

TANGAZA COLLEGE
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**POVERTY AS A CHALLENGE
TO THE CHURCH IN
AFRICA**

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(Religious Studies)**

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STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the material used herein has not been submitted for academic credit to any other institution. All sources have been cited in full.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Emery Kibal', written in a cursive style.

Signed: Emery KIBAL

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PREFACE

In choosing this particular issue of poverty as a challenge, I was stimulated by my dream for the dawning of a better social order in Africa which has never always been poor as I witness many individuals, households and entire nations subjected into the scourge of poverty, meaning living below the subsistence level.

Therefore this work aims to help African people and those interested in this continent recognise and assume their responsibility to change the systems and values that perpetrate misery and oppression. In this regard we Christians have an awesome responsibility and opportunity to significantly affect change on behalf of the most vulnerable members of the continent.

Thus, this work would never have been possible without the help of others, and I should take this opportunity to thank them. I am deeply indebted to Ambrose KIBAL and Jane NTOTILA, my parents to whom I dedicate this work for their love and education for justice imparted to me since my tender childhood. Moreover a word of thanks also goes to my formators in the Passionist family in which I belong for their incredible support and patience.

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Poverty by nature is a universal issue experienced throughout the world, but by its challenge to the Church's ministry especially in Africa by virtue of its acuity. Far from being a fate or a choice, African poverty is identified by the lack of material possessions and insufficiencies which, by its very existence is a human-made creation implying a lot of repression and destruction in all the spheres of life including religion.

Unworthy of human dignity, poverty reveals itself a very big challenge to a young Church in the process of being self-governing, self-ministering and self-supporting; this Church has become familiar with poverty and its demands. By all means, poverty is not a curse but rather an evil which undermines God's people from their original dignity. The African poverty, in contrast to other parts of the world's, is a counter-witness of a religion which fails to penetrate and transform the soul of African people. Thus Africa needs a transformed Christianity able to liberate it from poverty, greed, despair, dependency, idleness and oppressing structures.

Throughout our reflection we are going to deal mainly with the Church's responsibility and stance for the new social order on account of the oppressive structures that are operating within the continent. Moreover the church has the duty to challenge the complacency of African people who accommodate themselves with the existing and unjust order through education and structural reforms as part of her ministry. Before tackling such a crucial issue we will define the nature of poverty and determine its origin, respectively in chapter one and two. The third and fourth chapters are paradigmatic experiences from both the Old and New Testaments as the Jewish prophets and the first century Christians depicts an ideal community based on divine law though their life style and proclamations.

Before launching any option for the future in the sixth chapter, it is preferable to explore the prophetic role of the Church today in the fifth chapter as a response to the challenges of the poor. Finally, if the Church through her social concern, is to remain vital and creative, she must be able to speak to, listen to and struggle with African people so that her message remains capable of being accepted and interpreted without being compromised.

A. INTRODUCTION

From the beginning of human existence poverty has been a faithful companion of humans in every society. However the particularity of African poverty seems to be a source of concern for a modern man and woman, and especially the Church. Thus our first chapter will help us discover that African particularity and its various implications in the social and political arena are a hindrance to the Church in its ministry. So the first section of this chapter will be dedicated to the meaning of poverty while the second will be a description of the actual poverty of Africa which is the source of our concern.

B. MEANING OF POVERTY

By virtue of many meanings the concept *poverty* has been attributed along human history. We have presently the duty of clarifying and defining our approach to poverty. Poverty is the centre of our preoccupation today in Africa is a state of life characterised by lack of income and assets such as savings, provisions and resources. Far from viewing poverty as a fatalism by excluding from it any religious and human ideal Gutierrez provides us with a more complete definition of poverty as:

...a subhuman situation. Concretely, to be poor means to die of hunger, to be illiterate, to be exploited by others, not to know that you are being exploited, not to know that you are a person.¹

In addition poverty in Africa consists of lower global life expectancy, less access to medicine, safe water supplies, the higher population growth and the highest overall mortality rate. In this sense poverty signifies deprivation since essential and basic human needs are not met.

Contrarily to other parts of the world, this physical poverty in Africa goes beyond the rural areas to include groups such as Aged, disabled, Orphans, Unemployed; amazingly it affects also large parts of the urban working class through lack of adequate diet, suitable quality of health care, and basic services, sanitation, transport, education and clothing. Curiously we can identify

¹Gustavo GUTIERREZ, *A Theology of Liberation*, London: SCM Press, 1974, pp. 288-89.

...a today a variety of persons and households who are destitute because their income base is too little to satisfy even their minimal physical needs.

Since physical needs are not met, those affected have then a weak capacity to bargain for dignity, respectful treatment, political and legal right. Being so powerless they are unable to have easy access to services and goods allocated to the society of the rich by the rich. They are susceptible to a permanent defencelessness, insecurity and stress which likely lead them to the loss of self-worth, inferiority complexes, leaving them no thought beyond mere physical survival. We can therefore agree at the last resort that materialism of the destitute is a direct consequence of their vulnerability and powerlessness, creation of the very unjust structure. Moreover, victims of such a destitute condition are those whose survival cannot be maintained without being forced to beg.

C. THE ACTUAL POVERTY OF AFRICA

After having defined and described our approach to poverty we have come to determine African specificity as it has been a challenge for the Church's very essence in this world of transformation.

Manifestly, poverty in Africa is claiming victims on a growing scale both in terms of absolute numbers affected and the proportion of the population than any other part of the world. Indeed, the Oxfam Poverty Report, 1995 estimated the numbers of 218 million Africans living in poverty to be swelled by the end of the decade to 500 million total, with the downward trend of human welfare indicators likely to continue into the next century. At the same time Africa is the only continent of the developing world where projected literacy level proportions are declining and the infant mortality rates are rising.

While advocating for the cause of the poor and their dignity we are not inclined to glorify and praise their state as if they were saints and guiltless, or accusing the rich as being responsible of destitution, for both poor and rich, in some extent, are to be blamed because they could just comply with the situation without any thought beyond the current situation of safeguarding the status quo. In this regard John Cort did not hesitate to expose the conditions which the poor can bring about and assume in the community when stating that:

...the unemployed are dangerous and expensive. They breed crime, physical mental illness, loss of tax revenue, unbalanced budgets, high interest recession and depression, vicious circles and spirals, keynesian cycles of boom and-bust. And there is the psychic element, the psychic hunger. Those who are unemployed hunger not only for food but for fulfilment, for work that will permit them to reach their potential as children of God, to share in the creative work of God, making and remaking the world.²

Thus, in front of such abject poverty Christians must not stand indifferent since the condition of being poor is a clear expression of human sin as it is betraying their faith in a God who advocates for the love and cause of the oppressed. Poverty in Africa, by virtue of enormous proportions it has embodied to the extent of being tantamount to a global scandal. However, in the one hand, the number of poor people today is growing at an alarming rate, meaning beyond any forecast, while in the other, many evidences foresee an impossibility for the poor to break out of their condition since the actual structures of injustice and oppression which generate poverty are firmly safeguarded against any reform and revolution. The stronger the status quo is maintained, the more the conditions of the poor deteriorates.

By all means the vulnerability and low status usually attributed to the oppressed is attributable to the overall sub-Saharan countries since their land, livestock, fisheries, minerals, roads, and others infrastructures are generally undeveloped, posing naturally major obstacles for productive advancement of the continent and its people. This is why Stryker and his colleagues reached the conclusion that:

Africa is exceptionally vulnerable to international economic changes beyond its control, not only in the prices received for its exports, but also with respect to the market demand for its narrow range of commodities, the availability and the cost of needed financial resources and technologies, and the style of development promoted by rich and powerful countries.³

Therefore Africa has been reduced as the largest per capita importer globally as long as the coexist unbalanced relationship between the people and their unequal access to productive resources, technology, skills or political connections; and the cost of these imports are obviously significant factors and apparent in public finances crises as well as in other socio-economic life. This state of affair is in fact a predisposition of African nations' low status and

John CORT, *Christian Socialism*, New York: Orbis Books, 1988, p.33.

Richard STRYKER, *Poverty, inequality and development choices in Contemporary Africa*,

in M. PHYLLIS & P O'MEARA, eds., *Africa*, 2nd ed., London & Basingstoke:

Macmillan Publishers, 1987, p.330.

ability in the world capitalist system; they are and still being preyed by internationalism, partly at the cause of African oppression.

From such a description of African poverty, we have then enough reasons to believe it is a source of concern for any sensitive being and above all the Church whose mandate is to preach about God's kingdom whereby human being, image of the living God, deserves a decent treatment. However at the present situation of Africa, this Church mandate is being challenged; thus the need for an alternative social order in the continent. Being a challenge, African poverty does not suggest to be an historical fate since it implies a human condition. As it has been so far described, poverty seems to be depicted in its extreme characteristic, becoming synonymous to destitution and marginalisation as long as it has permitted its victims to live under subsistence level.

D. CONCLUSION

Both sections of this chapter on African poverty indicate how servile and dehumanising a scourge of poverty as it is affecting a great majority of the human population.

Beside the lack of tangible assets for subsistence, African poverty does not as well isolate its victims from isolation, vulnerability and powerlessness which together deny its victims from accessing goods and services and at the same time weakens their participation in social, economic and political sphere of the society. Consequently they are turned into permanent dependants who are begging for their survival. This particular situation, as the larger part of the continent is affected, is scandalous since human beings are deprived from their worth and dignity. What makes the African particularity is that the scourge of poverty is taking on enormous proportions in the society, insinuated by its rapid perpetuation a result of complex forces of injustice that have taken hold. Hence an attitude of protest is arising among modern people in view of a better economic order.

However an alternative order can only be achievable if the causes of the actual dehumanising condition are determined as the next chapter is going to tackle.

A. INTRODUCTION

The abject poverty which has affected Africa is not and cannot be regarded as a phenomenon devoid of any human manipulation. It is rather a product of forces of domination and oppression exercised through a perverse economic and social structures controlled by both outside and internal agents.

Besides these human manipulation of the system, African misery is also nurtured by a cultural orientation incompatible with the modern and development drive that entails different behaviours and mentality. Thus in this chapter we shall determine the complex causes of African poverty by identifying their real nature as external and internal, respectively generated outside as well as by local involvement, yet culturally conditioned and affecting the economic arena of the continent.

B. EXTERNAL CAUSES

Referring to international forces, there is a growing awareness today that injustices have been done to *poor* Africa to the extent that we can agree that rich countries have underdeveloped Africa for the sake of their ever unquenched capitalism. However external manipulation had partly contributed to the African global set back, and this state of affair exists within both economic and extra economic arenas.

B.1 DUBIOUS INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC FACTORS

Long after its political independence Africa is still not considered as an equal partner in the world market since it has little or no control over the price of oil, the rising interests rates, deteriorating terms of trade, reducing the value of the commodities of export together with protectionism in which the rich countries make the market access difficult.

In addition we have to recognise the huge debt contracted by African countries with banks and countries of the North, including monetary policies of the world bank and the I

under the pretext of structural adjustment with no consideration of the social and communal needs of African countries. Indeed since the 1980s attempts of this *policy dialogue* by international agencies has been utterly disastrous for Africa on account of the nature of the reforms demanded for. Unfortunately the structural adjustment goes along with radical and draconian measures such as reduction of the overall level of consumption apparently through devaluation of the local currency, cuts in Government expenditure like education, health care, power and water supply.

It implies also radical reduction or complete elimination of food and other consumption subsidies, reductions of wages, restrictions in the availability of credit, privatisation of public utilities while immediate prices increase for the services they provide, and finally higher taxes together with higher interest rates. All these measures have victimised Africa the more, for average per-capita income has been falling, and both unemployment and underemployment increased drastically. Hence adjustment in Africa has been sought as instrument for domination of private wealth and power rather than devoted for public service.⁴

Moreover there could be no doubt about the arms trade and its implications in present day Africa causing major setbacks to the consolidation process of African states, weakening the links of solidarity between national communities; this was manifestly felt through a tremendous loss of life and property. We have also come to observe with regret that colonial power made no attempt to increase production or to up-grade colonised lands to industrialisation and modern agricultural methods. On this ground Africa has become dependent on rich countries as mere suppliers of raw materials.

At the same time Africa provided an open market for industrial products and profitable opportunities for commercial companies, but being offered in turn only cheap labour. This is presumed as outcome unjust commercial relations between rich and poor countries. As a result the poor nations become poorer while the rich ones grow still richer; for prices which are fixed in the market can produce unfair results, especially when the economic condition of the contracting parties are too unequal because the consent of the parties does not sufficiently guarantee the justice to their contract.

Unfortunately we have come to realise that in nearly every African country today,

Graham HANCOCK, *Lords of poverty*, 2nd ed., London: Mandarin Paper Backs, 1991. p. 60.

governments do not control decision-making. They are decided by co-operation programmes which are determined almost unilaterally. Therefore it is impossible to control the choices of Africa's possible futures; thus most governments are not truly representatives of the African people. In this regard Africa needs to be decolonized once again, not only in terms of political structures, but also in terms of the post-colonial generation drives.

In addition, there is no benevolent aid from powerful countries since priority is always given to their national interests and these latter are generally pursued in terms of trade and economic policies. In many cases there is often a profit motive behind aids bestowed in Africa by industrialized countries. The genuine commitment of some lay and religious as well as foreign Non Governmental Organisation (N.G.Os) for human promotion of the continent. Indeed there is now a growing awareness of the concrete cases of injustice, expressions of poverty in different geographical forms; that injustice is manifestly incarnated in actual economic, social and political structures of Africa, and by their very existence are at the origin of the actual infra-human and deplorable life-style in the continent.

Despite the brutal destruction of the old culture, we have therefore to recognise and accept the fact that external penetration has brought the people of Africa into direct contact with a vital and universal principles that enables them to begin moving towards progress. However the next section will help us be disillusioned about the responsibility of foreign penetration as indigenous agents prove to be more involved as far as the proliferation of poverty is concerned. This victimisation of Africa has conditioned to a certain extent African people to a development of growing mistrust of any doctrinal message of human liberty, for their standard of judgement is the real commitment to the struggle to help the oppressed come out of their marginalization.

B. 2. INTERNATIONAL NON-ECONOMIC FACTORS

Furthermore, Africa has been subjected to an imposition of values from an industrialized world allowing no time for gradual adjustment. This has led to the rupture in the traditional biological, social, and cultural balance; meaning the loss of identity, of energy and dignity. The people are continuously regretting a better past world that will never come back while the present time inferiority complex is being created.

Today there is a growing consciousness that the super imposition of modern government on traditionally-minded people has resulted to wide spread confusion since their leaders are still to a large extent the product of the traditional culture. Moreover to acknowledge some negative consequences related to aid workers' inclination to decisions without reference to those they will most immediately affect. This state of affairs led tragically to irrelevant responses apparent through delays, inadequate and inappropriate solutions to catastrophes while challenging the recipients at the same time with a long development rather than short-term since their creativity and eagerness for development is obstructed by ready-made and effortless solutions.

Consequently the people are conditioned by the donors' cultural and technical superiority. At the root of the very humanitarian ethic lies the notions of compassion that are in a sense paternalistic and non-professional.

C. INTERNAL CAUSES

Being aware that their poverty has been partly the result of foreign manipulation, African people must also assume their own responsibility by virtue of active involvement of indigenous forces for the proliferation of poverty by their relative Co-operation with international forces. Political independence has disillusioned and frustrated all the hopes, often unrealistic for growth and development of the continent on regard to the human and natural potentials then at disposal due to their incapacity to master them due to various reasons summed up into cultural and economic headings.

C.1 CULTURAL FACTORS

Accordingly we can mention among those reasons the natural obstacles, namely deserts and the Equatorial forests preventing an easy communication for commerce and contact, including climatic obstacles. However the main causes of socio-economic stagnation that has kept Africa underdeveloped are cultural, as the social structures themselves prove inadequate through the lack of dynamism required to establish a society in the modern sense. Hence culture is always the matrix of any civilisation.

In this perspective the social situation of Africa is precisely linked to the immobility of the continent. It is the absence of an original inner drive toward development; inability for the people to initiate their own transformation by destroying internal and external chains. Indeed the initial impetus toward revolution came from outside, namely from Europe since Africa did not experience the evolution of ideas that transformed and dynamized the Western people, leading them to science, technology, modern organisation of the society, industrialisation and production. It was only as the establishment of the great principles of democracy and social justice.

On this regard it is not that easy for a person of one culture to understand the concepts created by another since the mentality, the way of reasoning and the kind of training reflect a vast cultural and intellectual diversity. Therefore Africa has to find it rough to get started on the road to development unless a major change is operative in its understanding of relations between the person and God, the person and nature as well as its conception of work.

As a matter of fact some social anthropologists have been glorifying Africans for being a tremendous religious people while its very concept of god(s) as well as of nature seems inadequate in regard to progress because its relation with the divine and with nature is one of contemplation, not of tension, discovery or conquest; instead people are eager to preserve the old order for the sake of peacefulness with the divine one, the ancestors and nature. This applies also in their concept of work; work is looked upon purely as means of subsistence and not as means of controlling nature and improving one's standard of life and the social order.

Consequently, the cause of African backwardness cannot be found either in racial inferiority, even lack of technical knowledge, but from inherited patterns of behaviour preventing Africa from being a respectful partner in the modern world community. What is lacking is not technical knowledge, but mostly new attitudes required to produce the responsible, reliable and hard working people able to set Africa on the path of development.

C.2 ECONOMIC AND STRUCTURAL MISMANAGEMENT

African governments are generally recognised by their poor economic performance. They fail in promoting material affluence of their people under the pretext of defending the property of citizens and security of goods while they loose sight of the economy and the contributions of the community goods entrusted to them.

No wonder therefore the army and police have been converted from community bands of palace retainers, whose only function is to protect the powerful and adage while the common people are simply submitted to repression. We cannot undack of morally well-trained leadership able to challenge the people to noble height, thought and action, and to eschew unbecoming actions.

Unfortunately African leaders and the people to some extent still confuse performance with chieftaincy whereby even elected officials wish to stay in power for the governance has become for most African leaders a business and an investment for and it has been sadly observed that African leaders spent 8 billion US dollars in 1997 on expenditure, equivalent to three quarters of the overall continental aid received. At the same time wars have been another calamity for the continent which has become a the world's longest conflicts materialised in Angola, Burundi, Chad, Ethiopia, Liberia and Somalia.

Beyond surprises, in many instances, the national treasury is no more the common service of all, but turned to be the leaders' private fortune pointed to secure their profits. In many cases these structures inherited from the colonial time, though at apparent adaptations, yet devoid of their intrinsic meanings and original purposes preserved till now. Indeed the flagrant and deliberate diversion of public resources to ends, incompatible with the purpose for which they were assigned, mainly resulted in growth of bureaucracy.

Thus it has been a general orientation for an African to view his or her work as a game rather than service; leaders as well as some middle group behave as if they are accountable to no one. A dramatic example is that of President Mobutu Sese Seko Konde Ngbendu Bona Obundu of the Democratic Republic of Congo. According to *Lords of poverty* owns fifty-one Mercedes-benz motor cars, eleven chalets in the United Kingdom and France and a beach side villa on the Costa del sol;⁵ and his wealth is estimated at 5 or 6 billions US dollars, more than enough to pay back the entire foreign debt of the country. To ensure the education and health care of some millions of non-immunised children. The extravagances and anomalies characterise the behaviour of a great many governments in Africa. They are concerned only with empowering themselves at any cost; some of these regimes are

Graham HANCOCK, *op. cit.*, p.64.

an rights in the most direct and repulsive manner, others are profligate wastrels and undrels, most are infected by the virus of corruption.

Frequently food aid does more harm than good while being conducted by well-meaning ignorant humanitarians leading into the collapse in prices of the domestic grain market and increased privation of rural producers. Thus there are countries that consistently import more than they export, and thus spend more than they earn while expecting for more aid. The world's debt now exceeds a trillion dollars while the little revenue earned from exports is carefully allocated to the payment of the old debts. Such financial disturbance on a massive scale obviously does call for a rapid and adequate adjustment. By all means structural adjustment is an inescapable and unavoidable pragmatic necessity for many African countries.

Besides, the population explosion seems to be exerting tremendous pressure on the environment, forcing the over-cultivation of arable land, widespread deforestation, soil erosion and worse still desertification to the extent that people and livestock are in danger. Tribalism creates division within the country and appears clearly in politics where parties are formed in a tribal basis, leading minority tribes being oppressed; this is the consequence of the incomplete formation of the spirit and national identity; in this regard Rwanda and Burundi are our proof. However demographic revolution has been the only sector that has had some immediate success in Africa; this took place without any revolution of ideas, of organisation of society or of technical production.

This situation though complex, can be explained both because of the lack of a tradition of public service as well as inefficiency and insouciance manifest in all structures such as government installations(offices), universities, hospitals, schools, churches and above all in the business sectors.

D. CONCLUSION

After a detailed listing of causes, be they internal or external, Africa is then again seen to have been a victim of unequal advantage as the result of an unjust world economic order. Despite political independence, many countries find themselves still subject to the law of the stronger known as neo-colonialism causing serious damage to the society and its economy. It means the western interference in the economy of Africa has been expressive through

ialism and economical as well as political imperialism.

However the fundamental problem of development evolves around education in the concept of life, the development of a new mentality and culture which are now lacking in African people through their lack of anxiety about progress and novelty. This is very expressive of some distorted structures at the origin of mismanagement and corruption. Despite the existence of some natural obstacles to development, there are individual and general attitudes of greed and selfishness at the core of structural sins incarnated and protecting the greed and wealth of the exploiting minority. By all means the fundamental cause of African poverty is cultural, as the root of all other distressing evils. Hence African people have not required the concern for development that is characteristic in developed countries, and the first step to development itself.

As Africa is desperately looking forward to an alternative in the social and economic development, the Bible in the next chapter is going to offer a paradigmatic experience of an oppressed people being visited by a God who opted to eradicate their poverty through the action of the prophets, the prophets.

CHAPTER III: HOW GOD DEALS WITH POVERTY THROUGH THE PROPHETS

A . INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we are going to discover the social, economic, political and religious context within which the prophets emerged and operated. We are going to deal mainly with the prophets, such as Amos, Micah, and Jeremiah.

Here we are going to deal within the realm of a settled Israel, meaning after the advent of the Monarchy as the urban and commercial way of life was greatly developed. Hence a society characterised by the centralisation of social structures, giving rise to the existence of the Royal official and the standing army whose sustenance was under the expenses of the community beside the tolls exacted on trade in transit. These changes shaped new patterns of life and behaviour apparent in the social and economic environment. So the first section of this chapter will be a sketching of the prophetic duty and action preceded by a brief definition of the concept *prophet*.

Then the second section will help to determine the relevance of the prophets to the society of Israel and its particular history.

B . ISRAEL AND ITS PROPHETS

B.1. PROPHEPIC IDENTITY

At times the word *prophet* might appear ambiguous in the Old Testament as it could refer to either functionaries of the national religion or attached in some way to its sanctuary. The prophet Samuel is well fit as an example, first of all when he is connected with the sanctuary place (*1Sam.9:11-26*), and then as leader of a band of ecstatic prophets at Ramoth-gilead (*1Sam.10:19:18-24*). However we have traces of Israelite prophets in a strict sense, only after the establishment of the monarchy among the peasant clans of Israel through their denunciation of the injustices done by the new ruling classes, incompatible to the value of their religion.

Therefore, the prophets, far from enjoying a hierarchical status within the society as charismatic figures as they were making an impact on their contemporaries because they were God's envoys and had a special relation with Him. Insofar as they enjoyed a direct relation with the divinity, true prophets were able to preserve a relative autonomy from the political structures of their society. So in accepting or rejecting them people are accepting or rejecting God on the grounds of them being God's medium.

B.2. THE DUTY OF PROPHETS IN ISRAEL

Prophets in Israel were concerned with social conditions and public issues revealing a real crisis since the actual human situation and fundamental moral issues were ignored. The centre of their preoccupation was the anxiety to remind and call back the people to their fathers, a God who is ever active within their history whose ethics were to lead to social transformation. It was through worship and social laws within their community that they expressed the vitality of their religion as well as the moral standards they strove for through their ministry.

Indeed the prophets helped recreate the religion and the culture of Israel through their dominant influence as we still recall with admiration. By all means the teachings and actions of the prophets were a clear reflection of the actual people's ways of living and its problems through their poor personal relationships. However, the prophets' motivations were religious. They strove to model society on the divine standard in order to promote good and the welfare of the people. In this account Amos was accurate when he exhorted his contemporaries: "*Hate evil, love good and establish justice (mishpath) in the gate (Am.5:15).*"

Thus their main preoccupation was no other than giving testimony to the circumstances of their call, which is mostly crisis. Their duty was to stimulate and invite the people to decide and act when faced with crisis.

B.3. PROPHETIC REACTIONS

Israel's prophets were challenging the society of their time in response to the social and institutional ill which was a flagrant abomination to Yahweh's covenant. Apparently Yahweh wanted to be at the people's centre of reference since their nomadic tradition and religion were not to accommodate with the new physical condition predisposing them to make compromises.

So the traditional and equalitarian order of Israel was disappearing and this gave rise to a very complex stratified society of free Israelites as well as slaves whose lot was only a shadow of their former power; and there existed resident aliens (*Gerim*), descendants of Canaanites, and foreign migrants. Alongside them existed also the class of the wealthy land-owners and merchants who were well associated with the court, the army, the professional group of priests, wise men and prophets, the elite of their new civilisation.

Privileges such as literacy was confined strictly to this upper class. Slowly individualistic occupations became so flagrant that the interests and values inherent to an equalitarian society were disappearing through judicial corruption, greed, lust for power, competition, inhumanity, commercial dishonesty, debauchery of the wealthy and their mad struggle for material gain. As the result crimes such as violence, theft and all kind of immoralities were rampant to the extent that the worth of life and properties of the weak members of the society were no more safeguarded.

Indeed Israel's search for self-satisfaction was beyond her control that her fundamental values and identity as God's people were sacrificed by their option for immediate advancement. This is what the protest of the prophets was all about since the existing social order did not define, define and sustain human and social values characteristic to their covenant with Yahweh. So the prophets found it urgent to tackle ethical and religious ground in order to rehabilitate the economic and political structures by fostering the establishment of justice, righteousness, love and integrity as capital values which would restore their broken covenant with Yahweh.

However the Prophets' appeal proved fruitless as social evil was amounting to a general catastrophe as they fiercely denounced them with such a vivid realism:

...there is no truth, no kindness, no knowledge of God in the land; cursing, murder, theft, adultery break out, and crime follow crime" (Hos. 4: 1-2).

Their descriptions point to the concrete actions posed or left out by their fellow countrymen. The responsibility falls accurately upon the beneficiaries of the existing system, namely those who live in luxury heedless of the destitute because they have let evil invade each and every realm of life; and social ill ceased to be simply individualistic aberrations but structuralised. Often in their vindication, the prophets show a double attitude of anger and compassion for the oppressors and pity for the victims. To this is also associated the prophetic rebuke of the

ular complacency and degeneracy:

Yahweh indicts the elders and rulers of His people: it is you who have cons [all the fruit of] the vineyard; what is in your houses has been plundered the poor (Is.3:14).

The corruption of the social order had resulted from the substitution of the worshipping of Yahweh and its inherent values by a false religion leading only to their self-destruction in their trust was put in material satisfactions, yet at their own cost. An appropriate protest is the Canaanite fertility cult daring to sanction the very vicious practice among Yahweh community:

... a man and his father go in to the prostitute, they are profaning my name,...and vine which has been seized they drink in the houses of their (Am.2:7,8).

These are false principles and corrupting practices in contrast to the nature of Yahweh to the nature of the new community. He seeks to create amidst human resistance. The social evils denounced by the prophets, be they political or economical were allied with a false morality which in turn produced a false morality generating a distorted social order. However, we still witness distortions in every human history if structures are not founded upon the principle of justice and truth. Thus the next section will be a proof of that failure, giving prophetic figures, prefiguration of an alternative social order.

C. PROPHETIC RELEVANCE BEYOND ISRAEL

The prophets as agents of God's active involvement in Jewish history, continue to be acknowledged as such in any culture as long as God ever permanent concern for human welfare still be felt among people of any culture. So there is no doubt about the relevance of the prophets, their message and their actions within each society in process of recreation.

C.1. PROPHETIC PROTESTS

The society in which we live today is based on a wrong economic principle consisting of people not deserving their actual standard of life. Either they do not have what belongs to them precisely because others have, use and enjoy what is not theirs. Consequently the society is

ted at all levels of an uncontrolled crisis, that some members take advantage of the weakness or the inability of others in order to guarantee their selfish pursuit which is no less than a continuation of the injustice of the dominant order. Here the critical analysis of Micah is enlightening as he uttered:

A woe to those who devise wickedness and work evil upon their beds! When morning dawns, they perform it, because it is in the power of their hands; they covet fields and seize them; and houses, and take them away; they oppress a man and his house, a man and his inheritance (Mic.2:1-2).

By all means the achievement of happiness in a society depends mainly upon its values. A just society which is to be supported by good values, which seek satisfaction from their own means and by appropriate methods. This basic and fundamental factor will condition public opinion, economic activities, legal and judicial practice, social institutions, public morality and religion. When the meaning, the worth and the direction of life are no more real, the whole social fabric collapses automatically as it was experienced by the Jews at the end of the monarchy. As a matter of fact, the social revolution initiated by the prophets was motivated by no more than their anxiety to revive essential ethics and social creativity. Yahweh Himself is ever in the struggle for social justice by being the authentic ally of the oppressed and dispossessed.

The prophetic denunciation was guiltily felt among the powerful, namely the civil and religious authorities as it aroused in them resentment because it sounded too subversive. Isaiah was banished while Jeremiah underwent imprisonment, and thereafter accusation and finally threatened with death. However the reluctance of the powerful was due to their fear of laying hands upon a *holy man* as well as the popular support which they enjoyed in view of their position for an appeal to ancient rights and liberties. On the contrary, the outcome of the prophetic mission had affected every constituent element of the social order for neglecting the basic values and characteristics of their professed Religion. Hence the prophets tried to confront the rulers and warn about the possible destruction likely to affect the people as to stimulate their repentance and return to Yahweh:

If you are responsive and obedient, you shall eat the best of the land; but if you refuse and are rebellious you shall test the sword (Is.1:19).

By all means, the people and their community are of prior importance in contrast to political, social, economic and religious structures. The former and the ethical values and principles are paramount. Hence the welfare of the people as well as that of the community cannot be achieved without reference to Yahweh whose cult demands justice and kindness to all true worshippers. People's welfare implies a fair distribution of economic facilities rather than the accumulation of private wealth. Moreover true prophets as instruments of social justice, through their pronouncement, out to ensure a rule of right within the society and to preserve the common good against a systematic power of evil which was involving the whole community.

C.2 CONTEMPORARY PROPHETS AND THEIR IDEAL

As long as one commits oneself to the promotion of justice in respect to human and fundamental rights, implicitly one is God's instrument because he or she co-operates in God's work of creation and liberation as His medium in the society.

Co-operating with God requires a vocation and courage since one will have to contend with individual greed and the society firmly built on principles of greed and selfishness whose main concern is self-worship. This was and still is the main mission of the prophets, namely to challenge and confront all the structures which embody the oppressive greed at the expense of the less fortunate. Today this oppressive and structural greed is well represented through multinational firms, cheap labour, the exploitation of children, the billion-dollar-trading institution, the arms trade; for their main preoccupation is profit rather than the common good.

Indeed contemporary history has provided us with some stimulating examples of prophets who made a right reading of the social reality, of social power, and social goods who directed their efforts in raising people's conscience in regard to justice; among them we can mention a few of them such as Rev. Martin Luther King, Archbishop Oscar Romero, Rigoberta Menchú, and Bertha Camara, people who have proved the effectiveness of God's ever concern in restoring contemporary society in need of restoration by their courageous commitment to justice.

Besides, it is worth to note that here as always, the justice question is raised from below rather than from above since the upper class is mainly preoccupied with the question of prosperity and security whose cost oppresses the voiceless in society. So a prior analysis of the actual cri-

It implies discernment and critic to enable the prophet to establish the profound justice which is sanctioned and practised within the society, as the first duty of the prophet. The prophetic denunciation is to be directed first of all to the rulers who embody the corruptures, for being beneficiaries of the actual system. Indeed the ground of injustice is laid in the economic realm since it has to do with access to and control of life as well as wealth.

Thus a possible social transformation could only occur if the prophet commits himself to raising people's awareness: both the oppressors as well as the oppressed. This awareness presupposes a social criticism of the actual distortion in view of an appropriate and restorative, well rooted on a divine consideration, be it explicit or not. For a prophet is expected to be the educator of the people because everything follows from their discernment and understanding of God and history. So the prophetic vindication has been nothing less than the dismantling of the corrupted and wrong social order for the sake of an alternative and divinely ordained order rooted on the divine standard.

In fact we can proudly recognise today a number of people, be they Christians or Muslims, even the so-called atheists, deserving the title of prophets by their tireless commitment to justice and right through their caritative, and above all through educating, in expectation of a better social order. However despite their religious confession they can rightly be acknowledged as contemporary prophets in virtue of their stand on behalf of justice, be it explicit or not. This same prophetic drive can also be seen operating among some civil servants while versed in the struggle of reform provided that their motivation is the promotion of the common good. By all means no serious revolution can be achieved in a corrupted society if the worthiness of life and property is not at the centre of their struggle.

D. CONCLUSION

Along human history there always emerged awkward people, who on behalf of God were committed to the reordering of the community's ethical standard while facing momentous crises. Indeed Israel has provided such examples in its own history, mostly in 8th and 7th centuries B.C as those agents challenged their actual and corrupted social, economic and political structures which were a betrayal to their professed faith which advocates for human

ty on behalf of Yahweh.

Therefore we refer to Israel's prophets for the simple reason that speaking to their o they put in disclosure the reality and the nature of the present-time crisis, which inv ies involved to judgement, decision, and action-taking according to the moral standar ritual understanding whereby common good and God are at the centre of all motivation the truth defended and strove for by Hebrew Prophets is still valid for every gener ce it is a transcultural and anachronic truth.

Consequently that same prophetic drive is still stimulating people beyond the confi Jewish geography since Yahweh deserves a universal jurisdiction through His rating presence in any culture. Therefore we believe that the Church community appropriate herald of that prophetic and divine mission in today's world. Thus we hope t the provisions for the Church's response to human crisis, especially poverty in the otors, starting with the New Testament through the Middle Ages until our presen erience.

POOR

A. INTRODUCTION

From the Old Testament texts, especially the prophetic writings our previous chapter provided indication of God's particular attention and care for the less privileged in the society. We have been able to discover the actual stands of the prophets on behalf of God in their action and how their action as well as message have been relevant beyond the border of their own days in the second section.

Since Jesus message and action is the prototype of God's concern for the weak members of the society, the New Testament is the milieu par excellence to draw God's involvement within human history as the first Christians tried to actualize and incorporate Jesus' message in order to establish a love-motivated community whose sure consequence would be the eradication of poverty for the establishment of equality among all, foretaste of God's kingdom.

Hence the three sections of this chapter are three attempts for the paradigmatic community whereby sharing, Christ-motivated love and equality are promoted and fought against poverty as they are shown in the Acts of the Apostles, in Paul writings and in the Epistles, respectively in the second and the third section preceded by an overall presentation of the first century context of poverty and the corresponding response of the *Church* in that period.

B. FIRST CENTURY: THE POOR AND POVERTY

In this section we are going to discover, through some indications provided by sources at our disposal, the challenge of the poor or poverty and the manner Christian community in the first century dealt with it, after appropriating Jesus' teachings. This was the time when a person's social status was determined by the amount of property and special building predisposition (her) either to freedom and independence or dependence and vulnerability. A poor person in this context held a status lower than that of a slave.

However in the post-Jesus Roman empire, poverty was equivalent to lack of freedom for full human potential. This lack unable to achieve satisfaction of vital needs and end of being deprived of social and political influence besides the lack of economic security through the latter conditions the first. In this perspective poverty and wealth were viewed in negative and positive terms respectively. But the Church in conformity with her master was to take another tone by showing solidarity with the humbled and disinherited whom Roman society would not spare. Thus the Church' attitude attracted the weakest members of the society through a revolutionary style of life by choosing to side with them in order to overthrow the existing oppressive structure of the society. This objective could not be achieved without a full knowledge of the actual social condition and the willingness to assume it.

Since Christ and bearing witness about Him was at the core of their community life, early Christians, especially the Jerusalem community were able then to develop a free attitude towards riches and their use which in turn promoted an equalitarian community without discrimination. This was a logical outcome of their faithfulness to Jesus' mandate about wealth, justice and mercy as their fellowship was made up of less privileged members of the society. Well: all were of one heart and soul, be they Jews or Gentiles, rich or poor because they were to be one in Christ Jesus.

This attraction of the poor in the Church has been comforted and strengthened by the promise of the coming of God's Kingdom pledged by Jesus through his life and death. This promise became the foundation stone of the community of disciples whose efforts made their impact extend beyond their circle of action. By all means the way of responding to poverty in the light of the Gospel ideal differ from one community to another; thus the need to sketch the accounts of the primitive and prototype community of Jerusalem according to the book of Acts of the apostles as well as to the epistle of James and the writings of Paul, especially the Corinthian community, each reflecting a particular experience of the writer.

C. PRIMITIVE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY IN JERUSALEM

C.1. THE EARLY CHURCH IN JERUSALEM ACCORDING TO THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

From the Acts of the Apostles, we can presume that the expectation of the Holy Spirit and the imminent return of the Lord is an indication for the Jerusalem community to have been constituted of the "poor of Yahweh" as well. This disposition did allow them to be ready to share their possessions. However, in the book of Acts we have no evidence to determine with certitude the proper economic status of those who made up the Jerusalem Christian community since they were people of varying amounts of possessions.

However the poor of Yahweh are known as quiet and religious people, endeavoring to serve God's will with the hope of being privileged by God's blessing in line of the poor of the Old Testament. Both poor have a clear assurance that the (actual) existing sad condition of destitution would end and they would be rewarded by a diadem of unfailing glory. This eschatological expectation is the product of a typical Jewish community well expressed in the Revelation of John.

The Pentecostal experience, stimulating to communal sharing, appears to be the source of their fellowship on account of their common ownership of goods and possessions. This material sharing can only be a consequence of a deeper fellowship based on the sharing of faith through a common prayer and the breaking of the bread in their homes (Acts 2:38-42). The sense of one's economic status, each would feel in solidarity with other members, for the church itself strove to eradicate needy conditions among its members by trying to fulfill the Deuteronomic promise: *but there will be no poor among you (Dt. 15:4)*.

In this perspective poverty is not seen by any means as an ideal to pursue rather than a counter-value to vanquish and eradicate in view of a society without poor. This new order would be a result of a loving fellowship expressive through the act of sharing with the poor. The characteristic of the Jerusalem community, for each had to receive as any had needed, as depicted in Acts, we can hardly call it *Church of the Poor* because none of them would have been poor and misfortune as long as there was sharing of goods. What is known as sharing of goods or possessions is the result of the celebration of breaking of bread symbolising the

...Christian people of God in its ideal expression. Their intimate bond with Christ stimulates them to transform themselves into a (new) community of sharing fellowship, expressive through sharing goods and possession without any speculation.

On account of this common ideal, the apostles managed to associate their preaching with loving care for each other in everyday life, especially in the service of the table. This same, by virtue of historical demands, the specific duty of deacons whose main prerogative was probably the care of needy members of the community.

C.2. THE EARLY CHURCH ACCORDING TO THE LETTER OF JAMES

Despite the apparent contradiction with Paul, James in his message keeps alive the prophetic tradition about the poor as well as their rights. Manifestly this prophetic tradition is shown in an "action re-play-off" some of the strongest denunciations against the greed and arrogance of the rich in the Old Testament:

you covet and you cannot get, so you fight and wage war ... behold, the wages of the labourers who mowed the fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out and their cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord (James 4:2 and 5:4)

James denounces as well in his chapter two any discriminative attitude of preferring the rich and powerful against the poor and powerless, attitude sadly experienced even during worse times.

Facing the imminent coming of the Lord, the author of James invites the poor to patience since only God is able to care for them. Moreover he summons the rich to be punished for exploiting the poor. In contrast he gives priority to the poor as those who should await whole heartily for the kingdom and its justice, while the rich are being stranded and have decided whether to serve God or earthly things. For these latter constitute, according to James, an hindrance from practising true piety which advocates the care of the less privileged members of the community. Hence the author does not suggest a strategy or an alternative leading to a new social order.

By all means, both Acts and James' vision and long for a Christian community where everyone is ready so that they may all share an equal social status. Thus such a model of society is meant to indicate all forms of exploitation of the poor.

While overwhelmed by the hope of the imminent coming of the Lord, Preserving the structure of their world would have not been their concern.

As Paul observed, the *koinonia* of both spiritual and material riches has and should extend beyond the limits of the local Church in order to promote a universal mutual sharing. Distinctions of class or rank would be eliminated by virtue of the Lord's supper. In the thought of Paul the theme of poverty is not a priority by its own accord, but there appears a concern for the promotion of an active charity within the community. This concern for the poor has been expressed by Paul's eagerness to obtain funds for the saints in Jerusalem. By no means does Paul view poverty as a virtue to be fostered, but as a participation in Jesus' self-offering humiliated for the redemption of the whole creation.

F. CONCLUSION

By virtue of God's preferential option for the poor, the whole New Testament community is called to give precedence to those in need as the community is to care for them through the *koinonia* that flows from the breaking of bread as well as the agape, by overcoming all barriers of social status. Stimulated by the spirit of fellowship, the New Testament community warned the rich to dispose and share their wealth in order to promote and strengthen community brotherly love.

In fact, the Acts of the Apostles portrays the Jerusalem community as the model of concern for the poor through the sharing of possessions (Acts 2:44-45). The same concern is clearly shared by James when advocating for equal rights and respects between rich and poor, the marginalized and outcast in the believing community stimulated by the Risen Lord. By placing the poor man's life at the center of community life, Paul appealed all members of the Church to shape their lives as he dealt with class divisions in Corinth (Cor. 11:20) as well as the Jews-Gentiles controversy among many other cases.

The Church today has to use with profit a great deal of her past experience in shaping her prophetic stance through her actual involvement in social, economic and political issues. So her option for the poor has to take a new form as she is opting to struggle for justice and working in solidarity with them since they have to be protagonists of their own liberation and that of the society. Our next chapter will expand on this when dealing with the Church and the actual stance of the Church.

TODAY

A. INTRODUCTION

After grounding on God's option for the poor in the Old Testament through the teachings of the prophets as well as on the New Testament equalitarian ideal, we are equipped with enough elements in order to launch a strategy for the liberation of the oppressed regard to today's situation of misery as created by actual social and economic structures. Before tackling on the nature of today's prophetic role of the Church, a clarification of the Church teaching foundation is needed; and the first section will be a study of the Church motivation in intervening in social matters to be followed by a sketch of earlier significant attempts of the Church in conformity to its teaching foundation in the past. By all means a brief evaluation of the Church intervention as indication of its relevance in the society will mark the particularity of the third section. However while referring to such relevance, we cannot in any way overlook possible ineffectiveness of the Church intervention constituting further challenges as the fourth section will expose few of them. In regard to these challenges, the Church is then set for an internal renewal in the fifth section in order to achieve an effective liberation of the whole society.

B. WHY THE CHURCH SHOULD INTERVENE

Being both people and institution the Church has a particular mission of proclaiming the Kingdom of heaven which ought to be fore-experienced in the earthly society. By all means the Church through her ministers tries to show how that mission is being effective in her experience. In her evangelic task the Church must be concerned with the people to whom she is announcing the Good News, in their respective contexts, such as economic, political, racial, and cultural. For there should not be any disparity between evangelization and human liberation. Regarding their final aim, that is the integral liberation of the human person. In fact that mission

Church is well expressed by Richard Mc Cormick as he writes:

*The Church as a whole, like every Christian community, is called to work for the dignity and the rights of man, both individually and collectively; to protect and promote the dignity of the human person; and to denounce and oppose every sort of human oppression.*⁷

This concern about human dignity has led the Church to protest against some structures of the social order which deny that dignity. However the Church plays the role of reminding and promoting and defending human rights through the liberating message of the Gospel, by which all men aspire to freedom. The eschatological salvation in its fullness should be present in the socio-political, economic and cultural arena of the person in order to be actualised, otherwise we are likely to be left in an utopic kingdom. Contrarily the kingdom is already present and gradually being revealed by means of man's intimate aspirations for higher and deeper values.

However the Church cannot escape from the real situation or need of people and people by preaching a living God, a meaningful message of salvation. In this process the Church faces a lot of obstacles to fulfil her salvific task which entails misunderstandings and sacrifices. She has to take a humanistic option in order to be a relevant witness through deeds in situations of poverty, indifference and insensitivity of others.

C. EARLY CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHINGS

In this section our concern will be a display of early and significant attempts of the Church in dealing with social matters which constitute by themselves patterns and precedents of immense importance inspiring for future and effective interventions as the modern misery seems far from being eradicated.

In response to new challenges of the poor, a series of papal encyclicals starting with *Rerum Novarum* (1891) were issued. The abuses, lack of honesty and insensitivity shown by the rich and powerful then incarnated in social structures were the root of the problem leading to the property controversy. In the quest for solution to the problem arising from the wo-

⁷ Richard Mc CORMICK, A., *Human rights and the mission of the Church*, in G. ANDERSON & T. STRANSKI, eds., *Mission Trends N. 4*, New York: Paulist Press, 1979, p. 10.

Leo XIII exhorted respectively the poor and the rich to deal respectfully with their employers and to love and deal honestly with their workers.

Never as before, the Church through Leo XIII's leadership, faced the oppression of the workers of the industrial revolution, made an appeal expressing their degrading conditions of work, namely long hours, low pay, no leisure. This document was and is still be considered a major statement of Catholic social teaching. Without underestimating even the shortcomings proved by the document, nevertheless it marks a dawning and stimulates Catholic concern and reflection on matters of social justice.

Curiously later social teachings of the Church seem to be a re-actualisation of Rerum Novarum by repeating, confirming and developing it though in different perspectives as witnessed by *Quadragesimo Anno* of Pius XI and *Octogesima Adveniens* of Paul VI. Further, the burden of enormous debts and unfair trading systems affecting Africa in particular is now viewed as heritage of an unjust regime since the time of Pius XI.

Closer to our time, John XXIII, in his *Pacem in Terris* in 1963 appealed for improved international relationships and solidarity among nations. The greatest contribution of this Catholic renewal was the bringing of new impulses into the Church and confronting the needs and challenges of the modern world. *Gaudium et Spes* is the most significant result of Vatican II's quest for relevance in the actual society in perpetual mutation. At the very heart of the social teaching was the recognition of the poor as a social class with a right to its own organisations.

Despite this recognition, the poor were moving away from the Church and becoming secularised. Though some attempts were made to reach this working class poor, namely through worker priests, pronouncements of the Church of the poor including the efforts of the African Bishops at Vatican II, yet clear option for the poor was still not achieved in Europe as it was in Latin America. In the latter context, being at the same time believers and oppressed class made it possible for the bishops to make a clear pronouncement in favour of preferential option for the poor, at Puebla in 1979.

With her social teaching the Catholic Church made a significant attempt of subjecting itself to the new principles of historical and literary criticism. It committed itself to the rejection of the ideology of capitalism while condemning liberal ideology as this latter was the instrument of the bourgeoisie used to overcome traditional barriers in the realm of science

...s, morality and the like. However the traditionalist flavour in Biblical criticism
...ght by Pius X through a series of his pronouncements such as *Pascendi L*
...s(1907) where modernism was condemned. Gradually the disparity between the C
...modern thought was becoming less felt as the twentieth century was progressin
...nce when the tools of literary criticism started being borrowed by Catholic exeg
...the Bible after *Divino Afflante Spiritu* of Pius XII in 1943.

At last the Second Vatican Council has enabled the Catholic Church to come to
...liberal thought. Thanks to the Church intervention, the ruling class after abandon
...l ideology allied itself with traditionalism to fight the common enemy, socialism.
...d traditional values and conservatism were re-vitalised throughout wealthy n
...efore liberal ideology quickly gained ground in Protestant dominated countries by st
...e new higher criticism whereby the Scriptures were subjected to a radical historio
...ry examination followed by its obvious consequence, scepticism.

Insofar the working class moved away from the Churches they could not do bette
...ng the interests of the bourgeois and middle classes. Beside Germany and the
...s Protestantism witnessed also a triumph of liberal ideology along with the power s
...ance of anti modernists forces, yet unprivileged in contrast to the liberal ideology
...minations. In account of the liberal pre-eminence in the main denominations, Pro
...Catholic's traditional standpoint were able to reach the same result as long as the ch
...e organised poor of the working classes was concerned, that is the *Social*
...sponded with a programme of service to the working poor in order to win them
...Churches against the danger of revolutionary socialism. For both Churches an
...arisation was a threat and object of contempt.

In recent years efforts have been made by Christian ecclesiastical institutions to ac
...*preferential option for the poor* in a society alleged by exploitation and a growing d
...een classes. And Vatican II through *Lumen Gentium* has launched a ground
...ch's preferential option for the poor by integrating all social classes includi
...essed and the elite in the common belonging as *God's people* without underestimati
...ch institutionalisation on account of the service that ensures the common well being

Besides, making a preferential option for the poor is a risking business as recogn
...Second General Conference in Medellin (1968), for it implies confronting the ruling

the society and the reactions it entails. Hence the need to act in order to transform structures at root of oppression rather than mere denunciation as means. From such a re-evaluation of the Church pronouncements, our questioning on today's relevance of the Church is to be resolved as our next section is going to tackle on the actual stance of the Church to restore its efficacy.

D. IS THE CHURCH RELEVANT TO TODAY'S WORLD ?

By undergoing oppression and underdevelopment, the people of Africa today have lost their dignity, and thus expect from the Church an active response and stance to recover their original divine likeness, now disqualified; only through a liberating option can the Church restore its credibility.

Facing today's challenges such as deprivation of rights, of basic facilities and dignity, the Church is being motivated and enabled to denounce the oppressive structures, and to initiate some actions for justice and development by means of education, care for the vulnerable, raise their awareness regarding the causes of destitution and how to curb them. This could indeed prove the effectiveness and competence of Church's mission in the social, political and economical field. In answer to the accusation of getting into politics, the Church bases herself upon the dignity of the human person and the concrete conditions that injure it. The Church has not to worry about confronting the oppression and the injustice that permanently plague more than half of her faithful.

Nowadays the Church is arising from her sleep, trying to foster consciences and involve herself by means of schools, Mass media, encyclicals, pastoral letters in order to re-structure the society, especially corrupts governments, oppressive economic systems with the collaboration of all peoples, because the Church cannot do anything without people's involvement. That reveals effective and practical in Africa where the Church does not cease to urge upon rulers and people of good will to take new options that lead to a better life and development in all sectors of the nation.

As a matter of fact, the Church of Africa is fighting against the manoeuvring of dictatorial management of public affairs and manipulation of the people, apparent in economic areas.

political speeches; that is experienced in countries like Zaire, Togo, Congo and ...
re some bishops have agreed to lead their respective national conferences and are
ing part, in some how, in the destiny of their countries. Accordingly F. Claver states:

*... that contribution, specific to the Church- I can only think of it in terms
vision . It is a vision that springs from the Gospel and keeps returning to
Gospel for clearer and clearer focusing; yet also a vision that must be discov
by every generation, in each local Church, and worked out according to
special genius as a people. It is a vision that must lead to action by people
people, with people; a vision to be realised and elaborated further in life,
evolving into a more and more genuine incarnation of Christ in history.*⁸

pite these efforts and achievements, much still to be done since the Church's inability
ive radically some sensitive and crucial issues of specific particularity constitut
nselves further challenges to be analysed in the next section.

E. CHALLENGES OF THE POOR TO THE CHURCH

Inherent shortcomings of the Church constitute a defying series of challenges to
inal mission and its relevance while at the same times her own procedure and struc
stitute possible obstacles for efficiency.

The poor in Africa constitute a larger part of the population plagued with
employment, under-development, poor health, inadequate education, poor living stan
the like. These victims are found both within or outside the Church; they have been tr
ess than human since they have often be used for selfish pursuit of the rich and pow
Unfortunately the Church has been accused of indifference and uncommitment to the cau
e poor.

This dehumanising condition has left the poor outside the operation of the benefits
ety and reveals what the world is, a world characterized by oppression, a widening
ween the materially rich and the materially poor. This very situation has been an
andalous for the Christian faith as the Church the Church failed to act responsibly on ac
er divine commission. However what has been the Church's stance ? What attention has
own to the poor and the oppressed ? These questions involve the whole range of the Ch

Francisco CLAVER F., *Proclaiming liberty to captives*, in: Dermot LANE, *Liberation Theology*,
Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1977, p.49.

ty and mission. The poor are challenging the Church about her self-understanding
mitment in the world.

Forcefully the presence of the poor in Africa reach a decision whether to side with
r in their struggle for liberation or to choose neutrality toward the problems of the po
a to identify with forces that generate oppression, dehumanisation and the kinds. E
ns the very character of the dilemma and issues preclude from the Church the opti
atched observer; for it has got to take sides and it can never be neutral on such vital issu
erty involving three fourths of the continent population.

Historically the Church in Africa, especially from colonisation has been identified with
ressive systems without invalidating some significant contributions made; nevertheless
vided channel for legitimisation of oppressive structures as it passively accommodated
n. This was remarkably evident during pre and post-colonial era in Africa when close t
e developed and witnessed between missionaries and colonisers in administering co
cy to the extent that no difference could be felt between the Church and the State,
sing contempt among local people as Mbiti vividly expresses it:

*... Christian Missionaries from Europe and America penetrated into the in
of Africa either shortly before, or simultaneously with colonial occupation
image that the Africans received and to a great extent still hold of Christi
was much coloured by colonial rule and all that was involved in it . We ar
too close to that period to dissociate one from the other... A Gikuyu pr
summarises this fact very well: There is no Roman Catholic Priest a
European- both are the same.⁹*

This phenomenon suggests an image of a Church which is not moving in the pace
signs of time by her inability to reach out and let herself be challenged. It insinuates th
essage and the action of the Church today do not always reflect the presence of Christ a
especially in victims of dictatorship and economic mismanagement in African contine
the poor seem to be out of place, even alienated since the Church has proved unabl
er them hope and newness of life. Such apparent failure from the Church, partly beca
very nature of its ecclesiastical structures, opened the way for the rediscovery o
ctionality of popular religions where the oppressed can feel at home in contrast
ablished Church that was not always attentive to their cry and pain.

John MBITI, *African Religions and Philosophy*, New York: Praeger, 1969, p.231.

In many instances the conflict between ecclesiastical bodies and the challenges of changing societies might appear very depressing, especially when the Church does not allow herself to be challenged and helped to review her methodology. Accordingly the very ecclesiastical structures are not often at the service of the struggle with the oppressed since they do not enable the needy to feel at home. No wonder if the society witnesses a growing proliferation of small Churches emerging among the poor as the result of inadequacy and irrelevance of the elements of the official Church such as its language, liturgy, songs, messages and theologies which have become obsolete and irrelevant for Africa which is in the cross-roads. Therefore traditional and African popular religions are in fact defying the official Church by providing for a setting where to share their tears, voice their sorrows, present their spiritual and physical needs, and respond to the challenges of their world in order to be able to empty themselves before God.

As a matter of fact the presence of the unprivileged in the Church has started helping the Church re-examine her self-understanding and approach the situation of the oppressed from the perspectives of the poor. They challenge the Church by more than what they lack for beside their pressing physical needs they offer to the Church an understanding of what the world is and what it should be. Furthermore the poor's cry prevents the Church from losing touch with history, as a consequence of the new theological consciousness emerging within the Church. Indeed today's oppression is so acute that all our theological formulations and methodologies find themselves irrelevant if separated from the struggle of the destitute. The realities of oppression and destitution are concrete and tangible, yet awaiting for our response from the Church. Thus we have enough reasons to admit that the poor are positive, corrective and creative force as they and their condition impinges upon the thought and mission of the Church, calling for action.

More and more it is becoming a conviction that to combat the agents of deprivation, poverty and domination, comprehensive effort must include even political action and people's mobilisation. This new dynamism entails individual renewal and that of ecclesiastical bodies in order to stand effectively with the oppressed in their struggle for justice and liberation. Nevertheless a new vitality is being experienced by African Church through small Churches and communities where the struggle of the poor for justice is being shared despite the setbacks, shortcoming and slow paces. Accordingly Mar Paulose remarked:

*if the proclamation of the Gospel is to be meaningful in our time, it must be closely related to the present struggle for justice, because that is the arena where the people find themselves today. In the other hand, the Gospel should be proclaimed to men and women, not in isolation, but in their social solidarity.'*¹

hence an attitude of revaluation is needed in the part of the Church on regard to her commitment to the distressing society and its demands.

Therefore the Church ought to be supportive of the poor 's struggle in their liberating process. So a concrete identification with the unprivileged in their liberating process is necessary to actively convey a relevant and liberating Gospel. Indeed our next section will help us to find an appropriate option for a genuine insertion into the local reality so as to enable Christianity to be incarnated in the culture of the people and bring about the new and better order of society. At least the poor have provided an opportunity for the Church to rethink her mission and re-evaluate her priorities in the light of her Redemptive significance within human history as rooted in the Gospel.

F. THE CHURCH AND THE NEED FOR RENEWAL

Being an historical institution, the Church has got to learn and read from the sign of the times. She can benefit from the richness of the actual challenges predisposing her to a constant re-examination so as to actualise her strategy in order both to preserve her original heritage and to give it a new meaning and relevance in today 's society. So this section is an invitation for internal conversion within the Church, be it individually and structural in response to African context and its demands. The world in which the Church is also part is broken, and thus the need for a radical restructuring and community human issues to be humanised, including the Church.

Before hand a previous analysis of the actual situation of the Church is needed to ensure relevant and adequate participation within the complex web of the economic, political and social arena of this modern world .At this point one may wonder whether the Church is still relevant enough to the actual life of the people, even to the extent of being challenged? Indeed the Church, both structure and people has shown herself through her life style to be a middle class institution. While enjoying privileges of the dominant classes, the Church despite her moralising

¹Paulose MAR PAULOSE, *Church's Mission*, Bombay: Build, 1978, p. 9.

er, has been part of the dehumanising forces through her silent complacency. This attitude kept her into middle class captivity and unable to apprehend the cre- arity between the rich and the poor while the existing order was being secured etrated. Indeed victims of this system have been recipients of paternalistic mercy cts of pity, but not fully part of the Church. For the Church reside in and adopted ttle class life style. So there existed and still a deep gulf between the church and ressed.

So today there is a growing awareness about the need for renewal within the church er to free herself from captivity and provide adequate channels for the eschatological v order to confront institutional patterns responsive of actual misery and oppression with tinent, the Church must be willing to die by giving up some of her impeding privilege- justification by initiating new forms of life together, that is shared-life between rich r, young and old, and women and men in contrast to the present human societies. ough her insertion and participation in today's life situation that the church can ificant contributions rather than standing apart from it.

Regarding Africa, the present situation of misery calls for the development ological reflection consistent with urgent liberating needs of the people. Facing these u ds, the Church must opt to struggle for change by dealing prophetically with a rtwined human issues of community and structures of powers. The effectiveness o ggle goes along with the giving up of her privileged institutional status in ord participate in social movements geared for the transformation of present structures of pow the case of Latin America. Unlike the modern period whereby the religious persp ved to legitimise the dominant institutions as it affirmed that the ultimate nature of s individual and private, today there is a growing orientation toward person-in-rel son-in-solidarity and person-in-interdependence. This consciousness marks a dawning y world where the church has got a part to play since God does not act over-against it ation whatsoever.

By virtue of her commission, the Church has got to help in seeking forms that wo re integrative, co-operative, sharing and more communal rather than fragme npetitive, hoarding and private ones. Therefore the present post-colonial Africa woul ase with such a felt humanity shared in the search for social liberation by rejecting any

unhindered greed and selfishness, yet at the root of misery and oppression. Finally, the Church has got to play a decisive part in the on-going struggle for human liberation by sharing solidarity with the poor in their occasional joys and sorrows. Undoubtedly the Church must be the partisans even in the political process in order to participate in the task of transforming society.

G. CONCLUSION

Considering previous attempts of the Church in responding to oppression through failed successes, today's Church in Africa in particular has been challenged, by virtue of her mandate, to influence and co-operate for the establishment of a just social order where the rights and dignity of everyone are assured and respected.

In this regard, the Church is called for an internal conversion, individual and structural, in order to gain relevance by her insertion in the struggle of people for liberation and justice. The Church's insertion entails an ongoing process implying an endless process in conformity with the changing world so as to challenge the society and its structures for reform. Hence, this chapter will help launching a two-fold option for a new social order susceptible to liberate Africa from the scourge of poverty and oppression.

A . INTRODUCTION

While facing the challenges of the oppressed along its history, the Church, especially the African Church today is exposed to self-examination and challenged to opt together with the people for a new social order by establishing justice. Therefore justice is not affordable unless the Church, as problematiser, is able to develop critical consciousness and to stimulate action. More and more it is apparent that charitable actions and policies can alleviate the misery of some, but are not enough to eradicate structural poverty and to attack effectively its causes.

Accordingly the first section of this chapter will be the first step for a better society through education of the whole society for a new consciousness to justice as a strategy for an efficient economico-political reform which is to be tackled in our second section. As the result of these facts, a sound education is to be geared to a critical consciousness enabling and stimulating the transformation of unjust structures and systems.

B. EDUCATION FOR JUSTICE AND RESPONSIBILITY

This section will demonstrate the importance of education in shaping a new order among people by fostering in them a sense of responsibility, honesty, co-operation and justice as matrix for the establishment of lasting justice because the common good will be the priority for any individual and community endeavour.

Being a form of action to be taken, the appropriate education in Africa needs an adequate methodology. This latter, however implies a process gearing to critical skills. In this regard African particularity must be at the centre of reference so as to ensure and inspire the ability to perceive critically and spell out both [past and present obstacles for a more human society]. The education-strategy, enriched by previous obstacles must be in a position to affect all the spheres of the society, such as banking, economic management and political leadership. Thus eventually it will likely be in a position to realise the necessity and possibility of overcoming all kinds of

...ments in order to launch a more human society. Above all a culture of accountability
...ng the leaders must be an outcome of a general education for critical consciousness
...in all sectors of the society.

Therefore this critical consciousness is likely to remain a mere ideal if a great deal
...cal education is not offered so to enable the entire community to evaluate and transform
...existing order. Only after such an accurate description of existing systems and its forces
...latter can effectively be submitted to critical and public scrutiny for an eventual
...sformation. By all means, education is ineffective without the challenges which in turn
...an adequate teacher. And the Church as teacher ought to let African people be stimulated
...challenged to approach critically the existing order in order to exercise responsibility
...within the society. Rather than adjusting individuals to the status quo, the education
...eared towards problematising method, that this education process may be at the service
...manisation.

Besides, the Church as teacher is only a problematizer by presenting the actual s
...ity as a challenging problem, demanding at the same time a response; for through an
...evaluation of roots of African misery people are enabled to act for change in a personal
...ctural level. Thus injustice is both mediated through individuals and above all thro
...ems and structures. So whatever strategy or devise conceived must be expressed in a
...nted towards transforming the economic, political and social structures of the society.

As educator, the Church has got to involve all people to work in co-operation in ord
...nge the structure, main concern of our next section. For the primary purpose of educat
...develop a critical consciousness and stimulate action that will change unjust systems
...ctures. In this regard education has got an important and strategic role to play i
...nstruction of the society. Hence Christian educators, on behalf of the Church ought
...ble all people to examine and criticise the social order of which they are an integral pa
...last resort, education for justice is an ongoing process presupposing a life
...mitment, be it in an individual basis or community at large. So the importance of educ
...transforming the society corresponds to its ability to impart the new civilisation to people

C. STRUCTURAL REFORMS

Considering the current social order and its ills, the actual system should be doomed to a radical reform in order to serve human interest in community. The felt need for reform within the Church in responding to the changing society whose structures are at the root of African oppression, calls the Church to act for a broader reform in the whole continent. So this section looks on the type of transformation to be achieved and specific sectors to be affected.

Therefore our effort in facing today's crisis must go beyond mere alleviating of the consequences of poverty by attacking the causes of evil. This can effectively be done only by transforming those very institutions that generate oppression at the world level. For the existence of poverty and poor in the society is a scandal for Christian faith. Moreover talking of social reconstruction implies increasing efforts in producing more goods and services. This may be detrimental to the society as it has always been the case in Africa, if a fair distribution is not promoted; for both production and distribution cannot be dissociated. A country can only when the natural endowment of the nation is exploited to supply goods and services that the dawning of a new order can likely be realised.

The success of such a project goes along with the promotion of social concern and political awareness; for people should be encouraged to think collectively and to act out of love other than profit. Such a collective commitment, if operating at all sectors of life, will confirm the thesis of Cort when observing that:

Full implementation of economic democracy calls for democratic structures at the individual level of individual enterprise, such as the producer co-operative, but at all levels as well, the industry level, the state, regional and national economic

11

Furthermore institutions of changes need to be supported with a particular vision or concept of life and civilisation able to challenge the people to opt and co-operate for the better social order. Indeed principles of democracy, freedom, justice, equality and dignity are the foundation stone of that vision without which social distinction and class privilege and economic parasitism as well as contempt towards the unprivileged members of the society would constitute a threat for a better order.

On account of these new values and principles, let education institutions instil a sense of social responsibility in everyone. Deals founded on democratic principles stimulate to the creative reconstruction of society. However once consciences are awakened, the people will no longer be the object of manipulation of any force whatsoever, they will rather become instruments of their own development. Without underestimating other settings such as social unions and political parties, the family remains the ideal environment for imparting adequate education for justice in addition to Small Christian communities.

D. CONCLUSION

Christians, individuals, groups and institutions, challenged by the unprivileged and oppressed, are looking with new perspectives at the situation of the poor and the oppressed. In regard the Church ought to view herself as the Church of the poor and create a strategy supportive of the poor's struggle through her education strategy as instrument of justice and structural reforms. It is in this ground that the Church can be truthful heir of a revolutionary tradition of Christ.

To avoid the traditional practice of almsgiving as a solution to the challenge of the Church today has got to combat injustice, oppression and inequality by developing a culture of justice, responsibility, civic sense and service through education against the culture of profit.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

Many years after European colonisation, many African countries have found themselves pressing as the speed of modernity is threatening to their disadvantage. Despite the colonial system in Africa, the rise of a new international corporation is just its replacement institution of domination.

Undoubtedly the multinational corporations have contributed greatly to the African colonisation as they have been exploiting the resources, labour and savings of Africa to the extent of reducing the continent so dependent on foreign input. At the same time, economic and cultural obstacles within Africa are also at the root of the misery of a large number of people in the continent.

This situation of general oppression challenges the Church in its ministering within the continent. Though its mission is divine while preaching the kingdom of heaven, yet the Church cannot be dissociated from historical reality of its aspirants. Hence the reason for the Church's intervention in social matters as response in conformity to its divine mandate. By all means, the Old Testament and the New Testament above all are grounds on which the Church's stands on social matters are inspired and referred to as guidelines in the Church's struggles against the oppressed for a just society, as a foretaste of the kingdom of God.

However poverty is a scandal to the Christian faith as it is degrading the whole continent's divine dignity. It is at the same time a challenge as it is forcing the Church's purification and internal renewal so as to be relevant to the demands of the society and a reflection of the kingdom of God. Then the actual social order, its structures, its culture and its values can be challenged for reform since the Church's own internal restoration constitute a part of broader social transformation.

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