

TANGAZA COLLEGE

CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY
OF
EASTERN AFRICA

GOD'S OPTION FOR THE POOR:
ITS PASTORAL IMPLICATIONS

AUTHOR: THADDEUS DIM O.C.D.

TUTOR: FR. PATRICK RYAN M.H.M.

LONG ESSAY SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR BACHELORS OF ARTS,
RELIGIOUS STUDIES.


DATE: FEBRUARY 1998

NAIROBI

STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the material used here in
has not been submitted for academic credit to any other institution.

All sources have been cited in full.

Sign 

THADDEUS DIM O.C.D.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
GENERAL INTRODUCTION	1

PART ONE

CONTEXT

CHAPTER 1. WORLD OF THE POOR

1. Introduction	4
2. The complex world of the poor	4
3. What option for the poor means	6
4. Why opt for the poor?	7
5. Summary and conclusion	8

CHAPTER 2. AFRICAN CONTEXT

1. Introduction	9
2. Brief historical development of poverty in Africa	9
3. Context: poverty in Africa today ..	10
4. Summary and conclusion ..	15

PART TWO

ANALYSIS

CHAPTER 3. OLD TESTAMENT

1. Introduction	17
2. God in the Old Testament ..	17
3. Ancient Near East	18
4. The Torah	20
5. The Prophets	21
6. The Psalms	22
7. Summary and conclusion	23

CHAPTER 4. NEW TESTAMENT

1. Introduction 24
2. Gospel 24
3. Acts of the Apostles 27
4. Summary and conclusion 28

CHAPTER 5. CHURCH'S MISSION

1. Introduction 29
2. Church's mission from God's mission 29
3. African experience of the church's mission 31
4. The church's social teaching and option for the poor 32
5. Summary and conclusion 34

PART THREE

PASTORAL RECOMMENDATIONS

CHAPTER 6. DECISIONS AND ACTIONS

1. Introduction 36
2. Decision for action 36
3. The church 37
4. Pastoral implications of the liberative actions 40
5. How to carry out the action 41
6. Characteristics of good action 42
7. Summary and conclusion 43

GENERAL CONCLUSION 44

BIBLIOGRAPHY 45

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Theology is a subsequent act of reflection.

Twenty centuries of reflection on God's presence in Jesus by his followers, has produced a rich body of wisdom that we call Christian theology. This theology much more than a collection of texts is actually, an ongoing attempt to understand and respond to God's presence in history. - There are serious presuppositions behind this statement -.¹ So, one of the tasks of Theologians is to correlate between revelation and history; though related are still distinct. Lots of thinking members of the Christian Community, had responded in the past by articulating their faith in an intelligible way. As a result they came up with, new ideas, methods, theologies, etc. to the challenges facing them.²

Today, as we approach the end of the third millennium, Christians face new challenges. By the use of science and technology, we have achieved remarkable material progress. We have also produced sprawling slums, nuclear war and possible ecological catastrophe, increase in injustice, poverty, oppression and marginalization of millions of people. The main issue here is, how do we correlate between God and our situation to come up with solution?

Liberation theology which emerged in Latin America during the 1950s/ 60s, offered a solution that is more than economic or political action. It offered Christianity lived in a radical way; a gospel message that has its center of focus on the poor, and the eradication of poverty: "Option for the poor." "It is probably fair to say that the most important, as well as the most controversial issue in contemporary Christian theology, is what has become known as option for the poor."³

This way of doing theology is both old and new. Old because, care of the poor has always been there from the time immemorial, as we shall see from old documents. Christian community, was commissioned to carry it on, but it seemed to have fall sight if it. Many religious institutions were started to bear witness to this, at least by their vow of poverty. But non of these became is headline news like Liberation Theology today, so it is new. In the Medellin conference of 1968, the Latin American Bishops committed themselves to being in solidarity with the poor; *"to give preference to the poorest and most needy sectors of the society, and to arousing the consciousness of oppressed group and helping them*

¹ An obvious presupposition here is that: Christians understand revelation as something that takes place in history. Added to that, is the understanding of revelation as an on - going event, not a static once - and - for all phenomenon.

² The result of the development is a huge area of studies, so I skip the treatment here.

³ JOHN O'BRIEN, *Theology and The Option for the poor*. [Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1992], p. 6.

become agents of their own development."⁴ This amounted to an option for the poor, though the term itself was not used in the Medellin conference documents.

At their 1979 conference at Puebla, the Latin American bishops reaffirmed their commitment to justice for the poor, despite determined opposition by some strong church leaders. One chapter of the final document of Puebla was entitled "*A preferential option for the poor.*"⁵ There was concern in the Vatican that, an option for the poor would be understood either as an exclusion of the rich, or worse still as a "class option" in the Marxist sense. Because of this Pope John Paul II insisted that "*no one must be excluded*" and that "*preferential option for the poor . . . is not an ideological option; neither is it a matter of letting oneself be trapped by a false theory of class struggle.*"⁶ With this radical call to opt for the poor, many church leaders in Third World countries, various religious congregations, and individuals began to confront injustice done to the poor. Africa needs this confrontation. I never knew how much poverty exists in Africa, and the magnitude of the people who suffer from it, until I came to Nairobi seven years ago for my priestly studies. I visited the city and was slammed with countless street children roaming about, amid all the sky - scrapers. Back at home it is the same, but nobody questions them; and so they become dogmatic will of God. The opportunity to work with youths from the slums opened my eyes more to the reality. Then I start pondering, what use are my studies of theology? What is my credibility as a religious and a future minister to these poor people? Consequently I came to a conclusion that the whole situation need more reflection and evaluation. So this essay is a theological reflection born first of experience in the field, then studies and researches. I aim at letting ourselves be radically challenged by the word of God. The essay is divided into three parts, corresponding to SEE => JUDGE => ACT pastoral method. The first part context, is a description of the reality of poverty. The second part is devoted to the analysis of scripture and the church; leading to the third and last part which has pastoral recommendations. As we progress, a short introduction at the beginning, and a summary at the end will be given at each chapter. I appeal to the reader not to just enjoy the essay, but to feel free to let it challenge and motivate you into action.

⁴ JUDITH A. DWYER, ed, *The New Dictionary of Catholic Social Thought*, [Minnesota: The Liturgical press, 1994], p.756

⁵ For a copy of the document see JOHN EAGLESON, and PHILIP SCHARPER, eds., *Puebla and Beyond*, [New York: Orbis Books, 1979].

⁶ JOHN PAUL II, *Address to Priests, Religious and Laity* [Mexico City: May 12th, 1990], in "L'Osservatore Romano", [English edition, May 14th, 1990], p.3.

PART ONE

CONTEXT

"Africa is a continent where countless human beings - men and women, children and young people - are lying, as it were, on the edge of the road, sick, injured, disabled, marginalized and abandon. They are in great need of good Samaritans who will come to their aid."

- JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 41

CHAPTER 1

WORLD OF THE POOR

1. INTRODUCTION

I will devote this opening chapter to indicating what this essay is about. Right away clarifications are called for. The clarifications will center on the title of the essay, "God's option for the poor." I will leave out "God" for now, to come back to him in the second part of this essay. Here I will look into the world of the poor to answer the question: who are the poor and what real poverty means? After that, I will examine what it means to opt for the poor, and why.

2. THE COMPLEX UNIVERSE OF THE POOR

A. WHO ARE THE POOR?

When we talk about "Option for the poor," who are the poor? The poor here should be real and not in a metaphoric sense⁷. To put it simply, the poor are people who lack the necessary resources of life: food, shelter, clothing, education etc. *"Poverty, properly so-called, may be defined as a pinching limitation in the possession of things necessary for human comfort or life. Every creature . . . can realize itself only through the possession of things other than itself. For man, property is an extension of his person."*⁸ So those who lack the basic properties in life are the poor. They feel the lack as evidence of personal inadequacy and social deprivation of rights. This threatens the individual's integrity, and the insecurity jeopardizes his/her possibilities of a future. Poverty then becomes misery. Next, I will classify the poor into different groups.

B. THE POOR AS COLLECTIVE BODIES

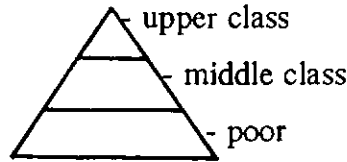
The classical image of the poor as a ragged figure begging a crust from door to door, is something we have to put behind us; to be replaced by less romantic and more realistic image of the poor. Today poverty is seen as a social, structural and massive problem; that the poor make up whole classes, and masses of people. They are found above all in the urban areas of the Third World, in their shanty towns and slums; also in large rural areas.

⁷ Gutierrez adopting Medellin's "Document on poverty" distinguished three notions of poverty. 1) Real poverty, as an evil [that is as not desired by God]. 2) Spiritual poverty, as availability to the will of the Lord. 3) Solidarity with poor, as well as with the situation they suffer. Refer to: GUSTAVO GUTIERREZ, *A Theology of Liberation*, [New York: Orbis Books, 1990], pp. 162 - 174.

⁸ LEO C. BROWN, S.J., *Poverty*, in "New Catholic Encyclopedia" vol. 11, [Washington D.C.: Jack Heraty & Associates, 1981] p.642.

In "industrialized" societies, there is a wide range of gap between the rich and the poor; with a much higher percentage of poor people, making the society pyramidal in structure:

Fig. 1



Taking the poor as collective bodies in this way, the first thing to discount is the old perception of the poor as individual cases. It separated the poor from their social condition or structure that defined them. *"The issue of the poor is a universal issue even when it is not perceived to be such."*⁹

To clear out any doubt about this, I will point out the two main causes of existence of poverty by Pixely and Boff. a) "Moral cause": Poverty is the fruit of ignorance or prejudice, and can also be the fruit of egoism and greed of others. b) "Natural causes": The poor are poor because they were born of poor families, or because of some disaster.¹⁰

So seeing the poor as individuals and not see the collective conditions and structures that hemmed the individuals, leads to disingenuous compassion. This kind of compassion as history has proved ends in failure; because poverty has not diminished, but has increased.

C. POOR AS ROOTED IN A CONFLICTIVE SITUATION

Social phenomena are produced not naturally, but by the people and the system applied. So poverty comes about by the force of a system of domination. The poor are dominated classes. They are exploited or rejected by a perverse economic system. This explains the fact that the poor remain poor. Under here fall features of the poor like: a) The Marginalized: those excluded from the prevailing economic system, - the unemployed, the wretched beggars, abandoned street children, outcasts, prostitutes, etc. b) The Exploited: those whom the socioeconomic system treats unjustly. They are proletariat in the cities and the rural workers. They include: seasonal wage-earners, settlers, tenant farmers, etc.

A widespread but erroneous view sees poverty as a collective, but not conflictive reality. For this view, the poor are simply backward and underdeveloped. "To escape from their situation, the poor only need to wait a while, with help from the others who are rich. It is all a matter of technique; investment and planing," it is said. With all their so called "help" to the poor, those who propose this solution [all rich, of course] have only produced greater poverty for the poor, and greater riches for themselves.

⁹ JOHN O'BRIEN, *Theology and The Option for the poor*, [Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1992], p. 60.

¹⁰ JORGE PIXLEY and CLODOVIS BOFF, *The Bible, the Church and the Poor*, [Tunbridge wells: Burns & Oates Ltd. 1989], p. 2.

D. POVERTY AS OPPRESSION

Strictly speaking there is another type of poverty besides the socioeconomic. This is better called "oppression" in the socio-cultural sphere, producing socio-cultural poverty. Here I mean racial, ethnic and sexual types of discrimination.¹¹ Others are national or religious minorities, homosexuals, physically and mentally disabled, old people.¹² So poverty has many faces, but they all show suffering features.

E. POVERTY AS DEATH

The poverty to which I refer encompasses economic, social and political dimensions. It is really unfortunate that poor people die of hunger and sicknesses which medical science has long overcome in other places [an example, is that in Africa people die of cholera now and then]. Poverty therefore leads to physical death, to say nothing of situations in which people are repressed and massacred. *"In the final analysis poverty means death, unjust death, premature death of the poor, physical death."*¹³ That is why Gutierrez insisted that poverty means death. *"Poverty therefore means death, in saying that, I am not only trying to discount the social economic or political dimensions; I only want to insist on this other meaning of poverty in order to point out that what is ultimately at stake is life itself."*¹⁴ So only these critical and dialectical views can explain the phenomenon of poverty and its growth.

3. WHAT OPTION FOR THE POOR MEANS

To make the option for the poor is to commit oneself to resisting the injustice, oppression, exploitation and marginalization of people that permeate almost every aspect of life. The society then becomes a place where human rights and the dignity of all are respected. This option or in other words "choice," can be made by individuals, communities or a church. ✓ The choice presupposes that one has become aware that the society has people at the top with a lot of power, and others at the bottom who are powerless. This option also means to choose to disengage from serving the interest of the powerful, and take sides with the powerless, to challenge the status quo. There are two equally crucial aspects to this commitment:

¹¹ Taking the case of blacks in South Africa for example; in the midst of some light skin group, they are seen as outcasts and most are also at the bottom of economic scale, oppressed and marginalized.

¹² The same can be said of women; besides suffering sexual discrimination, they are generally more exploited economically. So they are also poor.

¹³ JAMES B. NICKOLOF, *Gustavo Gutierrez - Essential writings*, [New York, Orbis Books, 1996], p. 144.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p144

A) An experiential aspect [solidarity]: is a deliberate choice to enter in some degree into the world of those who are deprived, sharing in a significant way, their experience of being mistreated, bypassed or left helpless. This way, one begins to experience not only their pain and struggle, but also their hopes and joys.

Without this experience of solidarity, the would-be reformer cannot help thinking of the poor as "them," the object of my sympathy. The people will sense this, no matter how well it is disguised and it will not help. It is only to the extent that a person becomes part of the group, and is able to think of "us," and be treated by the people as "one of us"; can he or she become an effective agent of change. *"The person who is making the option has probably come from a different accent or even skin colour. In that sense the person may always be seen as different, but the group with whom he or she has come to live may choose to accept the person as one of us."*¹⁵

B) A political aspect [action]: has to do with actions to overcome structural injustice. This involves a series of steps, sometimes referred to in a simple way as SEE - JUDGE - ACT. These two aspects of the option are similar to what O'Brien called *"The Dimensions of the option for the poor."* He divided them into four and defined them as i) *"Evangelical simplicity,* ii) *Existential solidarity,* iii) *Transformational analysis* and iv) *Institutional challenge."*¹⁶ Another similarity is what Ryan wrote, as ". . . two steps in the method of Liberation theology. The first step is the theologian's own commitment to liberation of the poor . . ." *"The second step . . . is reflection on what is happening in the justice struggle . . . The aim of this second step is to find ideas that can empower us to change the situation of the poor."*¹⁷

4. WHY OPT FOR THE POOR?

One might think that we should opt for the poor out of human compassion. Such compassion is very important, but it is not the ultimate reason. As we have seen, life is what is at stake, so we opt to save life and restore its dignity. The Christian faith also demands this option of all of us and no one can evade it. If I must say, the credibility of theologians, religious and church workers should depend on how they are involved in this option. The question is, how to do it.

On the other hand, in speaking about option for the poor, we are speaking not of people who have absolutely nothing and are insignificant; they also possess great human richness.

¹⁵ DWYER, ed, *The New Dictionary of Catholic Social Thought*, p.758

¹⁶ O'BRIEN, *Theology and The Option for the poor*, pp. 78 - 91.

¹⁷ PATRICK RYAN, *Liberation theology and Africa's Poor*, "Wajibu" vol. 12, no. 2, 1997], pp.10 - 11.

The curious remark is sometime made that *"the option for the poor is something which only the non - poor have to make."*¹⁸ This is not true, for the poor also have to opt in favor of their sisters and brothers by race, social class or culture. So therefore the option is a decision incumbent upon everyone.

5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Till now, I have looked at: a) "the poor" as a social - economic category, a body, class or classes. They are the collective "Lazaruses" who live in conflictive situations and seek an alternative humanity. b) The term poor, extends also to those who are deprived of fundamental political, cultural or religious rights. c) I also looked at the two aspects of this option; experiential solidarity and political action. d) "Poverty ultimately means death"; consequently, the need for everyone to opt for the poor.

In the next chapter I will look at a particular context in which these poor are found. I must say that the context I have in mind is Africa.

¹⁸ NICKOLOF, *Gustavo Gutierrez - Essential writings*, p.146

CHAPTER 2

AFRICAN CONTEXT

1 INTRODUCTION

In the first chapter I considered the title of this Essay "Option for the poor," as far as the proper and better meaning of the terms are concerned in today's theological world. In this chapter I will explore the term "poor" by inserting it into concrete realities where it exists. My main focus will be on the African life-setting, with particular reference to Kenya and Nigeria.¹⁹ I will start with a brief historical development of poverty in sub Saharan Africa, and then go into concrete areas and examples of the features of this poverty.

2 BRIEF HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF POVERTY IN AFRICA

A brief overview is required for a better understanding of the contemporary situation of poverty in Africa. These include the tragic past, from the imposition of the slave trade to the modern neocolonialism. I will present here three different periods. (a) The period of slave trade: which had effects of psychological dominance on Africans. The European masters were seen as super gods and the "Niggers" like any animal but not fully human. The traders callously and cruelly robbed Africa of its strong and talented humans, who would have helped to build their African communities.²⁰

(b) Next is the Colonial period, the so-called "scramble for Africa." Not denying the good imparts made by this to Africa, especially in physical infrastructure and developments; most of it practices and policies were made for the good of the colonial powers and not for the people. It was a period of mineral and agricultural exploitation, with no concern for the consequences on the local populations.

(c) After the Colonial period came the Neocolonialism. This summarily means that Africa got "political" independence but not "economical" independence. The changes wrought by colonialism and by more recent social, economic and political dynamics have introduced new cleavages, new privileges and new insecurities.²¹ This has made poverty a social

¹⁹ These are the countries where I have my first hand experience; and more so Africa is a very vast continent.

²⁰ The number of slaves taken from Africa are not exact, but is estimated to ranged between two and ten millions.

²¹ Here are some facts: Sub-Saharan counties were estimated to have expanded their economies by only about 1.5 percent per capita annually from 1960 to 1970, compared with 3.5 percent for the third world countries as a whole. From 1970 to 1980, average per capita hardly increased at all in Africa. By the mid 1980s the sub-Saharan region had the lowest global life expectancy, the lowest nutritional levels, the lowest literacy rates, the least access to medical care and safe water supplies, the highest population growth. Unto these were added the highest infant, and overall mortality rates. For more detail refer to: PHYLLIS M. MARTIN, and PATRICK O'MEARA, eds., *Africa*, [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986], p. 335.

phenomenon, as described in the previous chapter. In this sense, poverty in Africa is less a direct result of scarcity than of relationship between people, and their unequal access to productive resources, technology, skills, or political connections.

Of the forty to fifty poorest countries in the world two-third were located in Africa. As argued in an influential assessment of African development problems by the world bank; *"the record is grim and it is no exaggeration to talk of crisis."*²² The "crisis" is still with us today, and it is even claiming victims in a growing scale in tropical Africa. This is not only in terms of total number, but also in proportion to the population. A 1995 estimate by The Oxfam poverty report, said that *"by the end of the decade, the rank of the 218 million Africans living in poverty will have swelled to 300 millions."*²³ So poverty in Africa is growing at an alarming rate.

3 CONTEXT: POVERTY IN AFRICA TODAY

A. POVERTY THE KILLER DISEASE

Poverty is *"the world most ruthless killer"*²⁴ wrote Albanese and Onyango; and it is claiming victims in Africa. To mention the very word "poverty" conjures a sad image of the black African continent. Africa was never homogeneous except from afar; some countries have success more than others, but generally the story is decidedly pessimistic. If poverty is contagious that both rich and poor can be caught by it: it would have been done away with in Africa. But because poverty affects the powerless members of the society, they are left to shed their last drop of blood at the greed of others. Lets look at the facts of this poverty.

B. BAD GOVERNMENT

Many African countries do not even have the right to choose their leaders. This is no exerggeration. By 1990, twenty-eight of the thirty-four sub-Saharan states were oppressively governed by dictators: the military, one-party government, or life presidents. Today there is stress on democracy, but it has not made much difference because the dictators are still indirectly perpetuating themselves in power. Added to this is the sin of stealing the countries' money and banking them in private bank accounts abroad by government officials. It has now become a normal reality that the presidents of African counties are wealthier than their countries.

²² WORLD BANK, *Accelerated Development in sub-Saharan Africa* [1981], p. 2

²³ JULIUS ALBANESE and MAURICE ONYANGO, "Poverty: The world's most ruthless killer" in *New People*, no. 40, [January - February 1996], pp. 14 -15.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

The next fact comes in a question form. How many people in Africa know the Amount spent by African governments on trivial things neglecting those in need? ". . . *African governments were able to find eight billion US dollars for military spending in 1991, despite the pressing social needs of their peoples.*"²⁵ This amount was reported to be equivalent to the three-quarters of the aid received by the region in the same year. In Nigeria for example, "*in 1991, the local government purchased from Britain 80 battle tanks at a cost which would have enabled the country to provide universal primary education in its poorest state, and immunized all of the two million non immunized children.*"²⁶ The government can defend itself, that it is granting security to the citizens by buying ammunition. But whose securities are they talking about? They cause wars and are the first ones to fly out of the country, leaving armless women and children to fight the war and end up in refugee camps. This must have prompted Tutu's question "*Tell me of any army in Africa which has saved their country from external aggression?*"²⁷ He is right because, so far it has not happened; rather what we see is that the ruling classes use the armies to suppress the masses. With all those ammunition available and no war to fight, they are tried them out on armless citizens on peaceful demonstrations.²⁸ This brings to the fore the fact of human right abuses by the government. Ideologically, human rights exist in all African states. But in practice, they have not been accepted or better, are far from been achieved. Governments add insult to injury by lots of other practices, like jailing political activists. In this regard, Nigeria is a good example with lots of political prisoners.

C. ECONOMY

Many countries in Africa are in desperate economic situations. Some have foreign debts that are even superior to the gross national product, and this has been on the increase. "*The total external debt for sub-Saharan Africa was 84 billion US Dollars in 1980, doubled to 90 billion US dollars by 1990; by 1996 this stood at 223 billion US dollars.*"²⁹ The creditors are reluctant to reduce the debt burden considering it a "moral hazard!" This leads to thinking that Africa will be poor forever. The World bank and International Monetary Fund are both deaf and blind to notice what is happening in Africa.

²⁵ Ibid, p.15

²⁶ Ibid, p.16

²⁷ Ibid, p. 16

²⁸ This is now a common practice in places like Lagos and Nairobi. In Nairobi eleven people were killed by police men during the Saba saba event. This was the name give to a demonstration organised by some members of the opposition political parties against the government. [Saba saba means Seven seven, held on the 7th of July 1997.]

²⁹ PETER J. HENRIOT, "A Continent on the margins" in *The Way*, vol. 37, no. 3, [July 1997], p. 237

It is only logical to point out here the internal problems too. Some greedy Africans [mostly politicians] have lots of money that can help reduce the debts to a great extent, but it is not their concern. Father Kizito wrote in his Note Book about people who amass wealth for themselves; *"sometimes the riches they put together are so huge that in my opinion they are immoral in themselves, no matter how they were accumulated."*³⁰ Because of no official and reliable record, he could not give the facts. But he gave examples with some rampart comments that are shocking truths, of *"huge 10 - storey hotel . . . and that double towered shopping center . . . belonging to so and so . . . When he arrived in Nairobi owned only some head of cattle back home."*³¹ He also pointed out that some members of parliament are the existing millionaires in Kenya. In Nigeria too, we hear now and then the figures of money in Billions deposited in foreign banks by some politicians etc. Another tragedy is the amount of money paid by these poor countries to expatriate employees. *"A Kenyan expert once calculated that a year's support for one expatriate employee may exceed the center budget of a government department."*³² Professionals [sports men and women for example] receive money that can buy a big chunk of Nairobi while many are landless.

D. HUNGER AND FAMINE

The only image of Africa we see in international magazines and televisions are starving children with swollen bellies and sunken eyes, the results of malnutrition. One might say that famine and hunger choose their victims: by occupation, class, age, sex, social and political status. The leading candidates in Africa included the landless, the unemployed, lowest paid, social pariahs, the politically excluded, women and children. While *"some groups can suffer acute deprivation even when there is no overall shortage, others can prosper even in the midst of famine."*³³ Some people who experience natural disasters like drought, and loose practically everything are left on their own to recover.

There is also rising incidence of landlessness, and among pastoralist fewer animals in rural Africa, eg. the Masias of East Africa. Is their faith to be moving from hotels to centers of tourist attraction begging for money? We sometimes do not even think of them as poor. A more dreadful reality, is the monstrous existence of street children, with no hope of a better future. At the end what do we have? *"About 170 million people - a third of the subregion*

³⁰ SESANA KIZITO, MCCJ, "When wealth is a senseless addiction", *Father Kizito's Note book*, in *Lifestyle, The Sunday Nation*, [October 5, 1997], p. 4.

³¹ Ibid.

³² ALBANESE and ONYANGO, "Poverty: The world's most ruthless killer" in *New People*, no. 40, p. 17.

³³ MARTIN, and O'MEARA, *Africa*, p.335.

population do not have enough to eat; about 23 million children are malnourished and 16 percent of babies are under weight.³⁴

E. POPULATION AND EDUCATION

"Over the next forty years, the population of sub-Saharan Africa is projected to treble to over 1.6 billion." Such are the kind of news we hear all the time about Africa. I combined population and education because one seems to reinforce the dynamics of the other. On the one hand, children are the most valuable and reliable investments of most poor families. Their potential income and security contribution motivate parents to have large families. Children provide important household and family labor services, often offsetting child-raising expenses by quite early ages. One of the consequences is that; *"In Africa, where 50 percent of primary school children are not attending school, enrolment rates are decreasing at a very high percentage, leading to deepening poverty."*³⁵ Primary education is very vital and determines to a great extent the human welfare, opportunities and economic growth. Obviously the low earning of the poor comes from their low level of skills, opportunities and literacy. Which poor person can afford the high cost of university education in Kenya for example? Many poor people dropout from schools because they cannot afford the fee, while some rich people send their children abroad for even primary education etc.

On the other hand, rapid population growth among the poor increase the amount of labour in any locality, relative to the amount of unequally distributed lands and capitals. Lagos had something over one million inhabitants in 1967, but it grew to perhaps five million by the early 1980s. The effect was lack of housing unit among others.³⁶ Working-class households in Lagos generally paid between 30 and 40 percent of their income in rent and considered rents a greater grievance than overcrowding.³⁷

F. SLUMS AND SHANTY TOWNS

Urbanization in Africa is something that has double effects of death and life concern. A lot of people migrate to the cities in search of better life, compared to the less enterprising rural farming life. The places they get accommodation are in the slums and shanty towns. This

³⁴ HENRIOT, "A Continent on the margins" in *The Way*, vol. 37, no. 3, [July 1997], p. 236.

³⁵ ALBANESE and ONYANGO, "Poverty: The world's most ruthless killer" in *New People*, no. 40, p. 20.

³⁶ An official survey in 1971 found that 3.8 persons shared each room in Lagos compared with the legal maximum of 2.0. But unofficial studies suggested as many as 8.7 per room in the Obalende quarters in Lagos.

³⁷ JOHN ILIFFER, *The African poor*, [Cambridge: University Press, 1992], pp. 240 - 241.

gives rise to deep physical and moral sufferings. Another fact is that, squatter settlements often have evil reputation. It once happened in the shanty town of Lagos call Moroko; that the government within few days of notice, came and leveled the buildings with people's properties in them, in the name "keeping Lagos clean." I visited Mathare valley slums near Nairobi, which respectable residents of Nairobi feared to enter. It was an eye saw like the other slums in and around Nairobi: Kibera, Korokocho, Kariobangi, Kuinda, etc. These are small area of lands inhabited by thousands of families more than other parts of the city. For the most part, they lacked planing, and between 60 and 80 percent of adult inhabitants lack formal employment.

In Mathare for example, rooms are built each about ten feet square in a barrack-like rows; others are even less. They are constructed of unseasoned wood, painted with waste engine oil to repel insects. Rents of course are very high, because the houses are hot cakes for these poor people who cannot afford a room in decent areas of Nairobi. So if a tenant cannot pay, she or he goes and another takes the habitation immediately. The rents help the owners and private landlords to recover their capital within twelve and eighteen months. The local land owners, are very powerful fellow. People pay them great respect, they hire gunmen to run the squatters off their lands. One can get shot for interfering.

Only about 14 to 17 percent of the women living in Mathare were currently married. The medium income in the poorest section, was less than half the minimum wage. And half of the women engaged in illicit brewing, yet this was abnormal. Many of them solicit sex, in order to secure funds for feeding their children, or meeting school fees. The price for a section is less than half a dollar³⁸ -human flesh so cheap.³⁹ These women know little about hygiene, less about birth control; so many of them have children almost every year. It is said that "Bed is the opera of the poor, who should grudge it to them." These people painfully are racked by disease of damp and dirt; ulcers, abscesses, rheumatism, digestive disorders, malaria, diarrhoea, dysentery. The sick ones will sometimes have to wait one week for a doctor, before getting attention. Even after they have seen the doctor, it becomes worst; either their prescriptions are not available or they cannot afford the money. *"Poverty is the main reason why babies are not vaccinated, clean water and sanitation are not provided and curative drugs and treatment are unavailable and why mothers die at child birth. Poverty conspires with the most deadly and painful diseases to bring a wretched existence*

³⁸ A dollar as of now is sixty - three Kenyan shillings.

³⁹ They contract all kinds of diseases in the act, which the money cannot even pay for a cure. It is not surprising to hear that Africa today has the highest rate of HIV and AIDS patients.

to all who suffer from it."⁴⁰ This is what poverty is about; it leads to death, and it means death.

If I am to write every detail about the plights of poverty in Africa, it will be endless. This statement of John Paul II from *Ecclesia in Africa* no 41, best summarizes it, "*Africa is a continent where countless human beings - men and women, children and young people - are lying, as it were, on the edge of the road, sick, injured, disabled, marginalized and abandon. They are in great need of good Samaritans who will come to their aid.*"⁴¹

4 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have explored how tropical Africa is deeply ridden by the disease of "poverty." I looked at the brief historical development of poverty in Africa, and the concrete facts that contribute to it. I elaborated under these sub-titles: government, economy, famine, population and education, slums and shanty towns, the different faces of poverty in Africa. The next chapter which begins the second part of this essay will deal on God's part and attitude to poverty and poor people. The analysis will be centered on the Christian scripture, the bible.

⁴⁰ ALBANESE and ONYANGO, "Poverty: The world's most ruthless killer" in *New People*, no. 40, p. 16.

⁴¹ JOHN PAUL II, *The church in Africa*, [Nairobi: Pauline Publication Africa, 1995], pp. 32 - 33.

PART TWO

ANALYSIS

"The very God of the exodus, became present in Jesus to set humanity free . . . The God of the prophets who loved everyone through his preferential love for the poor is revealed in a definitive form, which from now on becomes the norm of recognizing God in all future manifestations." - Jorge Pixley and Clodovis Boff.

CHAPTER 3

OLD TESTAMENT

1. INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter I explored Africa, to see what the faces of poverty look like in this exploited continent. I stressed the need that something has to be done to help the situation. In this chapter I will give examples of where something was done in the past to change situations of poverty. I turn to the Christian scripture, the bible for this analysis. I will look at God and the various ways he showed preference to the impoverished and oppressed. I do not wish to dwell on the questions of historical feasibility, because God's promises are always miraculous. I must also say that Biblical scholarship is far from completing research on what the bible says about God's attitude to the poor.

2. GOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The bible, is a literary document and more than that, *"the life book of God's people. It is in this that the word of God, binding on all people has become flesh."*⁴² This is the main approach to the bible and the key to all Christian theologies, Liberation theology included. It is on this note that I turn to the bible in search of this paradox that speaks of a God who loves the unlovable. A God who gives values and worth to the undeserving, considered from human point of view.

The bible took great care to identify the God it speaks of; and it does so using categories other than our common understanding of God as: *"The sole supreme being, eternal, spiritual, and transcendent, who is the creator and ruler of all and is infinite in all attributes; the object of worship in monotheistic religion."*⁴³ The biblical narratives tell us the concrete expression of the above mentioned qualities; especially, how God in a peculiar way favored the slaves of Egypt, and the poor of Galilee. There is no doubt, that the God whom the bible calls Creator of heaven and earth has specific characteristics. Prominent among them is his preferential option for the oppressed. This is virtually manifested in almost all the books of the Old Testament. I will treat only what is possible, because of lack of space.

The Old Testament is not one continuous work but a collection of writings originating at different periods in the Ancient Near East [A.N.E.]. It had undergone a development over the course of more than a thousand years, before reaching its present form. For the most

⁴² CLAUS SCHEDL, *History of the Old Testament*, Vol. 1, [New York: Alba House, 1973] p.iii

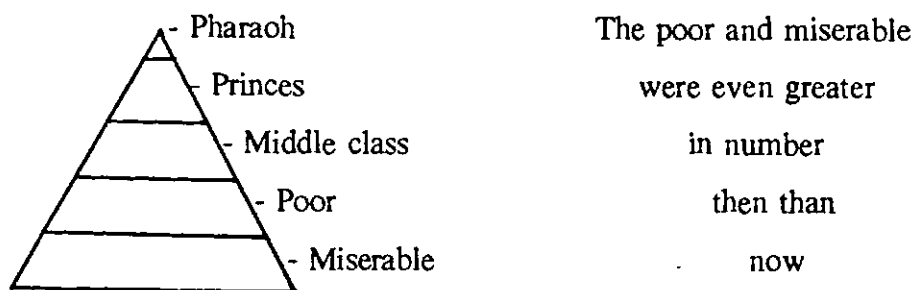
⁴³ PATRICK HANK, ed., *Collins Dictionary of the English language*, [London: Collins, 1989], p. 651

part, it was written in the Hebrew and Aramaic languages. The diversity of origin is shown in the different ways it takes up the basic themes of Israel's tradition. Because of this diversity, a scientific examination of God's preferential option for the poor in the Old Testament, becomes somehow out of place and incomplete, without a background from the A.N.E.'s people, kingdoms, culture and religion. So, let's take a brief look outside Palestine, to see what was there about this headline topic, 'God's option for the poor' around the time of the Old Testament.

3. ANCIENT NEAR EAST

This is a brief sketch of the lofty ethic of care for the poor, which can be traced all over the A.N.E. Reality may often have been cruel; nevertheless, in Egypt, Mesopotamia, among the Hittites and the Canaanites, the care for the poor probably had a higher profile in ethical conscience than in most of our modern societies. In a place like Egypt, they believed that God is responsible for the world, and has his way of taking care of it. God created the rich princes to help the poor, the weak and lazy people which are unavoidable in the society. If the poor are not helped, the time will come when they will revolt and there will be chaos.⁴⁴ The societal pyramid was like this:

Fig. 2



The upper classes of these societies were instructed to wipe away the tears of the poor.⁴⁵ After death one had to give an account on how he helped the poor. A biographical tomb inscriptions of Egypt give witness to the presence of this attitude through out three millennia. *"I gave bread to the hungry, water to the thirsty, clothing to the naked, and a passage to those who had no ship."*⁴⁶

In the A.N.E. the god who cared for the poor is mostly the Sun-God but it has different

⁴⁴ JAMES B. PRITCHARD, *The Ancient Near East*, Vol. 1, [New Jersey: Princeton University press, 1973], p.1-24.

⁴⁵ Example of these instructions are found in the wisdom writings: "instructions of Amen-em-opet" - 2nd Millennium, and "Book of the dead." Refer to: PRITCHARD, *Ibid.*, pp. 237 - 243.

⁴⁶ NORBERT LOHFINK, S.J., "Poverty in the laws of the Ancient Near East and of the Bible". *Theological Studies*, Vol. 52, Nos. 1, [March 1991], p. 34

names Amon-re, Utu, and Shangher.⁴⁷ This god listened to the cry of the poor *"Thou art Amun, the Lord of the silent man, one who comes at the cry of a poor man. Were I to call upon thee when I am ill, Thou comest, that thou mightest rescue me, that thou mightest give breath to him who is weak and rescue the one who is shut in."*⁴⁸ According to the affection people had toward the poor, the god blessed them or cursed them.⁴⁹ This led to spiritualizing poverty to the extent that, even the rich try to present themselves before God as poor. Poverty was seen as something good, because the poor are under the protecting hand of God.

The king was the center of welfare for the land; he took care of the disadvantaged part of the population. Along with his victorious wars and the shrines he had built for the gods, these social and economic actions were main topics of royal propaganda. From the royal inscription of ancient Babylonia, we know about royal remissions of debts and other legal reforms.⁵⁰ As constituent of royal inscriptions, they also found their way into the prologues and epilogues of the lawcodes. The oldest code known to us is the code of Ur-Namu, the founder of the third dynasty of Ur. There we read: *"The orphan was not delivered up to the rich man, the widow was not delivered up to the mighty man; the man of one shekel was not delivered up to the man of one mina."*⁵¹ The fixed word-pair "widow and orphan" is old as Lohfink writes, *"Israel must have inherited it from its surrounding cultures as a symbolic name for those in need of help."*⁵² We also have similar code from Hammurabi, the founder of the first dynasty of Babylon.⁵³

I must assume that the codes really meant to protect the poor. If they did not succeed in achieving that, it just shows the discrepancy between the ideal in the text and what was practiced. The important novelty coming from the study of the A.N.E. documents, is the

⁴⁷ The god Amun, who was fused with the old Heliopolitan Sun-god Re in the form Amon-Re, was the deity of the capital city Thebes and the dynastic god of the new kingdom. As a god who punished the offender, one had to beware of him. Uto and Shangher are the same Sun-god

⁴⁸ D. WINTON THOMAS, *Documents from Old Testament Times*, [New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961], pp. 152 - 153.

⁴⁹ From Babylonian 'council of wisdom' we read *"if you oppress the poor, his God will be angry, if you do good his god is pleased."* From the instruction of Amen-em-opet we read, *"God desires respect for the poor more than the honoring of the exalted."* PRITCHARD, *The Ancient Near East*, Vol. 1, pp.240 - 243.

⁵⁰ Their documents are known as edicts of *Misurum*. They depended on the free decision of the king, and the king considered himself as chosen by the gods to administer justice.

⁵¹ JAMES B. PRITCHARD, *The Ancient Near East*, Vol. II, [New Jersey: Princeton University press, 1975], p. 32

⁵² NORBERT LOHFINK, S.J., *"Poverty in the laws of the Ancient Near East and of the Bible"*, *Theological Studies*, p. 34.

⁵³ Hammurabi spread a kind of self-praise across the prologue and epilogue of his code. According to the prologue, the gods made him king *"to make good the flesh of the people, . . . to cause justice to prevail in the land, to destroy the wicked and the evil, that the strong might not oppress the weak, to rise like the sun over the black headed [people], and to light up the land"*. See Lohfink, S.J., *Ibid.* p. 34.

very presence of provisions concerning God's option for the poor. Another thing, is the common conviction that the gods have a special love for the poor.

4. THE TORAH

The foundation of the bible is the Torah, and the bone of the Torah are the laws it contains. In every society, it is the laws which give shape to the world. They define what can be expected, between a thousand possible worlds, and create the one world of a specific society.

It is traditional in modern scholarship to give the name "Covenant Code" to the text of Exodus 20:22 - 23:33.⁵⁴ In this code, theme of the poor is anything but accidental. It consciously emphasised the fact that, the divine legislator of the code comes more to the fore in the laws about the poor, than in the other laws. Without going into every detail, I wish to call attention to one particular point: The God who legislates in this code, is the God of the Exodus. The covenant code is not only related to God, but beyond that it is embedded in history. The A.N.E. law collections were given their insertion into history only by their prologues and epilogues. Insertion into history is inherent in the covenant code by reason of its laws concerning the poor, and the prohibition not to oppress the stranger "for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" [Exodus 23:9] and [Deuteronomy 24:18]. Yahweh's option for the oppressed, as an integral element in the Exodus event, exercised a basic influence over all the books of the bible. Lets take a look at the narrative, for it creates a new problem for us.

A. EXODUS NARRATIVE AND DEUTERONOMIC LAWS

There is no doubt at all in the Pentateuch that God's action, by which Israel was created, was essentially the liberation of the suppressed and the poor part of an inhuman, oppressive society. They were promised, a "land flowing with milk and honey" [Exodus 3:8]. That is mythic language. What it means becomes clear by the fact that, on their way, these people were given new laws. This is evidence God's plan to create for them, a just and blessed society, in opposition to all the corrupt societies of the world. *"It is one of the merits of liberation theologians to have seen the social and economical dimension of the Exodus*

⁵⁴ Since Wellehausen's discovery, there has been a suspicion that certain elements of the laws about the poor belong to this so called "Deuteronomistic redaction" of this covenant code. But Lohfink wrote that, *"There is no real evidence of a late reworking of the covenant code in dependence on the code of Deuteronomy. There is even strong evidence to the contrary."* LOHFINK, S.J., "Poverty in the laws of the Ancient Near East and of the Bible", Theological Studies, pp. 38 - 39.

message."⁵⁵ But perhaps even them, have not sufficiently emphasized the radicalism involved. The idea that God does not leave the oppressed Israelites in Egypt, but transplants them into another country and starts something new there. God "heard them crying for help" [Exodus 3:7] and transplanted them. Israel's creed [Deuteronomy 26:5 - 9] is a key to understanding the meaning of Exodus story.

The old A.N.E. motif of the cry of the poor to the gods is introduced here, in Deuteronomy, 15:9 and 24:15. The connected sanction is that whoever forces the poor to cry will be in the state of sin, which can only be expiated by the death of the sinner. Therefore, only the cry of the poor and God's massive sanction following it can be in view when Moses, in Deuteronomy 4:7, compared Israel's society to that of other nations. Even before pointing to the justice of the Torah, Moses asked the rhetorical question: "What great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is to us whenever we call to him?" [Deuteronomy 4:7]

The book of Deuteronomy, with its laws that protect and care for the poor, widows and orphans; like the Exodus, sketches out a world where there are no longer any poor.⁵⁶ What is crucial for my consideration here is a new discrepancy. It is the discrepancy between the fact that exodus dynamic tended towards a society without oppression and poverty. The fact that the covenant code, and subsequent laws, were given as a kind of blueprint for God's projected society, blandly supposed the further existence of poverty in new Israel.

There are many speculations about what may have been the intention behind Deuteronomy's laws. In my view, this intellectual problem, so deeply connected with human hopes and the incredible promises given to Israel at its beginnings, was not realized may be because, nobody believed in it; or perhaps they did not even realize what it really meant.

5. THE PROPHETS

Because of their direct inspiration from the Divine, the prophets can preserve a relative autonomy from the dominant religion and political structure of their society. The prophet Nathan had close links with the court of king David, and supported him in the name of Yahweh. To him, he attributed the important oracle: "Your house and your sovereignty will always stand secure before me and your throne be established forever" [2 Samuel, 7:16]. Nevertheless, his close contact with David did not prevent him from reproaching him for

⁵⁵ NORBERT LOHFINK, S.J., *The Option for the poor*, [Berkeley, Berkeley Institute of Bible Archeology and Law, 1987] p. 42

⁵⁶ The texts of Deuteronomy, 12, 14, 15, 18, 20, 21, 26, 29, provide support to the slaves, strangers, orphans and widows. If the system worked out as it states, these groups could no longer be considered poor.

the death of Uriah the Hittite [2 Samuel, 12:1 - 15].

The line of prophets who stood up to domination by the king in the name of Yahweh and the poor began with Ahijah of Shiloh. In the name of Yahweh, Ahijah supported Jeroboam in his unsuccessful revolt against king Solomon. [1 Kings 11:26 - 40]. Elisha continued the opposition of his master, Elijah, to the Amorites of Samaria [1 Kings 21]. The text presents the struggle between the prophets and the Amorites as one between Yahweh and Baal. Behind this religious rivalry lay a defence of the poor people of Israel, as the incident of Naboth's vineyard shows [1 King 21].

Micah and Amos were among the great prophets who lived in the eighth century, a time of prosperity for both Israel and Judah. Micah defended the poor in the name of Yahweh. This country prophet rightly saw the root of the problem in the ruling class of Jerusalem, with its corrupt princes, judges, priests and prophets [Micah 3: 9 - 12].

Amos saw the swindling traders, as the great sinners, who "by lowering the bushel, raising the shekel, by swindling and tampering with the scales . . . can buy up the poor for money, and the needy for a pair of sandals" [Amos 8: 5 - 6].

Jeremiah came a century later and attacked king Jehoiakim for building palaces by "making his fellow man work for nothing" [Jeremiah 22:13 - 19]. The wrong done against the poor reached such a pitch, that Yahweh in his anger supported Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon in his attack on the city [Jeremiah, 21: 1 - 10]. Yahweh as God opting for the poor, was kept alive by the great prophets of Israel by the different ways they carried out their missions.

6. THE PSALMS

Psalms are mainly the petitions of the needy. Such petitions clearly show the expectation that Yahweh is the protector of the weak and unprotected, particularly the poor, strangers, widows and orphans.⁵⁷ Most Psalms of petition, has three dramatic personals: the oppressed supplicant, the enemy who attack him and Yahweh the king and judge, whose intervention can save the supplicant from his torments. To understand the dynamic of these religious poetries, we have to note that God appears above all as judge [not father]. And that God's right judgement is what supplicant petitions for. For instance, Psalms, 3, 5, 6, or "The oppressed relies on you [God], The only recourse of the orphan. Break the arm of the wicked and evil" of Psalm 10:14 - 15; and many others.

The poor supplicant knows he is the object of Yahweh's special attention, and approaches

⁵⁷ ANAWIN is the collective name for this group. It means the poor of Yahweh.

God with a confidence astonishing to a modern reader. Without reservation he asks for the most terrible calamities to befall his enemy, who is seen as an apostate whose oppressive action declare that he dose not believe there is a just God.

7. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In this chapter I started to analyze how God had opted for the poor. I took a brief look at A. N. E. world and the kind of gods' options that existed then. Different from them is the kind of option God had for the people of Israel; namely transferring them from their situation of oppression into a new society. I pointed out some of the dissonances that existed both in the A.N.E. and the Torah. After that, I went into the books of the prophets and Psalms, to show how God continued to opt for poor in various ways.

The following chapter will turn to the New Testament to see what it has to offer about God's option for the poor. I will set out to answer a few questions that will arise in it.

CHAPTER 4

NEW TESTAMENT

1. INTRODUCTION

The last chapter was devoted to the Old Testament contributions to this topic of God's option for the poor. In this chapter, I intend to search and unmask how this option for the poor was continued in the New Testament. *"The very God of the exodus, become present in Jesus to set humanity free . . . , which from now on becomes the norm of recognizing God in all future manifestations."*⁵⁸ The central questions in this chapter are: Had Jesus the Old Testament God's option for the poor? In which ways did he carry this out, if he had it? And what were the consequences?

2. GOSPEL

A. INFANCY NARRATIVE

In his account of the birth of Jesus, Luke stressed the fulfillment of the hopes of pious Jews, represented by Zechariah and Elizabeth, Mary and Joseph, Simeon and Anna. He also seemed to stress the fact of Jesus' poverty. Jesus was born in a stable because his parents could provide nothing better. Those who celebrate the event to the accompaniment of a heavenly chorus were humble shepherds looking after their flock in the fields. The whole story is full of symbols, and was not meant to portray poverty but a sign that is unusual, - "this will be a sign for you" [Luke 2:12]. Modern scholars try to give us the real significant to what the signs mean.⁵⁹ The poverty of Jesus became an issue with St. Francis of Assisi's introduction of the crib. Jesus may have been poor but not miserable as he is sometimes portrayed. The occupation of his parent carpentry suggests, that they are fairly a middle-class family, and did not have to beg their food.

B. JESUS' MISSION

Jesus proclaimed his mission in the synagogue of Nazareth by reading a text from Isaiah: "The spirit of the lord has been given to me. He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor . . . to proclaim liberty to captives and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the lord's year of favour" [Luke 4:18]. The central fact of the Messianic proclamation, was that the proclamation itself was good news for the poor. This good news

⁵⁸ PIXLEY and BOFF, *The Bible, the Church and the Poor*, p.53.

⁵⁹ For more information read: ROBERT J. KARRIS, "The Gospel according to Luke", in RAYMOND E. BROWN, S.S., et al., eds., *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, [London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1990], pp.682 - 683.

was then made concrete in actions: liberating captives, restoring sight to the blind and bring freedom to the oppressed. Thus, the core of the good news was liberation.

Those afflicted with serious illness or physical disabilities were regarded as sinners [John 9:1 - 3]. For example, lepers were segregated from social life. Jesus by restoring their physical health returned them to society. Similarly public sinners, like tax collectors and prostitutes, were the dregs of the society. It was that condition and not their moral or religious quality that made them first in the love and tenderness of Jesus. *"Therefore, he apostrophizes the great ones of his people: 'Tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before you' [Matthew 21:31]. The gratuity of God's love never ceases to amaze us."*⁶⁰ Moltmann writes: *"The love of God and the humanity of Christ are biased towards the wretched and oppressed, the humiliated and the wronged . . . only through this partisan dialectic does the crucified Christ achieve universal significance."*⁶¹

Bockmann points out that: *"To claim to side with poor without changing the conditions that give rise to poverty, that is, exploitation in the economic, political and cultural spheres, amounts to fraudulence and hypocrisy."*⁶² In effect, Jesus' public activity from that moment in the synagogue consisted of intense progress from one town or village to another. He sought contact with all the needy, so as to proclaim in healing, words and deeds the good news of the coming of the Kingdom of the poor. Jesus' option for the poor, then deserved the option the poor made for him. He thereby, continued the Old Testament God's option for the poor.

C. JESUS' DISCIPLES

Jesus collected a small group of followers who are warned that: "foxes have holes and the birds of the air have their nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" [Luke 9: 58]. He chose most of his disciples from among the simple people, though we cannot claim that all were proletariat, [there were also tax collectors and Zealots]. On the whole Jesus demanded his disciples to relinquish their worldly possessions and follow him, living from one day to the next on alms and hospitality of the people. He sent them out empty-handed, *"presumably to ensure that they will not be received by the rich and the powerful, but by the small and insignificant."*⁶³ Jesus commanded the disciples to receive the poor into their

⁶⁰ GUSTAVO GUTIERREZ, "Option for The Poor", in *Systematic Theology*, by Sobrino J., S.J. and Ellacuria I., S.J., eds., [New York, SCM Press Ltd., 1996], p 30.

⁶¹ JURGEN MOLTSMANN, *The crucified God*, [London, SCM Press Ltd., 1989], p.65ff.

⁶² AQUINATA BOCKMANN, "What does the New Testament say about the church's attitude to the poor?", *CONCILIUM: The poor and the church*, number 104, [New York, The Seabury Press, 1977], p.39.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p 40.

community [Luke 14:12ff]; and to treat everyone equally as their heavenly father does, [Matthew 5: 45 - 48]. The parable of the workers in the vineyard in Matthew 20: 1 - 16, brings out the core message of Jesus' attitude to discipleship. "I intend to give this man who was hired the same pay as you" said the Lord, "I am free to do as I please with my money, am I not." *"The parable transmits a clear lesson concerning the core of the bible message: the gratuity of God's love. Only that can explain God's preferential option for the weakest and most oppressed."*⁶⁴ By electing the weak in this way, values are reversed. The humble are elevated and the elevated are humbled. [This echoes the Magnificat of Mary, - the ideal disciple - in Luke 1:46 - 55.]

D. THE RICH AND THE POOR

The Kingdom of God, as proclaimed by Jesus, produced a division in the society, between the rich and the poor. The poor were always favored and opted for, as this Beatitude proclaimed: "How happy are you who are poor: yours is the kingdom of God" [Luke 6:20]. "But alas for you who are rich; you are living your consolation now" [Luke 6:24]. In the Parable of the rich man and Lazarus; the beggar was taken up into Abraham's bosom when he died, whereas the rich man was despatched to a place of torment. There was no difference established between them other than one was rich and did not help the other who was poor [Luke 16: 19 - 31].

Jesus told the young aristocrat who asked 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 [Luke 18:18 - 23]. Also, to his listeners he said: "it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven" [Matthew 19:24]. Supposedly because their wealth blinds them from what is essential.

Otherwise, Jesus did not consider a person's rank and social class as relevant. He only sees the individual and how much that person needed him. He dined with the pharisees and with tax collectors, [Luke 7:36 - 50]. He was receptive to Nicodemus [John 3:1 - 21]. He pointed out a poor widow as an example to his disciples [Luke 21:1 - 4]. He accepted the rich and moved freely with them, but he warned about the danger of riches. The best use of wealth is to employ it in doing good for the poor. *"The gospel explains how this is to be done and the motivations for men's acts of kindness were transfigured."*⁶⁵ Such actions of Jesus were seen as deliberately subversive.

⁶⁴ GUTIERREZ, "Option for The Poor", in SOBRINO and ELLACURIA, *Systematic theology*, p. 28.

⁶⁵ ALBERT GELIN, P.S.S., *The Poor of Yahweh*, [Minnesota; The Liturgical Press, 1964], p 99.

E. JESUS AND POLITICS

Through his work, -which today we could call true conscientization-, Jesus took the risk run by all those who stood up to the great ones of this world. He laid himself open to the fate of the prophets, killed by the ancestors of the Pharisees. Though *"His purpose was to open the eyes of the multitude to the hope of the kingdom given to the poor, and to the fact that, with all their piety, the scribes and the priests were not working for the good of the people."*⁶⁶ His actions were seen by the leaders as subversive.

On the one hand, certain evidence would seem to suggest that Jesus was a member of the Zealot party or a social revolutionary. For example, his open approach towards all political and economic factions, proclamation of the kingdom of God, his critical attitude towards Herod, the order to carry a sword in Luke 22:36, the entry into Jerusalem. Gutierrez describes all such actions of Christ as liberating and political.⁶⁷

On the other hand, these were opposed by a whole series of other factors which proved that Jesus did not belong to any political party. Examples: The emphasis on using nonviolent means, the love of enemy, the beatification of the peace makers, the directive to go unarmed on missionary journeys, and to remain faithful to the law.

He was severely critical of social injustice of his days, but never called for revolution. Jesus exhorted the individual to be self-critical and reflective, to be truly converted and to love his / her neighbours. He wished to serve, not to rule and was prepared to undergo death.

3 ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

We have seen that Jesus, as described in the Gospels, organized a small movement of poor followers as part of the proclamation of the kingdom of God. These disciples formed the nucleus of what in time was to become the Christian church. The result of this organization process was mixed.

One group of the disciples remained in Jerusalem; there they formed a community in which those who had possessions sold them and shared out the proceed [Acts 2:42 - 47; 4:32 - 37]. There were no needs left unsatisfied among them, since the resources of the community were sufficient to look after the poorest of them. In one of the two collective reports describing the life of the first Christians, we read: "there was not a needy person among them " [Acts 4:34]. They sheared everything or placed their belonging at the disposal of

⁶⁶ PIXLEY and BOFF, *The Bible, the Church and the Poor*, p. 62.

⁶⁷ GUSTAVO GUTIERREZ, *A Theology of Liberation*, [New York: Orbis Books, 1990], p. 172.

others. The legitimate claim on possessions becomes a relative one within the Christian community, and is transformed into a bond of unity. Hence in this community, the Old Testament prophecy of Deuteronomy 15:4 was fulfilled. They symbolised the new Messianic people of God.

In Acts 6:1 - 6, we read that the Apostles combined preaching the word with daily service at table. Later on men "full of the spirit and of wisdom" [Acts 6:3] were chosen to this duty after prayers and laying on of hands [Acts 6:6]. A salient sign of the early church's concern and care for the needy members of the community. The community was soon being persecuted by the city authorities, the same who were responsible for executing Jesus. So they began to go hungry, possibly on account of the persecution, or because of defect in their primitive system of distribution and cheating too. Whatever the reason was, those who had fled to Antioch responded by sending food to relieve the situation in Judea [Acts 11:27 - 30]. This kind of witness in the Acts did not go far as other Christian Epistles testify. 1Cor. 11: 17 - 34 and letter of James 2: 1 - 3, warned of the discrimination in the community between the rich and the poor in their gatherings. That notwithstanding, one undisputable fact is that, the early church made effort to achieve the kingdom Jesus proclaimed in their midst.

4. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In this chapter I searched through the New Testament for the continuation of the Old Testament God's option for the poor. The following are my findings: a) That Jesus continued God's work of liberating the poor in all its crudity, by his teaching, values, words, deeds and choices. b) His practices brought him into conflict with the authorities and Jesus emerged surprisingly "political." c) The disciples were commissioned to carry on this work of Jesus to the ends of the world. d) In Acts of the Apostles we find a mixture of success and failure, but it showed a good effort on the part of the community to establish God's Kingdom.

Consequently the next chapter will look at the church's mission as the continuation and implication of God's option for the poor. I hope to point out some duplicities that exist in this mission.

CHAPTER 5

CHURCH'S MISSION

1. INTRODUCTION

The last chapter dealt with God's peculiar option for the poor that was carried on by Jesus Christ in the New Testament. When Jesus was leaving the world he commissioned this project to the Christian community. This chapter will take on the church as the inheritor of the project. First, I will look at the relationship between God's option for the poor and the mission of the church. Secondly, I will seek out the pastoral implications of the option, and establish a few duplicities that exist on the pastoral level in Africa. I will also give a brief survey of the church's social teaching on option for the poor.

2. CHURCH'S MISSION FROM GOD'S MISSION

A. MISSIO DEI

Holy Scripture reveals God as having a plan and mission for his creatures, through which he reveals himself and makes himself present to us. This plan and mission belong to God himself and so we talk of God's mission. "Missio Dei" is the term used in recent years in ecumenical circle to express this insight. The first implication of the term is that, God is the subject and protagonist in mission activity. Therefore we cannot speak of "our mission" nor talk of the "mission of the church" in the sense of being in control. Both the church and mission have their source in the loving will, mind and plan of God. Both are not independent bodies, but tools of God, through which he carries out his mission.

The point of emphasis here is that, mission is not a church-centered activity, but God [Trinity]- centered action. If mission is centered and based on the church; then mission becomes a matter of propagating the historical and cultural peculiarities of particular churches. The implication of this is that the mission of the Trinity [Missio Dei] determines the mission of the church. And the goal of this Missio Dei is the establishment of God's kingdom. In Pauline language, God's plan and mission is to unify all things in himself through Christ [Col 1:19 - 20; Eph. 1: 9 - 10]. *"God's plan is to make all adopted children in the Kingdom and to dignify all with participation in the true divine life."*⁶⁸ So this is the mission the church is commissioned to carry on by her Lord.

⁶⁸. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church nos. 1 - 7.

B. IMPLICATIONS OF GOD'S MISSION ON THE CHURCH

First, the church had to be seen as an outcome of the project of Jesus, aimed at carrying on the liberation work that he had started. The church's involvement in the question of poverty is primarily and fundamentally, because of the God of the bible to whom it wants and, must be faithful to. The fact that the church is present in poor countries, provides it a better opportunity to understand its responsibility of bearing witness to God, who became poor in Jesus Christ. This leads to the conclusion that the poor today, rather than being regarded as a "problem for the church," raises the question of what "being the church" really means. All this is a problem of ecclesiology; and as Okolo stated, the church has to answer, "*what are its priorities . . . ?*"⁶⁹

The church for most of its history had been occupied with the way it sees itself [from within]. The historical reason for this attitude is obvious and easily understandable. In the past the ecclesiology taught everywhere was that the church, the mystery of Christ in history is a perfect society [Christendom], whose work is to pass on the word of God. It was provided with powers of teaching and government, to grantee the truth and effectiveness of the word. The charnel for these, was through a hierarchical structure dependent on the supreme sovereignty of the pope. This ensured the unity of the faithful and the Catholicity of their faith. So the church as an institution over-shadowed the work of building the kingdom for which it existed.

Flowing from Jesus' commission, the kingdom should take priority. Ryan expressed this well, when he wrote; "*What has priority, however is the kingdom. The church is subordinated to the kingdom; its work is to build up the kingdom. It should never focus on its own strength as an institution. Rather, its aim is to promote kingdom values in the society.*"⁷⁰ In this way a situation with two models or levels of the same church emerges. These are distinguished by their relationship to the world of the poor.

- i) First, we see the model of the 'great institution' church with its sociological and culture center outside the world of the poor. This is a church that values discipline more, and seeks greater functional cohesion. A church that teaches doctrine with authority, and can make itself heard through the mass media of communication.
- ii) The second model is that of the 'Communication - network' church, with its sociological and cultural centre in the world of the poor. This is a church that values solidarity more and looks for a greater sharing of responsibility. A church that, in and from the world of the

⁶⁹ CHUKWUDUM B. OKOLO, *The liberating role of the church in Africa today*, [Eldoret, AMECEA Gaba publication, Spearhead 119, 1991], p. 59

⁷⁰ PATRICK RYAN, "Liberation theology and Africa's poor", *Wajibu*, [Vol. 12, no. 2, 1997], p.11

poor, seeks to bear witness to the gospel. This model should take precedence and be promoted in Africa today.

Many Christians are becoming aware recently, that if the church wants to be faithful to God of the Exodus and of Jesus Christ; it has to rethink itself "from below" - from the position of the poor of this world. This I can say is the main implication of our belief in the God who loves the poor. I must admit that this is no easy task to carry out. It means that the church must come down to the reality of this world and commune with poverty, injustice, struggles and hopes of the dispossessed, because of them is the kingdom of Heaven. The church has to be reborn by dying to a history of oppression and complicity.⁷¹ Its power to live anew depends on whether it has the courage to die this death. This "subversion of history" is death because, the church will have to forego for a while the trivial things she is clinging to. Unless the church does this, it will in no time become meaningless, and an empty shell.

3. AFRICAN EXPERIENCE OF THE CHURCH'S MISSION

In our Africa pastoral circle, the church as an institution is what is prominent. This may be because of how the church came into Africa. The church was historically bound up with western culture, the ruling white race; and its extension throughout Africa was in these western terms. The missionaries also followed in the tracks of the colonialists. This was the conventional image of the good news sent by Rome to the people of Africa.

An institutional and juridical situation was formed that, the problems, hopes and sufferings of the poor were not in the forefront. On the other hand, it is undeniable that, the church in Africa has always been a resort for the weak, the deprived, the voiceless and the poor. It has undertaken the social services that governments could not or would not perform; like educating children, setting up universities, caring for the sick, sheltering the aged and helping the handicapped. These functions are still carried out in almost all African countries, and the church has grown tremendously in the few decades it has existed. The point here is that, most of the achievements of the church in Africa were done as works of charity and not true justice.

Unfortunately, these works are counteracted by the fact that, the church and her leaders are part of the society's status quo. This consequently, becomes a drawback in the church's mission of building the kingdom. There is much truth in the opinion that the poor receive

⁷¹ Gutierrez insists that "History must be reread from the viewpoint of the poor. Human history has been written by the ruling classes, of which the point of view of the underdogs of history is quite different. History must be re-read from the viewpoint of their struggles, resistance and hopes." See, GUTIERREZ, "The poor in the church", *CONCILIUM: The poor and the church*, no. 104, p.11

little respect or support in the church, as in the society at large. This is because, the church in Africa is doing little to challenge the systems of government, economy, education etc. It seems to over look them as insignificant, when the majority of the faithful are suffering from them. The obvious reason is that those involved [the rich] are the great benefactors of the church. So the church enjoys benefits that help it to remain a strong institution, and neglect the mission of building the kingdom. *"The desire for efficiency loses its point, if the quality of human relationship is sacrifice to mere quantity."*⁷² The mission of the church and human relationship must never be sacrificed to things, profits, statistics or the whims of the rich. This calls for self-discipline, controlling our desires and remaining brothers and sisters. Though the poor are often the objects of praiseworthy charity; they are a marginal group, and are not acknowledged as sharing "rights" in the name of social justice. Because of this reality the poor are not at home in the African church, but are seen always as a source of worry.

The church in Africa has to rediscover the warmth of Christian solidarity, reading the good news Jesus preached to the poor in a fresh way. This has to be done by developing a consciousness of belonging to a people with a history of oppression and a vocation to freedom. In this way the church takes up its mission of being the leaven of the kingdom of God.

4. THE CHURCH'S SOCIAL TEACHINGS AND OPTION FOR THE POOR

In a world where no real social alternatives could be discerned to the simultaneous existence of poverty and riches, the church had only two possibilities. It will either turn its back on the evil world, or open up completely to it. But from the above mentioned implications of the God's mission, it is left with no alternative, if it wants to be faithful to its sender. So in recent years the church has responded to this mission through some of her teachings.

Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* was the first major step by the Vatican towards putting the church on the side of the poor and the working class. Its impact came not so much from its content as from the fact that by issuing an encyclical on the topic, the pope was seen as coming to the defence of the poor.⁷³ Forty years after the first social encyclical, in 1931, Pius XI issued *Quadragesimo Anno*. Among its contributions to Catholic social teaching, were its use of the term, 'social justice' and its articulation of the principle of subsidiarity.⁷⁴

⁷² HUBERT LEPERGNEUR, "The problem of poverty and how the church can help", *CONCILIUM: The poor and the church*, no. 104, p.94

⁷³ LEO XIII, *Rerum Navarum*, [Boston: St. Paul Editions].

⁷⁴ PIUS XI, *Quadragesimo Anno*, [Boston, St. Paul Editions, 1942], nos. 81 - 100

In spite of Pope John XXIII's 'moderate' position, his encyclical *Mater et Magistra* changed the whole direction of Catholic social teaching. Though he still insisted on the principle of subsidiarity, his proposals for a lot of state interventions amounted to approval of the welfare state.⁷⁵

VATICAN II: The council fathers awakened to a new sensitivity to the human and evangelical problem of poverty, took to replacing the concept of an authoritarian church with that of the church as the people of God. This led to the shift of emphasis from authority to that of witness, and how to fulfil the mission of preaching the good news.

Vatican II put an end to the "Christendom" mentality. The time for dialogue and service to the world has come. Pope John XXIII gave the council the task of opening the church to the world; and finding appropriated theological languages and bearing witness to a church for the poor. The constitution "the church in the modern world" showed the new horizon for the church's action seen by Vatican II. It offered an optimistic vision of the world and its progress, of modern science and technology. It affirmed the individual as subject of history and freedom.⁷⁶

The text of L.G. no. 8 which quotes Phil. 2:6 - 7, gives the essential Christological perspective between the church, - the mystery of Christ's body - and the poor. This mystery operates on two levels, carefully distinguished in the text as: a) poverty as a way of life, is an obligation laid on the church, against all the fascinations of power, and as a witness to the poverty of Christ. This is "the church that is poor." b) Second, is the fact that the church's first concern must be for the poor, to whom it must preach the good news and bring the liberation of the messiah. He "came not to be served but to serve" [Mt. 20:28]. This is the "the church of [for] the poor."⁷⁷

In Octogesima Adveniens, Paul VI offered what may be taken as his response to Medellin conference of the Latin American bishops three years earlier. It is a remarkable document that shows some sympathy for the kind of liberation envisaged by Latin American bishops.⁷⁸ There are other documents like "Justice in the world" issued by 1971 Synod of Bishops; Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, John Paul II's *Laborem Exercens* and the centenary encyclical *Centesimus Annus*. This last one highlighted and reaffirmed many of the traditional Catholic social teachings, stressing the continuity of that teaching over the past hundred years.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ JOHN XXIII, *Mater et Magistra*, [Boston, St. Paul Editions], nos. 53 - 115.

⁷⁶ Pastoral Constitution on the church in the modern world, nos. 40 - 45.

⁷⁷ Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, no. 8.

⁷⁸ PAUL VI, *Octogesima Adveniens*, [Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1971].

⁷⁹ Consult for more treatment of the church's social teachings: DONAL DORR, *Option for the poor*, [New York: Orbis Books, 1992], p. 350.

Despite some inadequacies, the Catholic social teaching provides support and inspiration for Christians in their efforts to bring justice to the world.

5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This chapter has been devoted to discovering: i) the implications of the sole mission of God on the church's mission. ii) I gave a brief overview of this mission in Africa, its growth and drawbacks. iii) I pointed out a few areas that the church had erred, namely by giving prominence to the institutional organisation, and not the building of the kingdom. iv) Lately the church's teachings are gradually being awakened by the situation around it. This had its climax with Vatican II and subsequent social encyclicals.

In the next chapter, I will make some recommendations for actions, that will help us to efficiently carry out this mission we have seen. I will also point out some of the implications of the actions.

PART THREE

PASTORAL RECOMMENDATIONS

"Liberation theology can be called an 'inconclusive theology' because it emerges from action and leads to action, wrapped in faith from start to finish" - Clodovis Boff.

CHAPTER 6

DECISIONS AND ACTIONS

1. INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter I pointed out what the mission of the church is, its drawbacks and achievements so far. In this present chapter, I aim at making some recommendations for action. They will help to successfully carry out the mission we had seen already, as an implication of the preferential option God has for the poor. I will also enumerate the pastoral implication of the actions, and how we can know if we are taking good actions.

2. DECISION FOR ACTION

The option for the poor always calls for a decision and action. Action has to be taken by all means, otherwise if nothing is done, the evil system triumphs. Option for the poor is for everyone. When I say everyone, I do not mean that all should leave their professions and start a justice and peace ministry. That is a vocation reserved to only a few; but in each person's little ways, the decision for the option for the poor is called for. All must show that they are concerned with Jesus' mission of liberating people, and fight against evil systems. This option for the poor is not hatred of the rich, nor their exclusion. It is giving preference to the poor, which the rich are also called to do. The point here is that the situation of the poor should take precedence, and be considered first, as God did with the people Israel in the exodus story. The rich have always been included in the mission of the church. The main difference is that, they can never take first place on the church's mission at least for now.

On the other hand, when the rich persist in injustice towards the poor, upholding oppressive structures; then the church can only be against their unjust practices. By so doing, the church is actually working in favour of their persons and for their salvation. On the part of the poor, this option is not egoism: the danger of self - seeking or seeing everything from self interest; because it is an option for justice and good of all. Above all, *"it seeks to have the poor as the protagonists of a liberation that embraces all human beings."*⁸⁰

The actions must be holistic, and so will require an integral process, "a new action," "a new praxis."⁸¹ The logic of action here is extremely complex. It includes many steps such as a rational, prudential assessment of all the circumstances of the action proposed, and an

⁸⁰ PIXLEY and BOFF, *The Bible, the Church and the Poor*, p. 202

⁸¹ "By praxis we mean -as a first approximation - doing, considering as reflective, purposeful, self-critical, human performance as distinct from mere making. Praxis is governed and informed by 'prudence'." O'BRIEN, *Theology and The Option for the poor*, p.107.

anticipation of the possible consequences. The action starts with the analysis of reality of the oppressed, through the word of God and arrives at concrete practice and back to action. This is referred to a "pastoral circle."⁸² And that is why Boff wrote; "*Liberation theology can be called an 'inconclusive theology' because it emerges from action and leads to action, wrapped in faith from start to finish*"⁸³ Briefly I will outline the main parts the church and each individual are called to play: the poor and non - poor alike.

3. THE CHURCH

A. AS INSTITUTION

- i) The church in Africa⁸⁴ could choose appropriate means, to control its power and listen to criticisms both from within and without.
- ii) The church must continually reverse its means to ends, because they depend on changing cultural values. All drawbacks must be eradicated to encouraged and strengthened all that opt for the poor. Then the church will become aware of the doubtful value of some of its aims, and the means it employs which shock public opinion.
- iii) If the church proclaims liberation, it must give examples of freedom and independence from economical and political worldly powers. This means it should reject certain easily available but dubious financial assistance, it receives.
- iv) The church need to make people aware by analyzing the situation and pointing out who are the beneficiaries and the victims in a system. The victims should be prioritised and made subject of the world's discussion, media attention and their movements should linked with the justice and peace movements all over the world. Following this and still part of it, is making pronouncements, organising seminars and awareness programs, signing petitions, writing books and pastoral letters to governments and leaders.
- v) Practical actions are political. The people should be made to see politics as the totality of life in a society; from education to organizing meeting or strike and even attending religious services and also election, -each in its own way, naturally.
- vi) The church must help the poor to organise; in overcoming the systems that exploit or exclude them, especially against foreign forces and their internal allies.

⁸² Fro a thorough analysis of the steps for action consult, JOE HOLLAND and PETER HENRIOT, S.J., *Social Analysis*, [New York: Orbis Books, 1992]. and CLODOVIS BOFF, "Methodology of the Theology of Liberation", in Jon Sobrino and Ignacio Ellacuria's *Systematic theology*, [London: SCM Press Ltd.], p. 20.

⁸³ CLODOVIS BOFF, "Methodology of the Theology of Liberation", in Jon Sobrino and Ignacio Ellacuria's *Systematic theology*, [London: SCM Press Ltd.], p. 20.

⁸⁴ Africa, because this may have been achieved in other places like Latin America, and also this essay is centered on Africa.

- vii) In real desperate situation like in many African slums, the church can start small scale business for the poor, from donations and loans.
- viii) The autocratic exercise of power and craze for secrecy and anonymity are harmful to the church's witness and do not always increase efficiency. Democratic organization of community structures help to see that actions are properly taken. a) Leader: The attitudes of leaders that exist today even in the church have to be changed. A leader should be more humbly an animator of the people. He or she should be a kind of catalyst of the dynamism existing among the people. Good leaders are true servants who exercise leadership in transitory fashion, to prevent any abuse of power. b) Leadership from within: The poor must be helped to see the need to lead themselves and not always to depend on leaders from outside. *"Only those who are 'of the people' can really be representative of them . . . representation becomes representation from and not representation to."*⁸⁵
- ix) Method for problem solving: In the past the practice was to get solutions from theories and apply them to the situation. There is a call now to start from reality; from the problems and struggles of the people. One of the reasons for this, is because practice is valued above doctrines and theories. Not that theory is dispensed with, but that it is at the service of practice and is created and re created in function of practice.
- x) Part of the action and very essential to it, are the accompanying prayers. We must never forget this. Even though we do our best by taking action, God is the one that crown it with success.

B. THE POOR

It is only appropriate to start with the poor for they should be the protagonists of action in this mission. They should continue to be agents of faith and evangelization, in family and basic communities, through their faith in the power of God and the saints. The poor have to believe in themselves and overcome the ideologies⁸⁶ that seem to lock them in. They should always cry out like the Israelites in Egypt for recognition, justice and equality, to unmask a situation of injustice. Through their clamour and in some situation through their mute presence, the poor call the rest to conversion, and to practice justice. They should also opt for their fellow poor, and evangelize the rich. *"By calling for conversion, practice of justice, evangelical poverty, solidarity with the oppressed, prophetic courage . . ., the poor*

⁸⁵ PIXLEY and BOFF. *The Bible, the Church and the Poor*, p.206.

⁸⁶ Simply, ideology is "that which gives direction to the means to effect a nonempirical chosen value."
O'BRIEN, *Theology and The Option for the poor*, p.32.

*challenges the church constantly, summoning it to conversion [Peubla 1147].*⁸⁷ In this way the church is also evangelized and made to discover the forgotten dimension of the gospel, especially the liberating dimension of faith in history.

C. THE RICH

The rich are called to be converted to Christ in his poor, by virtue of their option for Christ. They deceive themselves if they think that they can opt for Christ without opting for the poor, and the justice they seek. The rich in this case are asked to open their eyes and see that they are beneficiaries of the system; and that their wealth is not because of their efficiency but exploitation of the poor. Flowing from the gospel challenges, they are forced to choose between God, who opts for the poor and their wealth. This makes their situation dangerous and places them on a slippery slope to perdition. So what is at stake is their salvation.

D. MIDDLE CLASS AND RELIGIOUS: MONKS AND NUNS

For this class the word is also conversion, but a sort of decision either to follow plans of mammon or that of God. The middle class should dissociate themselves from the status quo system. This is the best group for lobby and advocacy⁸⁸ for the poor. So I classify the church's hierarchy, missionaries and religious here.

It is not enough to work among the poor to help them, actions should be taken to transformation of their situations. Except those who have a special vocation, religious are not required to be poorer than the poorest. But their individual and collective life style should show a general austerity, according to their personal and communal vocations. They must bear witness by their thrift, careful administration and generous sharing, according to their particular sphere of action in the church and the world. The right use of wealth of a religious community [property, revenue, influence etc.]; and their setting aside all anti-evangelical trapping and titles, should act as an example of what should be expected in civil society.⁸⁹

Religious have the duty to try and restore their vision and the vision of the world. Living in poverty is not an absolute, but a verb to be conjugated in all the persons, voices and

⁸⁷ PIXLEY and BOFF, *The Bible, the Church and the Poor*, p.227

⁸⁸ Lobby and Advocacy are strategies for generating social changes, by bringing forward the course of the poor and making them known.

⁸⁹ The religious poverty after Vatican II should be understood as aimed at using material goods according to God's will and putting them at the service of others. Religious are called to serve, and not to accumulate power by their goods.

modes necessary to freedom in any particular situation. Religious should challenge all, especially the rich on this. Poverty must not be a trinket displayed under glass by the church in a few religious orders. Poverty is both human and its religious context means solidarity, order, moderation, whereas the trend of our civilization is towards excess. Action on ways of evaluating excess in and around a community should be set up.

4. PASTORAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE LIBERATIVE ACTIONS

A. INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

- i) **CONVERSION TO THE POOR:** One prominent implication of these actions is the call for individual conversion, a demand for a new life and an evangelical faith. *"We cannot love the poor well except with the heart of Christ."*⁹⁰
- ii) **COMMUNION WITH THE POOR IN HUMBLY LISTENING WITH LIVELY PRESENCE:** Thus this action demands of us to be close and share with the poor. It becomes a style of life and an attitude of love that seeks no reward. In reality, the poor can only be served in poverty.
- iii) **SUFFERING MARTYRDOM:** An obvious implication of liberative action in our world today is persecution and even martyrdom. If the poor are oppressed, those who join them will certainly share their lot, which comes from their struggles against oppression.
- iv) **HUMILITY:** This action should never be a source of self-glorification, nor the reason to despise those who are not in it. But humbly, it should be carried out so that it becomes a source of grace that an account will be demanded of.
- v) **LOVE:** This is the most radical attitude demanded in this action. It means loving the poor for who they are, without reserve and reward; loving them as Christ did [Jn. 13:1], and as if they are Christ [1 John 3:16].

B. INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

The church is also called to all the above enumerated implications, but to those I add these:

- Redefining all sectors of its activity: liturgy, religious education, economic administration and so on, in order to be opting for the poor.
- The poor expect the church to preach Jesus as the liberator of the human race for their hope. The church cannot betray the poor in this without betraying God. The church as an institution of faith and charity is also that of hope, and must take up this mission among the poor.

⁹⁰ PIXLEY and BOFF, *The Bible, the Church and the Poor*, p. 232.

- The church should also initiate and support autonomous organizations of the poor, by ways of creating or renewing them
- The poorest among the poor should be involved in the church's liberating action so that no one feels left out or excluded in the process.
- The church should not only pray for the poor, but also celebrate with them, their struggles, hopes and all signs of divine presence in their midst.
- They should be encouragement to participate at all levels. in the church, basic communities and other ministries, so that a real 'church of the poor' can emerge.
- For the church to avoid scandals and compromising the clarity of the gospel message, it should distance itself from the powerful. In some cases it should exclude notorious and unrepentant oppressors from sacramental communion.
- On practical implications, the church should take care to critically learn, what the situation of the poor and its causes are. This will enable it to adopt a clear and effective stance. It should also be aware of how historical and political ideologies look like from the stand point of the poor.
- The church should adopt strategies and tactics that favour the poor and are within their reach, so that the poor acts as protagonists in the mission of the church.
- If the church carries these out well, it would have succeeded in achieving its aim as a 'church of the poor' and 'church for the poor'. As Ryan concluded: ". . . *There would be set in motion a movement towards a church that is centered on the poor, a church that is contextual, democratic, gender inclusive, rather than centralized, authoritarian, gender exclusive*" church.⁹¹

5. HOW TO CARRY OUT THE ACTION

1. Peaceful means are preferred; they include persuasive dialogue, negotiations etc. Nevertheless, it can move from dialogue, through strikes or public rallies to violent confrontations.
2. There should be openness to the non - poor who seek to attach themselves to the poor when their interests coincide in seeking justice. But this will be done with utmost carefulness otherwise the group can be duped by a spy.
3. The action should be directed to realistic expectations. Usually what the poor want are basic needs: food, shelter, clothing, etc., and not the luxury of the rich.
4. Permanent conversion: The poor too should feel themselves called to conversion. Along

⁹¹ RYAN, "Liberation theology and Africa's Poor", in *Wajibu* vol. 12, no. 2, p.12

the liberation of society, there is also the liberation of hearts and minds.

6. CHARACTERISTICS OF GOOD ACTION

A. PRACTICAL OR EFFECTIVE

Liberative actions have to be really liberating in the actual sense of the word. It should surpass mere feeling and words. Compassion, words and ideas may be necessary but we should not rest content with them. However, what I wish to emphasize here is that this enterprise would be impossible without a minimal contact with the world of the oppressed. Poverty is practically a real problem as we have discovered, so nothing can replace specific concrete actions in eradicating it. Studies, word and ideas like this essay help to ask the right questions, and unmask relevant points and facts that pose actual threats to the status quo. But they can never replace real prophetic actions, denouncing injustice and proclaiming a new world in the particular situation. *"because only concrete practice can change an actual, real situation."*⁹²

B. PARTICIPATORY ACTION

The actions should be with the poor as one of them, rather than working for them. Otherwise the poor are reduced to the status of object of Christian love - of my charity. Good liberative action makes the poor true subjects, agents of liberation, partners in joint action. On the part of the non - poor, they must put themselves on the side of the poor not to make them their allies but to make themselves the poor's allies.

C. A POLITICAL ACTION

The action should also be political in character if it is to be practical. Pixley and Boff talk of option for the poor as a new form of love - precisely 'Political love.' ". . . *It seeks the real-life transformation of social structures, a new society without whole classes or masses of people living in poverty.*"⁹³ Other authors put it like this: *"Poverty reduction consists in filling the gap between rich and poor . . . The crucial ingredient of success is not so much the availability of financial resources as to the existence of what is often called 'political will'"*⁹⁴

⁹² PIXLEY and BOFF, *The Bible, the Church and the Poor*, p. 220.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 222.

⁹⁴ ALBANESE and ONYANGO, "Poverty: The world's most ruthless killer" in *New People*, no. 40, p. 20.

7. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In this last chapter, I dealt with concrete suggestions for actions to eradicate poverty. Summarily they are: a) Everyone is called to make decision and take action for or against the poor; church as an institution, the poor and the non - poor alike. I enumerated some actions we can take. b) The actions are not just any kind, but ones that are best described by this word 'praxis'. I discovered that the actions have their pastoral implication both on the individual level and institutional level.

c) Part of my findings is that good action has the characteristics of: practical, collective and transforming political results. It is effective, against all ineffective sentimentality and verbosity. It is in solidarity, against all harmful paternalism; structural, against all forms of dangerous aid mentality. This is the mission we are called to do, which is the pastoral implication of the option God our Father has for the poor.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

A look to the future.

This essay began as a theological reflection on our faith; as a way of conclusion, it will be wise to look at what lies ahead. So far I tried by way of reflection to apply theologically, liberation to the African context ridden by poverty. I rightly started the first part by considering the real poor in the real world. All my attempts would be devalued from the outset if they are not clearly correlated with actual living conditions of the poor. The second part by way of analysis saw how God of the bible through his actions, the prophets and finally through the incarnation of the son of God made preferential option for the poor. Then I moved on to the pastoral demands made by this option and the difficulties the church has in responding to them. In the third part I made recommendations to help us for action. The actions I enumerated are not all encompassing; but they are enough for helping the church in Africa, and each of us to be converted and opt for the poor. In my view they are not meant to rule out, but to appeal for further reflections and researches. In fact they only lead to fresh beginning of reflection that will consequently lead to new action. This means that numerous other perspectives will undoubtedly emerge from this work in future. This is the unending process of the pastoral circle of social analysis.⁹⁵

As much as the issue of poverty is complex and discouraging; the overall picture of human life in this end of the third millennium is bleak, and endangered to an alarming point. The major cause of alarm is hunger and the fact the millions of people, die of starvation every year. Also, everyone agree that no good can come from arms race, and still it goes on. Humanity now has the capacity to annihilate not only itself but also animals and vegetable species with it. The impotence of international bodies in the face of these problem - and the already mentioned ones - stem from the self - interest of those who stand to benefit from their oppression of other humans. Wherever there are oppression, there will be struggle to win life - sustaining conditions. It is not a moral imperative nor a scientific conclusion, but simple observation.

The God of the bible who loves the poor is always with them, even when they cannot find any course than struggle to defend their lives. We who believe in this God are instructed to follow Jesus, in his solidarity with the poor. The future of humanity depends on achieving life giving conditions; otherwise the indication is that all shall perish, rich and poor alike. Instinctively, humanity has to make a preferential option for the poor for survival.

⁹⁵ For more on the "circle of praxis" refer to, JOE HOLLAND and PETER HENRIOT, S.J., *Social Analysis*, [New York: Orbis Books, 1992], pp. 7 - 30.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

ALBANESE, JULIUS and ONYANGO, MAURICE, "Poverty: The world's most ruthless killer", in *New people* no. 40, January - February 1996.

BOFF, LEONARDO, and BOFF, CLODOVIS, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, Tunbridge wells: Burns and Oates Ltd., 1989.

BROWN, LEO, C., S.J., "Poverty", in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 11, Washington D.C.: Jack Heraty & Associates, 1981.

CADORETTE, CURT, et al., *Liberation Theology*, New York: Orbis Books, 1992.

THE COMPLETE PARALLEL BIBLE, New York / Oxford: Oxford University press, 1993.

DORR, DONAL, *Option for the poor*, New York: Orbis books, 1992.

DWYER, JUDITH, A., ed., *The New Dictionary of Catholic Social Thought*, Minnesota: The Liturgical press, 1994.

EAGLESON, JOHN and SCHARPER, PHILIP, eds., *Pueblo and Beyond*, New York: Orbis Books, 1979.

FLANNERY, AUSTIN, OP. ed., *Vatican Council II*, Bombay: St. Paul Publications, 1991.

GELIN, ALBERT, P.S.S., *The Poor of Yahweh*, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1964.

GREINACHER, NORBERT, and MULLER, ALOIS, eds., *CONCILIUM: The poor and the church*, number 104, New York: The Seebury Press, 1977.

GUTIERREZ, GUSTAVO, *A Theology of Liberation*, New York: Orbis Books, 1990.

HANKS, PATRICK, ed., *Collins Dictionary of the English language*, London: Collins, 1989.

HENRIOT, PETER, S.J., "A Continent on the margins", in *The Way*, vol. 37, no. 3, July 1997.

HOLLAND, JOE, and HENRIOT, PETER, S.J., *Social Analysis*, New York: Orbis Books, 1992

ILIFFER, JOHN, *The African poor*, Cambridge: University Press, 1992.

JOHN PAUL II, *Centesimus Annus*, Nairobi: St. Paul Publications.

_____ *"The church in Africa"*, Nairobi: Pauline Publication Africa, 1995.

_____ *Address to Priests, Religious and Laity*, Mexico City: May 12th, 1990, in "L'Osservatore Romano," English edition, May 14th, 1990.

KARRIS, ROBERT, J., "The Gospel according to Luke", in BROWN, RAYMOND E., S.S., et al., eds., *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1990.

KIZITO, SESANA, MCCJ, "When wealth is a senseless addiction", *Father Kizito's Note book*, in Lifestyle of The Sunday Nation, Nairobi: October 5, 1997.

LEO XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, Boston: St. Paul Editions.

LOHFINK, NORBERT, S.J., "Poverty in the laws of the Ancient Near East and of the Bible", in *Theological Studies*, Vol. 52, no. 1, March 1991.

LOHFINK, NORBERT, S.J., *The Option for the poor*, Berkeley: Berkeley Institute of Bible Archeology and law, 1987.

MARTIN, PHYLLIS, M., and O'MEARA, PATRICK, eds., *Africa*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986.

MCBRIEN, RICHARD, P. ed., *Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1995.

MOLTMANN, JURGEN *The crucified God*, London: SCM Press Ltd., 1989.

NICKOLOF, JAMES, B., *Gustavo Gutierrez - Essential writings*, New York: Orbis Books, 1996.

O'BRIEN, JOHN, *Theology and The Option for the poor*, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1992.

OKOLO, CHUKWUDUM, B., *The Liberating role of the church in Africa today*, Eldoret: AMECEA, Gaba Publication, Spearhead 119, 1991.

PAUL VI, *Octogesima Adveniens*, Boston: St. Paul Editons, 1971.

PIUS XI, *Quadragesimo Anno*, Boston: St. Paul Editons, 1942.

PIXLEY, JORGE and BOFF, CLODOVIS, *The Bible, the Church and the Poor*, Tunbridge wells: Burns & Oates Ltd., 1989.

PRITCHARD, JAMES, B., *The Ancient Near East*, Vol. 1, New Jersey: Princeton University press, 1973.

----- *The Ancient Near East*, Vol. II, New Jersey: Princeton University press, 1975.

RYAN, PATRICK, "Liberation Theology and African Poor", in *Wajibu* vol. 12, no. 2, 1997.

SCHEDL, CLAUS, *History of the Old Testament*, Vol. 1, New York: Alba House, 1973.

SOBRINO, JON, SJ., and ELLACURIA, IGNACIO, SJ., eds., *Systematic Theology*, London: SCM Press Ltd., 1996.

WINTON THOMAS, D., *Documents from Old Testament times*, New York: Harper Torchbook, 1961.

WORLD BANK, *Accelerated development in sub-Saharan Africa*, 1981.