR: Fr. Aelred Lacomara, CP



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*This is a long paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for a Bachelor of Arts degree in Religious Studies.*

12. 02. 1999

Nairobi, Kenya

Student's Declaration

I hereby declare that the material used herein has not been submitted for Academic Credit to any other Institution. All sources have been cited in full.

Marek Stybor

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.	1
Part I	
God's Attitude to the Poor.	3
1. The Poor Jesus.	3
2. The Lord's Year of Favour.	5
3. The Kingdom of God Proclaimed by Jesus.	7
4. The Poor are Privileged in the Eye of God.	9
5. Jesus and the Well-to-Do.	11
Part II	
The Disciples' Fulfilment of the Obligation to Help the Poor.	12
A. According to the Gospel.	13
1. Introduction.	13
2. Jesus Demands Complete Renunciation of Possessions for Disciples.	14
3. Disciples of Jesus are to Give Alms, to Help the Poor and Provide Hospitality.	15
B. According to the Acts.	17
1. Introduction.	17
2. The First Summary of Community Life (2:42-47).	18
3. The Second Summary Passage about Community Life (4:32-35).	23
4. The Action of Barnabas.	24
5. The Deceit of Ananias and Sapphira (5:1-11).	25

Part III

How Should the Disciples Help the Poor Today?	26
1. Introduction.	26
A. Inside The Religious Community.	27
1. Live a Simple Life-Style.	28
2. Realization of Beatitudes.	30
B. Beyond The Religious Community.	33
1. Efforts for the Benefit of the Poor.	33
2. Personal Contact with the Poor.	33
3. Active Listening.	34
4. Active Sharing in the Struggles of the Poor.	35
5. Political Involvement.	36
6. Solidarity with those who Struggle for Social Justice.	37
C. Religious and the Modern Age.	39
Conclusion.	41
Bibliography.	43

Introduction.

The intention of my work is to demonstrate that the disciples' obligation to help the materially poor is based on God's care for them expressed through Jesus' attitude according to the Luke's Gospel, and the commitment of the Early Christian Community according to Acts of the Apostles.

I intend to follow the exegetical approach. First of all, I have to tried to familiarize myself with the texts of Luke-Acts pertaining to my topic by referring to various commentaries and relevant authors. And then, I have developed the material in three parts.

In the first part, I have outlined God's attitude to the poor as revealed through the person of Jesus. Here, there is a message to the world which God wants to communicate through the presence of the poor, I have emphasized this. I have referred to the various passages from the Gospel of Saint Luke and the heart of this chapter is the *Year of Favor* (Lk. 4:18), where Jesus announces his mission as that of proclaiming the good news to the poor. This part of my work develops the theme of God's attitude towards the poor, as revealed in the person of Jesus.

In the second chapter I talk about the disciples' fulfillment of the obligation to help the poor. Here, I have analyzed the lifestyle of the Early Christian Community *vis a vis* the poor, according to the Acts of the Apostles. The lifestyle of the Early Christian Community, according to Luke-Acts, will help us to understand the obligation of disciples to help the materially poor. Their concern for the needy brother and sister reflects the divine concern for the poor.

The present day application is contained in the third chapter of my work. My concern in this final part is the challenge which the poor give to the religious who are

to be today's disciples of Jesus in a special way. How are we going to face the challenges given to us as people consecrated to God by those who are oppressed, persecuted and suffering because of hunger and other injustices? This is the burden of this chapter.

The main guiding question of my work is: What message does Luke-Acts communicate to the Christian disciples concerning their attitude toward the poor? I hope my work answers this question as we go through the text of Luke-Acts from the perspective of the situation of the materially poor in relation to God, and the Early Christian Community's attitude towards them.

Part I

God's Attitude to the Poor.

In this section I would like to present God's attitude towards the poor as revealed in the person of Jesus. The context in which he was born, the solidarity with the poor he announced in his mission program according to Luke 4:18 and realized in the course of his life are all a manifestation of the divine option for the poor. His commitment to bring about their liberation remains a constant challenge to his disciples and the Church as a whole.

1. The Poor Jesus.

In Luke's theology of poverty the Messiah is born, lives and dies poor. Jesus' association with the poor is for Luke a proof that he is the fulfillment of the messianic prophecies (Isa 61:1ff).¹

In his account of the birth of Jesus, Luke stresses the fact of Jesus' poverty, and the meaning of his life as a sign of hope for the poor. His advent effected the reversal of values. This is what his mother proclaims in her song of praise: "he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty" (Luke 1:53). The sending away of the rich, together with the "scattering of the proud" and the putting down of "the powerful from their thrones" (1:51-52) is a sign of the reversal of fortunes and expectations brought about by God's visitation to his people (3:5-6; 14:11). The filling of "the hungry with good things" accompanies the exalting of

¹ John Newman, "The Poor, the Rich, and the Kingdom of God," *Theological Studies*, 14 (1964), 227.

“those of low degree”² (1:52-53). The Greek word used for those of low degree, *tapeinoi* has definite resonances in the tradition. It designates not only those who are without possessions but those who are oppressed by their fellow human beings and must look to God for help, since they expect none from elsewhere.³

Poverty is a fundamental mark of blessedness in the thought of Luke (6:20). The joy of the kingdom of God belongs to the poor. Mary exclaims: “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of servant” (1:46-48). Mary expresses the joy and eschatological hope of Israel’s faithful poor (*anawim*) with words that recall theirs: “...the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. The Lord brought us out of Egypt...” (Deut 26:7-8).

Luke makes a subtle transition from the graces conferred upon Mary to those conferred upon Israel. Because of her poverty all generations shall call Mary blessed (1:48). She is exalted because she is poor (*tapeinos*). This same exaltation shall be extended to all the poor (*tapeinoi*), to all who constitute the Israel of the spirit (1:52). Mary is the personification of the poor, of that privileged people chosen for salvation. She is the perfection of their poverty.

Mary describes herself as the servant of the Lord (1:38, 48) at the moment when the glory of God comes to dwell within her (1:35, 45-49). The poverty of the servant of the Lord is the reason why she has become the object of divine favor (*charis*) and messianic joy (1:28).⁴

² According to the New Revised Standard Version : “...lifted up the lowly” (1:52-53).

³ L. Timothy Johnson, Sharing Possessions: Mandate and Symbol of Faith. Overtures to Biblical Theology, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), pp. 13-14.

⁴ John Newawa, Themes of St. Luke (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1970) pp. 103-104.

When the time for his birth came, Jesus was born in a stable because his parents could provide nothing better. The new born Jesus is laid in a manger (Luke 2:7) and his first visitors are the lowly shepherds (2:15-20). At his presentation, Jesus' parents offer the sacrifice which the Jewish law prescribed for the poor: "If she cannot afford a sheep, she shall take two turtle-doves or two pigeons" (Lev 12:8; cf. Luke 2:22-24).⁵

During his public ministry, Jesus' actions and words identify him as one of the poor, and as well as a poor man who showed solidarity with other poor people. He has nowhere to rest his head (9:58), and even his burial is in another's tomb (23:50-53).⁶ His mission brings freedom to those who live in difficult circumstances.

2. The Lord's Year of Favor.

When Jesus starts his ministry, he applies to himself the reading from Isaiah 61:1-2: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor" (Luke 4:18). This is clearly intended to announce the kind of messiah Jesus was to be and the gist of his message.⁷

Significant is the way, according to Luke, in which Jesus proclaims his mission by reading a text from Isaiah (Luke 4:18). The Isaiah 61:1 citation in Luke 4:18f functioned as the scriptural legitimation and fundamental premise for the ministry of Jesus as the prophetic Christ. Chapter seven can be seen as the fulfillment within the narrative of the programmatic presentation of Jesus in chapter four. This has

⁵ Barbara E. Reid, "Reading Luke with the Poor," *The Bible Today*, 32(5), 1994, p. 283.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Johnson *op cit.* p. 14.

the effect of emphasizing that what was prophesied as the mission of the prophet is actually being achieved in the words and deeds of Jesus. As the prophetic Christ, therefore, Jesus proclaims the Good News to the poor (the poor are those who received the Kingdom). The poor appear twice in Luke 14 in the sayings of Jesus to the Pharisees who were testing him (14:1). In the lesson on hospitality (14:12), that man is declared righteous who invites those who cannot repay him, including the *ptochoi* (14:13). This lesson is taken up by the parable of the Great Banquet, in which, after those first called to the banquet refuse, the poor (*ptochoi*) are invited to come.

In four of these passages, the poor take a prominent place among others to whom the Good News is proclaimed. The citation of Luke 4:18 lists with the poor, captives, the blind and downtrodden and 7:22 includes the blind, the lame, lepers, the deaf and the dead. These are the types of “blemish” found in Leviticus 21:18 as prohibiting participation in the cult of Israel. We also know from Qumran that men with such blemishes were considered unworthy of and, therefore excluded from the eschatological war and Messianic Banquet.⁸

The call of God to the poor is both a reflection and a defense of Jesus’ own prophetic mission to proclaim the Good News to the poor. He read from the writings of Isaiah and then announced to the congregation: “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (4:21).⁹ For Luke the scene in the synagogue at Nazareth corresponds to the sermon on the mount for Matthew, as being a ‘programme-speech’

⁸ L. Timothy Johnson, The Literary Function of Possessions in Luke-Acts (SBL Dissertation Series, 39), pp. 132-133.

⁹ J. Richard Cassidy, Jesus, Politics and Society: A Study of Luke’s Gospel (Maryknoll: Orbis Books,

or manifesto, giving the kernel of Jesus' message at his first major public pronouncement.¹⁰

Jesus inaugurates his mission in a special way by preaching God's Kingdom as present among the people.

3. The Kingdom of God Proclaimed by Jesus.

The Kingdom of God, as proclaimed by Jesus produces a division in society between the rich and the poor: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God" (6:20).¹¹ Jesus emphatically asserts that the "poor" manifest a deep hope and trust in God. Acutely aware of their dependence and need, they are most gratefully receptive to the Kingdom. Throughout Luke's Narrative it is usually the poor who readily receive, and trustingly respond to, Jesus' proclamation.

The poor, experiencing the Father's love and providential care (12:30), possess the Kingdom now. The verb in the Beatitude is the present tense: the Kingdom *is* theirs. God's penchant for reversing human notions of what is right and reasonable is clearly perceptible here. All that is treasured by human beings is of no enduring worth in God's sight; the real abiding treasure involves earthly poverty.¹²

At first Luke seems to suggest that, in Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom, it was only the poor who were to be allowed a place; this would amount to an absolute condemnation of wealth.¹³ Luke introduces the passage of 16:16: the Kingdom of

¹⁰ Henry Wansburgh, "St Luke and Christian Ideals in an Affluent Society," New Blackfriars, 49, 1967-1968, pp. 582-587.

¹¹ George V. Pixley, and Clodovis Boff, The Bible, the Church, and the Poor (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1986), p. 59.

¹² John S. Galigan, "The Tension between Poverty and Possessions in the Gospel of Luke," Spirituality Today, 37, 1985, p. 5.

God is not just for some or the rich. Luke 16:19-31 provides him with additional armament for his combat: the poor, who ostensibly are not blessed, participate at the heavenly banquet, while the favored rich suffer.¹⁴

In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, after the beggar dies he is taken up into Abraham's bosom, whereas the rich man is dispatched to a place of torment, without any difference being established between them other than that one is rich and the other poor (16:19-31).

Jesus tells the young man who asks him what he must do to inherit eternal life to sell all his goods and distribute the money to the poor, and then follow him like any other poor person (18:18-23).

The reply Jesus sends to John the Baptist's question from prison demonstrates that Jesus believes that his actions towards the poor are sufficient evidence that he is the one all are awaiting (7:18-23). The Kingdom of God, the hope of the poor, is being made present in the actions of Jesus and of his followers: "But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out the demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you" (11:20)¹⁵ There is nothing to indicate that Jesus sought any power or position through all his intense activity. His purpose, always as presented by Luke, was to open the eyes of the multitude to the hope of the Kingdom given to the poor.

Luke presents Jesus' death as serene, making him able to say from the cross: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (23:46). And the context implies that it was not just his spirit that he was confidently commending to his Father, but also

¹⁴ Robert J. Karris, "The Lukan *Sitz im Leben*." In: Charles H. Talbert, ed., Perspective on Luke-Acts (Danville: Mars Hill College, 1978), p. 122.

the cause of the Kingdom he had proclaimed.¹⁶ We may clearly notice that the poor have a special role and place in this Kingdom.

4. The Poor are Privileged in the Eyes of God.

The point to be noted here is that Luke describes Jesus as having definite sympathy and concern for those who are poor and hungry. He heals people who are in distressed circumstances (4:31-41) and eats with people of low standing (15:2). He teaches that riches can choke the word (8:14) and lead to loss of self (9:25). He declares that: "Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God" (18:25). He tells parables condemning a wealthy fool (12:16-21) and a rich man who ignores poor Lazarus at his door (16:19-31). He advocates inviting people who are poor and disabled to banquets (14:15-24).

Jesus criticizes the Pharisees for being lovers of money (16:15-24) and condemns the scribes who "devour widow's houses" (20:47). He advises that no one can serve both God and mammon (16:13) and that people should sell their belonging and give alms, thus ensuring *an unfailing treasure in heaven* (12:33).¹⁷ The blessing of the poor and rejection of the rich by God is sharply expressed in the story of Lazarus and the rich man (16:19-31) told to certain Pharisees, whom Luke calls *lovers of money* (16:14), and who had scoffed at Jesus' words about loving God more than money.¹⁸

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

¹⁷ Reid, *op. cit.*, pp. 283-284.

It is not by accident that Luke should refer to *the poor, the cripples, the blind and the lame* as those invited to the great banquet (14:21). His banquet theology has its roots deep in the Old Testament tradition (Isa 25:6f; 55:1f; 65:11f; Deut. 12:4), according to which perfect happiness is established by the Messiah among the poor and afflicted and between them and God. He is to inaugurate the community of the blessed. Thus those who love the poor, invite them to their tables, and share their lives and goods with them (14:12-14), have already become the blessed poor of the parable. There is a very close interconnection among the Lucan themes of happiness, poverty and banquets. The word for *happiness* is used fifteen times by the evangelist. Always it refers to those who are receptive to the word of God, the poor, the afflicted and despised; these are the ones who find happiness (6:21-22; 11:28; 12:37; 14:13). To enter into communion with the Messiah is to enter into his community of the poor.¹⁹

Jesus' famous Sermon on the Level Stretch (6:17-49) makes obvious his predilection for the materially poor, especially when it is contrasted with Matthew's Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:1-11). Luke's Jesus says: *Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God* (6:20). Then, when Luke adds a matching: *But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation* (6:24), it becomes clear with whom Luke's Jesus stands. He stands with and for the poorest among God's people! The emphasis in Luke's writings concerning the poor is truly good news for the poor. He assures them that their condition, like that of the beggar Lazarus (16:19-31), will be dramatically changed. The poor will be the recipients of God's special

¹⁹ Cf. also the "Sermon on the Plain" (Lk 10:1-12) and the "Sermon on the Mount" (Lk 11:1-13).

blessing, because they are poor and needy.²⁰ However, we shouldn't get the impression that Luke's Jesus does not keep a place in God's Kingdom for those who are rich. Luke has in mind rather the danger of wealth if not shared. Jesus cares for all the people. Jesus came to bring salvation to all.

5. Jesus and the Well-to-Do.

This image of Jesus as poor, associating primarily with the poor, teaching relentlessly about the dangers of wealth, and demanding that his disciples do the same is only part of the picture Luke presents. He also tells of Jesus dining with people who are well off. Levi gave a great banquet for Jesus in his house (5:29) as did Zacchaeus, a wealthy chief tax collector (19:2). Simon the Pharisee (7:36-50) and other leading Pharisees also invited Jesus to dine in their homes (11:37; 14:1).

Jesus healed the slave of a centurion who was wealthy enough to build the synagogue in Capernaum (7:1-10). He cured the daughter of Jairus, a synagogue official (8:40-42, 49-59). Jesus' teaching is directed to people on all points of the economic spectrum. The characters in his parables include rich landowners, poor peasants (19:11-27), and even middle managers, such as a steward (11:35-40; 16:1-8).²¹

However, Luke is not so naive as to maintain that riches in themselves were evil, but he perceives that, unless riches are subordinated to higher values, they can lead one away from God, from Christ and from one's neighbor.²²

²⁰ van Philip Linden, The Gospel of Luke & Acts (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1986), pp. 79-81.

²¹ Reid, op. cit., p. 284.

²² Robert F. O'Toole, The Unity of Luke's Theology: An Analysis of Luke-Acts (Wilmington: Michael Glazier 1984), p. 129

Part II

The Disciples' Fulfillment of the Obligation to Help the Poor.

In Luke-Acts the use of material possessions in relation to discipleship is a constant theme. But there is no standard answer to the question of how disciples should use economic resources. Some leave everything behind (Luke 5:11, 28), some give alms (Acts 9:36; 10:2), others keep their property and money and place them at the disposal of the community (Acts 12:12; 16:14). In Acts, sharing everything in common becomes a hallmark of the early Christianity (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-37).

Luke-Acts attests that followers of Jesus were not only the poor and outcast but also people of means. Luke mentions that Simon Peter, Andrew, James, and John were partners in their fishing enterprise. Mark preserves the note that Zebedee and his sons were prosperous enough to have hired hands (Mark 1:20).²³ Mark did not have any *panta* (in every way, altogether): "and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him" (Mark 1:20); "they left everything and followed him" (Luke 5:11). All disciples of Jesus must commit themselves to follow him even up to the cross and not to allow any possessions to stand in the way of their commitment to him. How this is to take shape in their lives will vary from person to person as we can see when looking at various disciples of Jesus (Mary, Martha and

Lazarus in 10:38-42; women accompanying Jesus in 8:1-3; Zacheus in 19:1-10; first Jerusalem community; Tabitha in Acts 9:36 and Lydia in Acts 16:12-15).²⁴ Luke alone notes that Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, and the other Galilean women disciples provided for Jesus and the Twelve out of their resources (Luke 8:2-3).²⁵

A. According to the Gospel.

1. Introduction.

Jesus' teaching on discipleship and material possessions is seen as a call to a new economic order grounded on generous giving without expectation of return (6:35).²⁴ His teaching advocates radical generosity not for the sake of economic security, but a giving whose objective is to meet the needs of others. In this way all become obligated to do something beyond their personal economic security. In the Christian community all are brothers and sisters. Parables such as that of the woman who throws a costly party for her friends and neighbors when she finds a lost coin (15:8-10), or that of the poor widow who gives her whole livelihood (21:1-4), illustrate the desired response.²⁶

Jesus himself retained at least enough to live on and seemingly allowed his disciples to retain a minimum. Jesus' possessions are in opposition to surplus possessions. The question that immediately arises is which possessions are surplus

²⁴ L. Clerici, *Private Notes* (Nairobi, 1998), pp. 1, 7.

Reid. *op. cit.*, pp. 284-285.

and which are essential. Luke's Gospel does not provide any specific answers, but the general impression is that almost all possessions are to be questioned.²⁷

As to how Jesus and the twelve obtained their livelihood, the only information that Luke provides us is that several women disciples accompanied them and "provided for them out of their resources" (8:3).²⁸

Luke has particularly emphasized the danger of wealth. He has laid stress on the proper use of wealth for the followers of Christ. Can we say that Luke has interpreted some of the teaching of Jesus as demanding of his followers radical renunciation to all possessions? Surely some Lucan texts make us think so. For Luke, the following (*akoloutheo*) of Jesus on the way to Jerusalem (to the cross) is the paradigm of discipleship. It is for this reason that Christian faith is called the way (*hodos*). In Luke the term "disciples" is not restricted to the few who could follow Jesus physically; it means all those who welcome Jesus and his teaching (Luke 6:17; 19:37, 39; Acts 6:1, 7; 8:1, 26, 38; 11:26).²⁹

2. Jesus Demands Complete Renunciation of Possessions for Disciples.

Jesus' disciples practice the same poverty. Simon, James, John, and Levi leave everything to follow him (5:11-28). Jesus tells a rich official who wants to do more than keep the commandments to sell all, distribute it to the poor, and then follow him (18:18-23). When Jesus sends his disciples out on mission they are to take nothing for the journey, no walking stick, no sack, no food, no money, no second tunic (9:3).

²⁷ Cassidy, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

²⁹ Reid, *op. cit.*, pp. 284-285.

When Peter reminds Jesus that he and the Zebedee's brothers had left their own things in order to follow him (18:28), Jesus promises a reward in this life and in the next (18:24-25). Beyond keeping the commandments, they must sell all they have and become destitute followers of the Messiah. The rich man in the story failed to meet this demand of discipleship. Disciples must be willing to leave behind all close relationship and to carry the cross after him (14:25-27). Jesus warns them to count the cost before responding (14:28-32) and concludes with a demand regarding possessions: "whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple" (14:33).³⁰

3. Disciples of Jesus are to Give Alms, to Help the Poor and Provide Hospitality.

The practice of "charity" or "justice" called almsgiving is seen in Luke-Acts as another way of using possessions. The idea of almsgiving seems to be implied in the story of the unjust steward and its awkwardly appended sayings about mammon. (16:1-13). The story addresses more directly the use of possessions by the disciples in the world: "make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth, so that when it is gone, they may welcome you into the eternal homes" (16:9). If we attach this moral to the pattern of the story, this would mean that the disciples are to use money in a way which will secure them a reward from God. Followers of Jesus are expected to use their possessions in a creative way (19:11-27); they are to give alms to the poor, and this will secure them a place in heaven.

In another place (12:33), Jesus tells those who have already become his disciples, "Sell your possessions, and give alms; provide yourselves with purses that

³⁰ Luke 14:28-33; Acts 2:44-45; 4:34-35; 16:17.

do not grow old, with the treasure in the heavens that does not fail..." Those who *already* are disciples (12:22) and presumably had left all to follow Jesus are now presumed able to give alms. Here there is clearly no requirement to sell *all* they have.

In an extended attack on the Pharisees and Lawyers (11:37-52), Jesus tells them to "give for alms those things that are within; and see, everything will be clean for you" (11:41). Almsgiving is contrasted positively with the obsessive concern with ritual purity of which Jesus accused his opponents.

Almsgiving makes another appearance in the Gospel narrative in the story of the widow's offering in 21:1-4. Jesus by no means condemns the rich who put in great amounts of money; the generosity is only heightened in contrast to theirs. When we look at the narrative rather than at directives, we see that not all those who believed in Jesus sold everything they had in response. In Luke 8:1-3, brief mention is made of a group of a women who were traveling through Galilee with Jesus and the disciples, and who "provided for them out of their means." They used their own possessions to support the ministry of Jesus and the Twelve.

Zaccheus who wanted so much to see Jesus was a chief tax collector and very rich (Luke 19:2). In the presence of Jesus, he promised to give half of his possessions to the poor (19:8). This is very good response to Jesus' teaching concerning the possessions, but it is not absolute renunciation. Jesus said, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is son of Abraham" (19:9). We are not told he sold that house, left his possessions, and followed Jesus, or that he stopped being tax collector. By giving alms to the poor and by giving back what he had taken, and by showing hospitality to the Messiah, Zaccheus showed himself to be a "son of Abraham." In Luke-Acts hospitality to the emissaries of God is a sign of acceptance of faith (Luke

9:3-5; 9:53; 10:5-12, 16; 14:12-14; 24:28-32; Acts 10:23-33; 16:14-15, 32-34; 28:1-2, 7-10).

Continuously throughout Luke-Acts we find the idea of the call to total renunciation of possessions, and the ideal of almsgiving and hospitality. We must admit that in order to give alms on a continuing basis one must have something to give; one must maintain some possessions. Similarly with hospitality, to the needy: one needs to have a house, or at least a room.”

B. According to the Acts.

1. Introduction.

Luke presents the theme of possessions in the early Church in Acts in a less prominent way than in the Gospel. The most well-known passages are those about the community of believers sharing all things (2:43-47; 4:32-35). There is no mention in Acts of the term *ptochos* (the Greek word means ‘one who is so poor as to have to beg’, it relates to the one who is completely destitute). This term was often used in the Gospel. Luke’s silence about the poor is coherent with his portrayal of the Jerusalem community: “There was not a needy person among them” (4:34).

Interesting is the prominent place given to the rich in the Acts’ narrative. Luke refers to wealthy and influential persons who either join the Way or who are interested in it. One of Luke’s apologetic concerns was to show that the Christian movement was attracting individuals well placed from social, political, and economic perspectives.

The proper use of material resources is demonstrated in the early community by sharing all things in common, and by giving alms. Numerous times believers who are heads of households extend hospitality to fellow believers. Paul, in particular, is frequently a recipient of hospitality, though he also shows his self-sufficiency.³²

The practice of almsgiving is found in Acts, where, strangely enough, the contrast between rich and poor defined in the Gospel, is entirely lacking. The woman Tabitha is said to have been “devoted to good works and acts of charity” (9:36). The centurion Cornelius was one “who feared God with all his household; he gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God” (10:2). Cornelius is told by God in a vision that his “prayers and...alms have ascended as a memorial before God” (10:4).³³

Luke describes the community of goods in the context of the major summaries (2:42-47; 4:32-35). Immediately after the second account (4:32-35) Luke adds two practical cases. The first is the good example of Barnabas (4:36-37) and the second is the dishonest deed of Ananias and his wife Sapphira (5:1-11). These two cases elucidate the selling and putting of the proceeds into the hands of the apostles³⁴

2. The First Summary of Community Life (2:42-47).

This summary of community life in Acts of the Apostles follows upon the mass baptism (2:41). The influx of three thousand members into the community

³² John Gillman, Possessions and the Life of Faith: A Reading of Luke-Acts (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1991), pp. 94-95.

³³ Johnson, Sharing Possessions, pp. 18-21.

³⁴ Thaddeus A. Mworira, The Community of Goods in Acts: A Lucan Model of Christian Charity (Doctoral Dissertation, Rome: Urbaniana 1986), p. 83.

required some plan to meet the increased needs. The response was for the believers to share voluntarily "all things in common." The term *koinonia* refers to the common life, the fellowship and unity characteristic of the community. According to Luke this common fellowship was experienced by the sharing of possessions: "And all who believed were together and had all things in common (*koinonia*); they would sell possessions (*ktemata*) and goods (*hyparchonta*) and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need" (vv. 44-45). This assumes that the believers owned property and other possessions. Their task was to use their private property for the needs of the community by selling it and distributing the proceeds. The imperfect tense of the verbs "sell" (*epipraskon*) and "distribute" (*diemerizon*) suggests that the selling and distributing did not take place all at once but it happened over a period of time whenever "any had need."³⁵

Koinonia signifies participation, sharing, association, partnership. It occurs 18 times in the NT: 13 in Paul, 3 in 1 John, once in Hebrews, and once in Acts. It never occurs in the gospels. We may define four different connotations which take into account the elements contained in v. 42. *Koinonia* may apply to the union of the faithful with the apostles or the practice of community of goods. The word could be equivalent to the expression "the breaking of the bread," so that the third expression in v. 42 would be in opposition to the second and would explain it. The word might be also another way of referring to almsgiving. *Koinonia* can be seen as the table of fellowship or communitarian agape, as apostolic communion, as community or fraternal communion.

According to J. Dupont and L. Cerfaux, quoted by Thaddeus A. Mworia in his doctoral work, the *koinonia* in 2:42 must refer, above all to “their practice of sharing their possessions. But their *koinonia* does not limit itself to the level of material goods, it also implies a spiritual communion among them.” It refers to the practice of putting material goods in common as an expressive external sign of the intimate communion of hearts. Therefore the *koinonia* in 2:42 refers directly to the practice of fraternal sharing of goods, but not exclusively. It refers first and foremost to the practice of putting material goods at the disposition of all. This may indicate that Luke intended to stress the person-to-person relationship existing among the Christians.³⁶

The term fellowship (*koinonia*) it is Paul’s favorite word to describe the unity of believers with each other and with their Lord. There may possibly be a reference to the table of fellowship which becomes more explicit in the “breaking of bread.”

This fellowship found practical expression in experiments in Christian communism. The original *habhura*³⁷ (in Aramaic equivalent to the term *koinonia*) of Jesus had shared a common life (John 13:29), and the communism of Jerusalem was simply a continuation of that practice. The word *koinonia* almost has the sense of “almsgiving” or “relief”.³⁸ What is in view here is clearly not absolute communism, but a sharing of goods for the benefit of those in need. Nevertheless the motive was

³⁶ Mworia, *op. cit.*, pp. 125-130.

³⁷ The Aramaic term *habhura* seems to have been in common use to describe a group of companions who shared a common life, particularly those who united to celebrate a common Passover meal. There may possibly be a reference to the table-fellowship which becomes more explicit in the breaking of bread. see: George A. Buttrick, *et al.*, *The Interpreter’s Bible*, Vol. 9 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), pp. 50-51.

probably not mere charity, but the recognition that the claims of the Christian family are superior to those of the individual, and that brethren must have their share, not only because they are needy, but because they are brethren.³⁹

“They would sell their possessions and goods” (v. 45), *kai ta ktemata kai tas huparxei episkon*. The Christians sold *ktemata* (possessions) which means real estate, with or without buildings. Most probably they sold their land, and divided the proceeds, while they physically distributed the ‘private goods.’⁴⁰

The structure of the summary is fairly simple. It has two parts. The first, v. 42; the second, vv. 43-47 which in turn divides itself in two units 43-45 and 46-47a. The first part contains the four areas of the life of the community which are later developed in the second part, and therefore, it plays the role of ‘announcement of the subject.’ In this verse we meet the force of the periphrastic imperfect of *eimi* with the participle *proskarterountes*. The Christians continued to remain constant to:

v. 42a: *te didache ton apostolon kai te koinonia-the apostles’ teaching and fellowship.*

v. 42b: *tei klasei tou artou kai tais proseuchais- the breaking of bread and the prayers.*⁴¹

v. 43: *wonders and signs*; Luke certifies that the prophetic Spirit (2:19) that was at work in Jesus (2:22) is also at work in the apostles.

v. 44: *had all things in common*; the phrase *epi to auto* is here translated “together,” but in v. 47 as “the community”. The Greek phrase *panta koina* (“all things in common”) is an unmistakable allusion to the Hellenistic *topos* (public sites, or

³⁹ Buttrick, *op. cit.*, pp. 50-51.

⁴⁰ Mworira, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

buildings) concerning friendship, that “friends hold all things in common” (*tois philois panta koina*).

v. 45: *they would sell their possessions and goods*; the verbs are in the imperfect to denote customary behavior, and serve to generalize what may have been exceptional act of generosity.

...*as any had need*; neither the process of collection nor distribution is described; at this point, Luke wants to show the sharing of possessions as a spontaneous outgrowth of the spirit, rather than as an institution. The disciples are fulfilling the commands of their teacher (Luke 6:30-36).⁴²

The reminder of the summary in vv. 46-47 depicts the unity as it expressed itself in daily worship and the sharing of daily bread. What Luke wants to underscore throughout the vision of a believing community, alive through the Spirit, whose sense of oneness was evidenced by their readiness to provide for the economic needs of one another. It was not selfishness or greed, but generosity and joy and a sense of oneness which led them to share all things in common.⁴³

Luke’s portrait of the early community is certainly idealized. Not that the first believers could not have been intense in their unity and joy, but in the literary sense the description is idealized. Especially in his use of the language associated in Hellenistic philosophy with the *topos* on friendship, when he characterizes the community as having *koinonia*, and holding all their possessions in common (*panta koina*).⁴⁴

⁴² L. Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1992), pp. 58-59.

⁴³ Walter E. Pilgrim, *Good News to the Poor: Wealth and Poverty in Luke-Acts* (Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1981), p.150.

3. The Second Summary Passage about Community Life (4:32-35).

Because of the close similarities with the first summary, it has been conjectured that Luke's description for both may have originated from one source, probably represented by the verses 32-39 in chapter 4. The theme of unity is announced, which serves as the basis for the church's remarkable economic life, once more expressed by the principle of "everything in common" (v. 32). In this verse Luke explains the principle that "no one claimed private ownership of any possessions." If we take this literally, it would seem to say that all believers were willing to share their possessions with the community, yet it still implies ownership of possessions. This verse appears to be in conflict with that of v. 34. We are told in v. 34 that those who did have possessions were actually selling them and bringing the proceeds to the apostles, who then supervised the distribution according to existing needs. The two verses can be reconciled. Since the imperfect tense is used throughout, Luke wants to stress the on-going nature of the sharing. The purpose of v. 34 is simply to illustrate the fact that the willingness to share, expressed in v. 32, was put into action. What Luke has in mind is not a total selling of all one's possessions at one time and then living off the proceeds from that moment on, but a continual selling and sharing as the needs emerged or as the treasury became low.

Verse 34a expresses the goal of the community: "There was not a needy person among them." This goal itself is echoed in Deuteronomy 15:4, where the intent of the Sabbatical Year is interpreted with the words, "there will be no one in need among you." To fulfill this goal meant a redistribution of wealth in the

community, in which the wealthier members made their possessions available to the poorer members.⁴⁵

The literary context of the summary 4:32-35 is the block of material extending from 4:32 to 5:11. The block deals with the theme of sharing of material goods among the believers. It is divided into three parts: a summary (4:32-35); a narrative on the deed of Barnabas (4:36-37) and another narrative on the dishonest behavior of Ananias and Sapphira (5:1-11). The three cases have the following elements in common: a) Possession of property, b) Selling and c) Putting the proceeds at the apostles feet (that is, at the disposition of the apostles)⁴⁶

4. The Action of Barnabas (4:36-37).

After the second summary account Luke gives an example of Barnabas who disposes of his property. Barnabas sells a field (*agros*) he owns and brings the money to the feet of the apostles (4:36-37). Barnabas by his action demonstrates freedom from the bondage to his property. By giving the money to the apostles, he shows that he puts the needs of those in the community above any preoccupations he may have about holding onto his personal possessions. His positive response stands in contrast, on one side, to the person in the Gospel parable who is too preoccupied with the field (*agros*) he has just bought to accept the banquet invitation (Luke 14:18) and, on the other side, to the deceitful action of Ananias and Sapphira in the episode that follows in Acts.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Pilgrim, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

⁴⁶ Mworira, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

5. The Deceit of Ananias and Sapphira (5:1-11).

Like Barnabas, Ananias and Sapphira have sold a piece of property. However, after conspiring with his wife, Ananias has “kept back (*enopsphisato*) some of the proceeds, and brought only a part laying it at the apostles’ feet” (Acts 5:2). Luke draws upon the story of Achan from the Hebrew Scriptures, who keeps back something for himself out of what is God’s, and for this reason is stoned to death by the community (Josh 7:1-26). On the face of it, the donation of an even part of the money seems to be generous, but the problem is the deceit of Ananias and Sapphira. This conniving couple make themselves appear as if they are embodying the ideals of the fellowship of “one heart and soul,” but instead their pretense violates trust and disrupts the Spirit-centered unity of the fellowship. Their sin is one of fraud.

Luke believes that through the allurements of possessions, Satan can get control of one’s decision-making capacity. The same has already happened to Judas, one of the Twelve. In the Gospel narrative, as the passion of Jesus draws near, “Satan entered into Judas” (Lk 22:3). Judas plots to betray Jesus for financial gain. The reward of his wickedness is a violent death (Acts 1:18). Similarly, Ananias and Sapphira are punished by a sudden death. All three of these people, Judas, Ananias and Sapphira, are examples of the misuse of property. The implication of Ananias and Sapphira’s fraud is that the unity of the early community is broken. These individuals serve as negative examples to those in Luke’s church who might be tempted by Satan to act for self-serving financial gain at the cost of the community.⁴⁸

Part III

How Should the Disciples Help the Poor Today?

Introduction.

The first task and priority in the work of disciples for the poor is to be informed about the situation of those who are suffering because of unjust social structures. This is the first step to the fulfillment of disciples' obligation to help the poor.

We live in a society in which the cry of the poor rings forth to all people to struggle for love, justice and peace. The poor, especially in the Third World, do not live in conditions suitable to human norms. Many of them do not have a sense of their own value as a person. The poor today are robbed of their dignity as human beings. Our political, social, economic and cultural system is not in favor of the oppressed.

The reality of the poor is a challenge and task for us religious. We may choose to shut our ears and refuse to hear, and we can close our eyes and refuse to see the misery and suffering of the poor. We may also choose to have open ears, open eyes and be ready to do everything that is possible to change the sinful reality of the society we live in.

The poor throughout the world are calling for brotherhood, freedom, justice, love and sharing. These are the values of the Kingdom of God which Jesus preached. We know from the Gospel that Jesus entered into situation of people of his time. He also lived in divided society as we do now. Jesus was always on the side of the oppressed and the poor. We as religious, as Jesus' followers of today need to imitate

our Master in his commitment to the poor. We are called to do in our time what he did in his. Our task is to espouse brotherhood, freedom, justice, love and sharing. We must be near the poor and the oppressed because Jesus was near them.⁴⁹

People today are tired of religious slogans. They want something very concrete. They need words which are followed by actions. Example: Saint Francis of Assisi, who said that brothers preach more by the way they behave than by saying only words. This is very practical for today's reality. We know that actions speak louder than words. So we are called to do something very concrete for the sake of our brothers and sisters, who suffer because of poverty.

A. Inside The Religious Community.

Religious community is a group of people of different personalities, different backgrounds, temperaments, who come together to share, to respect, and to learn from the others. Religious communities are a sign to the world that religious life is alive, that some people dedicate and consecrate their life for the sake of God and neighbor. A religious community reminds people that it is possible to live according the evangelical counsels (obedience, poverty, and chastity). Moreover, the religious community is the place and process where people help each other to grow in love. Love is the reason for community's existence⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Gerarld R. Grosh, "On Commitment to the Poor," *Review for Religious*, 36(4), 1977, p. 540.

⁵⁰ *www*. E. H. C. "Community and Faith." *Review for Religious*, 34(6), 1975, p. 696-698.

1. Live a Simple Life-Style.

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus appears by his actions and words as the one who is called to live a simple style of living. Jesus did not demand more from his disciples than he did from himself. He had at least enough to live and seemingly he allowed his disciples to retain the minimum.⁵¹

The way the poor people live challenges us, the followers of Jesus, in today's world to adopt a much simpler life from the one we already live. This can make our ministry more fruitful and more meaningful to the people whom we are sent to. The reason why we need to change our life-style as religious is because of commitment to Jesus, who lived simply. He committed himself to the poor and oppressed.

I would not say that material goods are bad. The question and challenge is whether by the way we live we bear witness to Jesus and draw others to God. Our simpler life-style would be more apostolic.⁵² Jesus does not only ask us to have a sense of the poor with whom he identified himself; rather, he asks much more, that we ourselves become poor, that we follow him in his condition as a poor person. Blessedness is not only a call to feel with the poor, it is a challenge to us to become poor. The essential element in following Jesus is the demand of evangelical poverty. Firstly, we are to be freed in our hearts from situations, wrong attachment to persons, and things in order to grow in love. Secondly, as a result of our free will, our hearts committed to God's love will be closer to others for the sake of Jesus. We are called to respond to this challenge of poverty, which is a condition of love. We shall look

⁵¹ Cassidy, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

for the response in faith and prayer. This will lead us to take concrete action in our daily life, but first we must begin from our own community."

A person who is hungry and thirsty, ill clad, poorly housed and roughly treated, does not think that he or she is important in this world. When we look from the other perspective, we realize that with any measure of possessions above that of other persons, we are inevitably inclined to think of ourselves as being better, as being above other people. It is true that many times those who are rich receive honor and enjoyment of recognized status in human society. We as members of religious communities should be very aware of the danger of feeling above others. We are called to be servants of God's people, not their masters. Our way of living may be a real witness to our fellow Christians, or a scandal.

Is it necessary for us religious to drive expensive cars? Can't we remain driving poorer ones? Do we have to dress in the most expensive styles or look for elaborately-furnished houses? Honestly speaking, religious communities do not have to keep up with the material standards of the affluent. There is a danger that we as people consecrated to God may be identified with a social elite.

We admit that actual poverty is not everyone's vocation. Those who are choosing this style of life, namely, real material poverty, need to pray continuously to discover if that is God's will. We are challenged to take seriously the value of poverty.

The actual life style of a religious community does not need to be radically poor. There is no need to live extremely poor. We need at least to live in the way which shows that we are not servants of material things. We should be able to use the

material resources for the sake of those, who are needy. We shall build in our communities a spirit of sharing, mutual support and concern for others. By our lifestyle we should proclaim to the world the Beatitudes. Poverty for us is the way of responding to the Gospel.⁵⁴

2. Realization of Beatitudes.

Poverty seems to be very difficult to understand in view of a religious life. Lay people often find a problem in how to grasp what is the meaning of a religious vow of poverty. What we mean by it or what in reality it is supposed to portray, is a problem to them. The problem is that the meaning of the term poverty for religious life is understood in different ways by different people.⁵⁵ Some are unwilling to take it as direct approach of simply being poor. There is a dilemma whether we shall treat poverty as good or evil. From Jesus' perspective, we find positive aspects of poverty. Our Master said: *Blessed are you who are poor...* (Lk. 6:20) moreover he said: *How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God* (Lk. 18:24). Maybe we should make a distinction between poverty and misery. Jesus was not in favor of misery. In fact we as religious people do not live in misery. Whatever we have does not belong to us as private persons, we are supposed to cultivate a spirit of sharing and mutual support. Is this not what was meant by community of sharing goods in the extended sense? We choose poverty as a tool to express our devotion to God. It expresses our detachment from material things.

⁵⁴ M. David Knight, *Cloud by Day Fire by Night: The Meaning and Choice of Religious Poverty*, Vol. 2, (A Publication of the Canadian Religious Conference, Ottawa), pp. 33-34, 39-40, 42-43, 147, 153.

we are ready to give up material things for the good of our brother or sister who is in need.

Poverty is to be lived according to the nature of the apostolate of different groups. Saint Maximilian Kolbe was encouraging his brothers to use all possible means to spread the Good News. He was saying that he would use the poorest habit to wear, but if needed for the sake of Christ to use the most advanced model of plane. There are many ways we may use for the attainment of one's redemption. We need also to stress that religious poverty is to give clear evidence to the Church's sense of poverty. It involves a sense of the tradition of poverty throughout history. We shall always look at the spirit and tradition of religious poverty in the light of the sociological and cultural situation of the present day.⁵⁵ Religious poverty is apostolic: *as Christ carried out the work of redemption in poverty and oppression, so the Church is called to follow the same path if she is to communicate the fruits of salvation to men.*⁵⁶

Religious poverty is essentially an act of grace, which expresses itself in and through our nature. It is an experience of our response to Jesus. By our poverty we witness that we take Christ seriously, we prove that our treasure is in Heaven, and finally that we want to be like him.⁵⁷

Religious poverty, in another way, is a way of proclaiming the Beatitudes. We not only show them to others, but first of all, we make them a part of our life. We are

⁵⁵ J. Robert Hilbert, "A Note on Religious Poverty," Review for Religious, 34(3), 1975, pp. 380-382.

⁵⁶ Dogmatic Constitution of the Church: *Lumen Gentium*, No. 8, in Austin Flanery, Vatican Council II, Vol. I, (Bombay: St Paul Publications, 1975), pp. 329-330.

⁵⁷ Knight, op. cit., p. 134.

called to proclaim him by our way of living. Religious poverty is a freely chosen state of material deprivation by which we testify that the teaching of the Beatitudes is true. The medium by which we express our commitment to poverty is the material things which we share. What we eat, drink, ask for, accept, use, buy, wear, live in, prove or deny that we believe in the blessedness of being poor.⁵⁸ It is our duty as people consecrated to God. We must remind all the baptized about the fundamental values of the Gospel, just as we read in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*; *splendid and striking testimony that the world cannot be transfigured and offered to God without the spirit of the Beatitudes*. It is our task to be witnesses and a challenge to others to live in union with the mystery of Christ and the Church. Our mission is help our brothers and sisters to keep their eyes fixed on the peace which is to come, and to strive for the definite happiness which we only find in God.⁵⁹

Modern people do not need so much our words. What they really need is our example through our actions. They need to see that we really live according to the spirit of the Beatitudes. It is not enough to live only *spiritually* according to the Beatitudes. We are asked to live *materially* in a way that expresses concretely and visibly the spirit of the Beatitudes. The question may remain whether we religious, by the way we live, express our belief that Jesus meant what he said. Our vow of poverty should be an expression of our faith in the Beatitudes. In fact religious poverty is the least important and at the same time the most important of the religious vows

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 145-146.

⁵⁹ John Paul II, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation: Vita Consecrata* (Boston: Books & Media, 1996), No. 33, pp. 54-55.

depending on how one views it. The poverty of the religious, should be a visible sign of who we are and what we have chosen to be for Christ.⁶⁰

B. Beyond The Religious Community.

1. Efforts for the Benefit of the Poor.

The challenge today that the poor are putting before us is that they want us to use our institutions for them. They want us to do something for them. They expect us to be active, not passive. For them, our preaching is not enough; they need concrete action from us. We can use our resources to do research which will benefit the poor. We can educate people to the viewpoint of social justice. This may cause for us problems, we may make more enemies. We may lose some of the financial supports we are receiving. However, let us remember the encouraging words of Jesus when he said: *Blessed are those who suffer persecution for the cause of justice.*⁶¹

2. Personal Contact with the Poor.

We need to admit that not all of us are able to live in the slums. Not all of us are able to live as Mother Theresa of Calcutta did. It is a very special call to live with the poor, to be with them in the very real sense. Although living among the poor depends on a personal call and on different psychological drives of each person, we all need to have a personal contact with them. There are many ways in which we may show our solidarity with them.⁶² Our concern for the poor we may show in very

⁶⁰ Knight, *op. cit.*, pp. 145-146, 172, 175.

⁶¹ Grosh, *op. cit.*, p. 547.

⁶² Knight, *op. cit.*, pp. 145-146.

simple things. We can express it by being kind and cheerful to them; it might be just a good beginning. First, we have to be open to them, to be ready to have time for them and then to make them feel loved and wanted. We may be the first, who may show them that they are needed. We do not always need to do big things. We may start just from a simple greeting or even a smile towards them.

For some of us it is easier to speak than to listen. In our relation with the poor we need to be able to listen, and to listen long. Sometimes at our house gates in Nairobi, people come, who ask for different kinds of help. What I noticed during my four years of staying in Kenya, is that it is not really necessary to give something material to the poor, but to give our time, just to show our interest, simply to listen to what they want to say. Some wise man said that the greatest gift we can offer to one another is a gift of our time.⁶¹

3. Active Listening.

As we listen to the poor and oppressed, we discover in them very attractive values, namely: simplicity, joy, hospitality and sharing. At the same time we may also discover their insecurity though we may not understand it fully. In spite of everything we see in them the face of our Lord. The challenge for us is to change the way we look at them. Maybe we need to change the angle from which we analyze their situation. We should try to imagine ourselves in their reality of life. The poor person may try to manipulate us or deceive us in hope of getting some material gain or economic help. We cannot judge them from our comfortable situation, from our secure way of living. The poor may be in so desperate need that he or she will use any

means to get it. Contemplation does not mean to be deaf or blind to what the poor say or do, but it means to try to understand what the situation of the poor is really like.⁶⁴

4. Active Sharing in the Struggles of the Poor.

Our love for the poor leads to an active sharing in their struggles for social justice. In fact, we have to admit that we live in sinful social structures. We may define two ways in which a person can get to be involved in responding to the needs of the poor. One way is directional, where one strives to take away the needs of the poor, one gives them something, one does something for them. The other way is educational, where one strives to accompany the poor person in his or her struggle to find his or her own dignity. In this way one does not give, but one shares. In my personal opinion, I think that the educational model is very suitable for today's ministers in the Church. In fact many religious congregations and dioceses live in this line.

By comparing these two models, we notice that the directional model cannot really solve all the needs that the poor have. If we help only one, there are a thousand more we leave behind. The main difficulty of the directional model, is that it avoids the root problem. It involves patronization and superiority on the part of the person who is committing himself to the poor. In this way the poor person is deprived of his sense of dignity.

Looking sometimes at the way the goods are distributed we see that giving is often humiliating for the person who receives. However, sharing seems to be more human, it is a mark of equality. In sharing we are walking together. Is that not what

⁶⁴ Ibid.

Jesus is calling us to do? Are we not brothers and sisters who are living together, and walking on the path to the Father? In sharing we not only give, but we also receive.”⁶⁵

Can we learn something from the poor? Do they have anything to offer to us? Among them we find the values of God’s Kingdom. The poor are a challenge for us. Surely, through their presence God wants to communicate to us an important message.

5. Political Involvement.

Christians should not be ignorant. They need to know what is going on in the world. Unfortunately the political and economical systems of the world do not favor the poor. We as Christians are obliged to struggle for justice. Our option should be always to stand with the poor. Do we really hear the cry of the poor? Do we help the poor for evangelical reasons?”⁶⁶

The United Nations in September 1998 called for urgent action to raise the standards of the world’s poor. They disclosed that: 1 billion people have been left out of the past two decades. The United Nations informs us in its annual Human Development Report that gross inequalities between rich and poor are worsening. 20 per cent of the global population accounts for 86 per cent of consumption. The consumption has increased sixfold in the past 20 years and doubled in the past 10 years. People in Europe and North America spend \$37 billion a year on pet food, perfumes and cosmetics. According to the United Nations this figure could provide basic education, water and sanitation, basic health and nutrition for all those who are

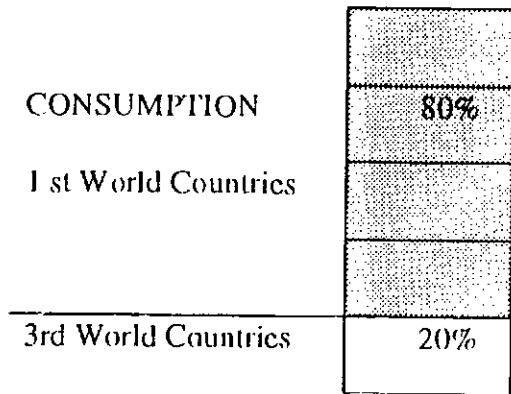
⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 544-545.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 545-546.

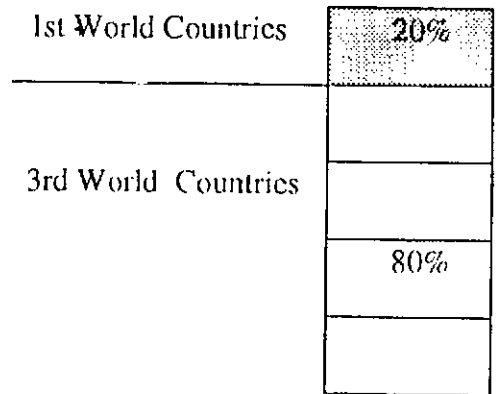
deprived of it and there could remain \$9 billion over. The United Nation Development Programme administrator James Gustave Speth said: "Abundance of consumption is no crime, but it is scandalous that the poor are unable to consume enough to meet even their basic needs."

We shall also know that the inequalities of current consumption opportunities have excluded more than a billion who do not meet even their basic consumption requirements.⁶⁷

WORLD RESOURCES



WORLD POPULATION



6. Solidarity With Those Who Struggle for Social Justice.

The majority of religious profess poverty together with the sharing of goods. The evangelical concept of poverty includes a movement towards solidarity. There is no opposition between poverty and sharing of goods. The profession of poverty applies to religious communities. In the same way as the community is poor, its members should be poor. There is not single solution to the problem of owning or not

⁶⁷ Larry Elliot, Victoria Brittain, "The Rich and Poor are Growing Further Apart," *Guardian Weekly*, 20 September 1998

owning of economic goods, on the part of religious communities.⁶⁸ Saint Francis of Assisi said to his brothers in the First Rule: *They should be glad to live among social outcasts, among the poor and helpless, the sick and the leper, and those who beg by the wayside. They should not be ashamed to beg.*⁶⁹

The consecrated life criticizes society in a prophetic way, namely by living in the way that is against what is evil and practically non-Christian. Our life as religious is radical in an evangelical sense. We are supposed to take poverty as a commitment to the liberation of the *little ones*.⁷⁰ Even if we cannot do much we can always do something. People who are struggling for social justice need our support, our interest, and our love.

Social activities have sometimes resorted to violence in their attacks upon unjust social structures. Jesus also attacked the power structure of his day and he died for it, he was killed. Jesus did not resort to physical violence. We are not to condone violence, but we are called to understand its causes. We need to enter into the frustration of the poor at the oppression of the system which gives rise to acts of violence. We need to open our ears to our fellow Christians who are suffering. What are our fellow Christians saying about violence, particularly those from the Third World? We may understand why the poor are driven to violence but we do not advocate violence.⁷¹

⁶⁸ John M. Lozano, Discipleship: Towards an Understanding of Religious Life (Chicago: Claret Center for Resources in Spirituality, 1980), p. 148.

⁶⁹ Francis of Assisi, "Rule of 1221," chap. 9, in Marion A. Habig, ed., St. Francis of Assisi. Writings and Early Biographies: English Omnibus (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983) p. 39.

⁷⁰ Galilea, op. cit., p. 84.

⁷¹ Grosh, op. cit., pp. 546-547.

Jesus' mission was to proclaim the good news to the poor, to proclaim release to captives, to give sight back to the blind, to set the oppressed free, to declare a year of favor from the Lord (Lk. 4:18-19). We as followers of Jesus are supposed to have a true "preferential option" for the poor. Religious people in a special way as Christ's disciples are held to the option for the poor. If we are sincere in fulfilling our call, we will live the life of poverty. This will help us to commit ourselves to the promotion of justice in society. We should see Christ in the poor person. Jesus identifies himself with the person who is poor, who suffers, who is hungry, who is naked. We ourselves witness to the Gospel authenticity by serving the poor. That is our act of evangelization the world we live in.⁷²

C. Religious Poverty and the Modern Age.

The world we live in with its prosperity and cultural advance made many religious congregations rethink their interpretation of poverty. It is not easy to find adequate ways of living for friars in the needs of the modern world. What kind of apostolate does the modern person needs? Private life of the religious communities has been affected by improving standards of living. They need to have a new way of exercising poverty. However, the value of religious poverty does not change, that is, the theological understanding of poverty remains substantially unchanged. In spite of everything, every religious order must interpretate poverty on the grounds of Christ's own words; the conviction of the value of poverty we get from the Gospel .

We are challenged not to stop appreciating the positive worth of poverty. The positive value of poverty draws us from *relationship of having* to *relationship of*

⁷² *Vita Consecrata*, No. 82, pp. 133-135.

being. The heart of poverty is charity. Poverty frees us from narrowness of relationship of a relationship of having.⁷³

It is difficult to explain the blessing of poverty to the modern person. People look sometimes at poverty as if it is a curse. They wonder what Jesus really meant by the words "Blessed are you poor, the reign of God is yours" (Lk. 6:20). Many people hate poverty because by it they feel degraded. In fact, Jesus instructed his followers to free people from such poverty. Maybe a more adequate word could be used here, the word misery to describe the kind of poverty that we are talking about now. Poverty is not a blessing if it is accepted only as a fact of life, as the hopeless situation of a social class. The really blessed are the poor who voluntarily choose poverty. They accept a poverty that has been imposed on them or they freely choose to be poor when they do not have to.

⁷³ Paul J. Bernadicou, "Religious Poverty and the Modern Age," *Review for Religious*, 23, 1964, pp. 770-771, 774-775.

Conclusion.

It was an interesting task to find the answer of what the message Luke-Acts communicate to the Christian disciples concerning their attitude towards the poor. The Lucan Gospel can be called 'a message of hope for the poor,' which is in opposition to self-centered and pleasure-seeking individuals. Luke stresses the totality of renunciation for the disciple, a renunciation which is closely linked to care for poor fellow Christians. In the Acts of the Apostles, with the community of goods, *koinonia*, Luke sees fraternal solidarity and the outward expression of the mind-set prevailing within the community. For him Jesus is the Savior of the disadvantaged who, together with his followers, makes salvation available to the disadvantaged.⁷⁴

For us, followers of Jesus, his disciples in today's world, Mother Teresa of Calcutta is a good example of putting into practice what Jesus asks us to do. She challenges us in a unique way by her life-long service to the poorest of the poor.

John Paul II on Sunday, 7th September 1997, remembered Mother Teresa in a short speech before reciting the *Angelus*. It was two days after the death of Mother Teresa when the Holy Father said that she offered an appealing example which attracted to herself many people who were ready to leave everything to follow Christ in the poor.⁷⁵ Mother Teresa, as she was receiving the Nobel Prize for peace and for her activities among the poor, convinced the organizers' committee to cancel the customary awards banquet, and instead, offer the money thus saved for those who really needed a meal. In fact there was an outpouring of emotions, which brought in

⁷⁴ Navone, *Themes of st. Luke*, pp. 112-113, 147-148.

⁷⁵ John Paul II, "Mother Teresa Served Christ in the Poorest of the Poor," *Catholic Messenger*, November, 1997, p. 21.

its wake more than was saved from foregoing the banquet. £ 36, 000 was collected and £ 3, 000 from the cancellation of the banquet. This amounted to almost half of the award money.⁷⁶ Mother Teresa is an example and challenge for today's disciples of Jesus. She showed by her life that it is possible to follow Jesus in his concern for the poor. Her mission was to the poorest but she understood that the greatest poverty is of those who are unwanted and unloved.⁷⁷

Luke's teaching on poverty in his Gospel and Acts is very clear. He presents the concern for the needy brother and sister in the community of believers in very concrete ways. We are inspired by his teaching to make efforts for the sake of the poor, and to have a loving attitude toward them.

⁷⁶ Chawla Navin, Mother Teresa (Queensland. Element Books, 1992), pp. 186-187.

⁷⁷ Benny Aguiar, "Someone Beautiful for God," Catholic Messenger, November, 1997, p. 16.

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