

**MISSION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE POOR
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE ISIPINGO FARM
COMMUNITY, DURBAN**

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SUMMARY OF DISSERTATION

Mission is an ongoing process. It is essentially God's task of bringing the world unto Himself. Hence, mission must not come to a halt. However, the forms, principles and methods of approach in mission must be constantly assessed and re-evaluated. The changes in society will obviously warrant new missiological methodologies. The old way of "doing" missiology must become resilient enough to adopt itself to a new and changed situation. The change might be either positive or negative, either way the missiological approach must seek relevance. This is what this study hopes to achieve by paying particular attention to the situation of the poor.

The central thesis of this dissertation is given in its title: *"Mission in the context of the poor with special reference to the Isipingo Farm Community, Durban"*. It is our claim that we come to understand the Kingdom as we hear God's call to us in the people and events of human history - in the critical and prophetic moments, the *Kiaros* of the now. Thus we recognise God's word in the poor who cry out for saving action on their behalf. We hear the message better when we find our place beside the poor, when we share the good news together. These people and events give us the message of the Kingdom today.

The poor are the ones who suffer injustice through exploitation and oppression and bondage. Life is literally taken from them as they experience the concrete impact of sin. The poor are without recourse, and their resources are nonexistent. This world judges them to be beggars, destitute, burdens to the state. But the poor and weak of both the Old and New Testament are the preferred of God and His justice; they receive the attention and compassion of Jesus. The poor are the persons open and receptive to God's gifts, dependent as they are on Him as the source of life.

On the basis of this biblical insight and the fact that the majority in South Africa are poor, it is our view that the church in South Africa should direct its mission efforts towards the poor. However, if the church is to do this then it is required to redefine its nature and structure. It has to bring itself in line with the ideals of the Kingdom of God (Chapter Five).

Moreover, in this dissertation we argue the need for contextual analysis. We point out that we should not engage mission without first analysing the mission context. We then proceed to analyse the economic, social, political and religious conditions in Isipingo Farm, a poor sub-economic Indian community in Durban. Our intention here is to show how we can offer relevant ministry in Isipingo Farm after having determined the needs within the community. Our eventual aim is to posit some principles for mission amongst the poor in general.

The intent of this study can be made even clearer in the purpose of each chapter:

Chapter One attempts to do two things: Firstly, to present a broad view of mission, and secondly to argue for the need of the "contextualization" of mission. In Chapter Two we choose to look at a context. The context we choose is that of the poor. In this chapter we attempt to provide biblical justification for our choice. In Chapter Three we attempt to provide a socio-economic, political and religious analysis of a poor community (Isipingo Farm). Our aim is to show how one can relevantly minister in such a context after having ascertained the community's needs. In Chapter Four we attempt to look at the principles required for ministry in this poor community - Isipingo Farm. How can we make our ministry effective and relevant? In the final chapter (Five) we attempt to redefine the role of the church in South Africa today, pointing out how such a view influences our strategies and methods of mission to the country's poor majority. What we attempt to present here is some new ways of looking at the mission of the church in South Africa in the perspective of the Kingdom, especially if we are to take the poor seriously.

Introduction

Mission is our human response to the divine commission. It is a whole Christian life-style, including both evangelism and social responsibility, dominated by the conviction that Christ sends us out into the world as the Father sent him into the world, and that into the world we must therefore go to live and work for him. Instead of seeking to evade our social responsibility, we need to open our ears and listen to the voice of Him who calls his people in every age to go out into the lost and lonely world (as He did), in order to live and love, to witness and serve, like Him and for Him. For that is 'mission'. Mission involves the whole person in his or her total situation in response to the whole gospel.

Much of what we are to say about mission in this dissertation is summed up in a few brief paragraphs by Orlando Costas on the goal of Third World missions:

"The ultimate goal of Third World missions should be the final revelation of the Kingdom (of God), understood as the total transformation of history by Jesus Christ and the power of his Spirit. This will involve the redemption of creation, the definitive abrogation of evil, chaos and corruption and the birth of a world of love, peace and justice. Third World missions, as any Christian mission, should see themselves, fundamentally, as witnesses to the coming kingdom.

The kingdom of God, however, is not just a future, transcendent reality. It is also a present and eminent order of life, characterised by the forgiveness of sins, the formation of a new community, and commitment to a new ethic. This order of life is centred on the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Hence to witness to the Kingdom is to declare the name of Jesus Christ as the Lord and Saviour of humankind.

This in turn implies that the announcement of Jesus Christ in the world has personal communal, and socio-political dimensions. Personal, in the sense that it is accompanied by the call to faith and repentance and the concomitant experience of forgiveness of sin. Communal in that it implies incorporation into the church, understood as a community of faith and commitment. And socio-political, in the sense that it involves a new life-style based on love, whose practical expression is justice and ultimate hope is peace (or well-being) for all....."(1)

1. The Strategic Question

Mission has to do with "every creature", the "whole creation" (Mark 16:15). God "desires *all* men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4). He does not wish "that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). In other words, there is a quantitative dimension to mission as well as a qualitative one. Mission has to do with people, millions of people. But the vast majority of these millions are poor, weak, needy and oppressed. This raises the strategic question: *'Who are we going to, and who are we going to identify with, as we move out in mission'?* Failure to see the poor as the biblical object of mission is to misunderstand mission altogether. Yet much of our mission activity today takes place among the urban elite of the world: university students, professional people, business men and women.

The poor are far more than merely the object of mission. They are pre-eminently its carriers. Consequently, we must go to the poor, identify with them, learn from them, and seek support from them. They are active not passive, participants in the kingdom. I agree with Paul Löffler that the gospel "does indeed apply to all human beings at all levels and in all classes, but the Christian movement as a struggle to implement the reign of God obviously recruits itself primarily from among the poor". (2)

The Roman Catholic bishops of Latin America have quite rightly spoken of God's "preferential option for the poor", which is revealed in the life of Jesus as recorded in the New Testament. (3) At the Latin American Episcopal Conference in Puebla in 1978 it was put thus: "When we draw near to the poor in order to accompany and serve them, we are doing what Christ taught us to do when he became our brother, poor like us". (4) This should, however, not be understood as a patronising "charity" approach to the poor. Jesus acted to empower and challenge the poor to liberate themselves from oppression. His followers' mission should have the same effect:

"The objective of our preferential option for the poor is to proclaim the Saviour. This will enlighten them about their dignity, help them in their efforts to liberate themselves from all their wants, and lead them to communion with the Father and their fellow human beings through a life lived in evangelical poverty". (5)

Hence, the central claim in this thesis is that mission today must be geared towards the *poor*. Moreover, in this dissertation we attempt to look at the more relevant patterns, styles, forms and principles for mission that is required to minister among the poor. In order to ascertain the latter we attempt to examine the socio-economic, political and religious conditions in Isipingo Farm. Isipingo Farm is a poor over-populated, sub-economic Indian Community which falls under the jurisdiction of the Borough of Isipingo.

We have chosen to do analysis on Isipingo Farm merely because we have been availed the opportunity of serving as Christian workers in this poverty-stricken community. This research and its formulations is not intended to be prescriptive. We have only assembled and interpreted as faithfully as possible. To draw conclusions and make recommendations is part of the responsibility of a researcher and could not be shunned. Hence the theological precepts and principles for mission amongst the poor is not what emerges from the researcher's desk but from the Isipingo Farm community. However, we have taken the liberty of putting our findings together so that it may benefit those Christians who are working or seeking to work with the poor in other communities.

Although our research is based on a micro-situation, the Isipingo Farm Community, yet it is true to say that the latter context has striking similarities to other such poverty-stricken communities in South Africa. We, therefore, believe that the principles for ministry with the poor outlined and explained in this dissertation could also be applied to other such communities in South Africa. On the basis of this we believe that the Church in South Africa must redefine its position, structure and nature if it is to be true to its commitment to be with the poor, since the majority in South Africa are poor.

2. Methodology

The methodology employed in this study is essentially that of socio-economic contextual analysis with special reference on a socio-religious perspective. This indicates that much of the information for this study had been drawn from the people within the Isipingo Farm Community, over a period of three years.

We obtained this by:

1. A qualitative analytical review of literature with respect to mission amongst the poor. This involved the identification, collection and processing of written sources.
2. The conducting of an empirical socio-religious survey of adult Indians, within the Isipingo Farm community, by means of a methodically constructed interview schedule and accepted controlled interview methods. A group of five practising church people assisted in the collecting of information. The interview schedule concentrated on issues such as:
 - (i) Housing
 - (ii) Wages
 - (iii) Employment/Unemployment
 - (iv) Social: Contact, Opportunities and Facilities
 - (v) Religious Groupings
 - (vi) Economic Standards
 - (vii) Education
 - (viii) Political leaders
 - (ix) Services and Facilities
3. The conducting of discussions or informal interviews with people from the various segments of the Isipingo Farm Community.
4. Establishing personal contact with as many knowledgeable people as possible, especially with religious and community leaders.
5. Personal observations and the collection of information through field work.
6. Interviewing the Town Clerk of Isipingo.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. ORLANDO E. COSTAS, "A Strategy for Third World Missions", in *World Missions-Building Bridges or Barriers*, Theodore Williams, ed. (Bangalore; WEF Mission Commission, 1979). p.36.
2. PAUL LÖFFLER, "The Reign of God has come in The Suffering Christ: An Exploration of the Power of the Powerless," in *International Review of Mission*, Vol. LXVIII, No. 270 (April 1979), p.113.
3. See *International Review of Mission*, Vol. LXXVII, No. 308, October 1988, p.507.
4. GUSTAVO GUTIERREZ, *The Power of the Poor in History*, Maryknoll: Orbis, 1983, p.137.
5. Ibid., p.149.

CHAPTER ONE

MISSION AND THE POOR

Leslie Newbigin in his essay *"Bringing our missionary methods under the word of God"*, writes:

"The church must in every generation be ready to bring its tradition afresh under the light of the word of God". (1)

A key-word here is 'afresh'. It appears that the old ideas, patterns and methods of mission have remained essentially unchanged in many quarters over the years. There is, therefore, a definite need for a radical rethink on the understanding of mission in the modern era.

1. What Is Mission?

Attempts to define the Christian mission have resulted in prolonged and relentless debates. Even more difficult is the task of determining the aims of mission. In fact such discussions has resulted in the formation of two distinct terms: *Mission and Missions*. Leslie Newbigin provides a helpful distinction between these two terms. He states that:

"The MISSION of the church is everything that the church is sent into the world to do: preaching the gospel, healing the sick, caring for the poor, teaching the children, improving international and interracial relations, attacking injustice.

The MISSIONS of the church is the concern that in places where there are no Christians there should be Christians. In other words, MISSIONS means to plant churches through evangelism". (2)

Leslie Newbigin further adds that the aim of missions should be the establishment of a new Christian community that is as broad as society and is true to the national situation.

Jerald D. Gort points out that such a community is characterised by reconciliation and peace but also by justice.⁽³⁾ This new redeemed community is then equipped for their mission, their life assignment which is to teach, preach, heal, care for the poor and attack injustice.

Karl Barth, however, warns us against the dangers of establishing such an exclusive Christian community.⁽⁴⁾ He points out that the people's chief concern then is with the saving of their souls, or their experiences of grace and salvation; in short, with establishing their personal relationship with God.

Barth regards this whole understanding of becoming and being a Christian as thoroughly unbiblical and ego-centric.⁽⁵⁾ What makes someone a Christian is not primarily his or her personal experiences of grace and redemption, but his or her ministry. Indeed, the Christian receives forgiveness, justification and sanctification in order to become a servant.

Leslie Newbigin, however, is not unaware of such criticism. His immediate focus with regards to mission seems to be ecclesiocentric but he carefully points out that this is not the only goal of mission. He states that in the past we have largely limited the goal of missions to the conversion of unbelievers and the planting of churches. This, he asserts, must remain the first objective. The trouble comes when this becomes the sum and substance of our missionary endeavour.⁽⁶⁾

Writing in a similar vein the Danish theologian, Johannes Aagaard, states that God works through one extraordinary mission and many ordinary missions.⁽⁷⁾ The *extraordinary mission* is the mission of Jesus Christ, the mission of the church - manifested in the sending of Jesus Christ and in the calling of the church to its particular vocation of witnessing to the kingdom of God.

The *ordinary missions* are the missions of the nations, the missions of all historical agents that co-operate in the building up of human community.⁽⁸⁾ Through all aspects of human history, political, economic, cultural, and social - human beings are called, as communities and individuals, to participate in God's providential care - which includes the building up of caring, protective communities.

This is a useful distinction, but it cannot be absolutised because Christians and churches are also necessarily involved in the so-called ordinary missions through diaconal ministries. The fact that the church is a social institution has in itself socio-political consequences.

Having said this much then, let me point out that our view of mission is not limited to the 'mere saving of souls', or the 'planting of churches'. Hoekendijk criticised the 'church-centric' view of mission pointing out that it does not fully correspond with the biblical view of mission.⁽⁹⁾ Such a view of mission belongs to an old school of thought and it has arguably lost its relevance in the present century. There is a need therefore for a new definition of mission which is all embracing and encompassing. What we certainly do not need is a definition of mission which limits the purposes and will of God for the world. Rather a new approach to mission is called for which has a message for both, the whole world and the whole person.⁽¹⁰⁾

What then is mission today? Emilio Castro answers this question somewhat succinctly. He states God's and our mission is to bring in the kingdom.⁽¹¹⁾ And the goal of the kingdom is life in its fullness. Hence the kingdom has to do with the welfare of the whole person, not excluding the social, political and economical aspects of life. Since God is interested in the life of the whole person, so must we if we are to take our responsibilities of mission seriously. Verkuyl supports this view by stating that both in the Old and New Testaments, God by His words and deeds claims that He is intent on bringing the kingdom of God to expression and restoring his liberating domain of authority. Hence Verkuyl states that the ultimate goal of the *Missio Dei* is the kingdom of God.⁽¹²⁾ From the countless biblical images and symbols which describes God's intentions, he selects this one as the clearest expression of God and his purpose.⁽¹³⁾

We therefore select the kingdom of God as the central theme around which to understand mission. It would be difficult to find a more inspiring biblical theme when we face the challenges of the contemporary situation. This, however, does not mean that our choice is a matter of convenience.

The Bangkok Assembly of 1973 supports our view in the following statement:

"The selection of the symbol of the kingdom of God is not an arbitrary one: Firstly, because it is the central concern of Jesus Christ himself."

Secondly, because we believe that it responds to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that is calling our attention once again to that ongoing memory of the kingdom, to provide the intellectual and inspirational categories that will help the church in its missionary obedience today".(14)

Thus far we have given ample justification for selecting the theme of the 'Kingdom of God' as the goal of mission. Perhaps we should now offer more clarity on what we hold the kingdom of God to be, since this is an often misunderstood term.

Biblically speaking then, what is the Kingdom of God? A natural tendency is to frequently narrow its borders to include only the inner life of the individual. Verkuyl points out that such an interpretation is not wrong; it is, however, inadequate for the preaching of Jesus so obviously treats issues which extend beyond the individual soul.(15)

Moreover, some interpretations restricts the kingdom exclusively to the church. The Kingdom and church are interchangeable terms.(16) For instance, the old Roman Catholic view maintained that 'sola ecclessia', 'sola gratia' (only in the church is there salvation).(17) The old Roman Catholic view obviously mistook the church for the kingdom. But many scholars are quick to point out that the terms *Basileia* and *Ecclesia*, though related, are anything but synonymous.(18) The church then is not the kingdom but a pointer to the kingdom of God.(19) A further emphasis on this point can be observed in the words of Wilhelm Anderson in his contribution to the conference at Willingen (1952):

"(Even) the church cannot be the starting point for a theology of mission: the origin of mission is found in the triune God, from whose nature and purpose the church receives the commission, impulse and power to engage in mission".(20)

Tambaran (1938) also supports this view pointing out that the church itself must stand ever under the ideal of the Kingdom of God which alone can guard it against becoming an end in itself and hold it true to God's purpose for it.(21)

Still, others claim that the kingdom has come when the spiritual needs of humankind are satisfied; Kingdom involves the forgiveness of sins.⁽²²⁾ Castro, however, points out that the New Testament nowhere spiritualises the kingdom of God or limits it to the spiritual side of nature.⁽²³⁾ Verkuyl points out that the Kingdom to which the Bible testifies involves a proclamation and a realisation of a total salvation, one which covers the whole range of human needs and destroys every pocket of evil and grief affecting humankind. He adds that kingdom in the New Testament has a breadth and scope which is unsurpassed; it embraces heaven as well as earth, world history as well as the whole cosmos.⁽²⁴⁾

Verkuyl further states that:

"The Kingdom of God is that new order of affairs begin in Christ which, when finally completed by him, will involve a proper restoration not only of man's relationship to God but also of those between sexes, generations, races, and even between man and nature".⁽²⁵⁾

Judging from this then, what may we say is the Kingdom of God? Once again Verkuyl sums this up best, when he says: 'It is the creation which has achieved its goal'. Rauschenbusch takes it even further stating that 'the kingdom of God is humanity organised according to the will of God'.⁽²⁶⁾

By defining mission as the establishing of the kingdom of God we are attempting to give a broad definition to mission. We are categorically stating that God's concern is with the whole world and with all humanity. Hence there is no dichotomy between what is 'sacred' and what is 'secular'.

We state with W. Pannenberg that all history is God's history and whatever happens in the world today is also of special concern to God.⁽²⁷⁾ Tambaram (1938) pointed out that *"the kingdom of God is within history and yet beyond history"*.⁽²⁸⁾

Whilst we accept the latter, yet we must reinforce the fact that the kingdom is to be understood in present reality. Hence, by accepting such a view, what we are simply saying then is that mission and evangelism are both one and the same thing. To be involved in the world, be it through proclamation or praxis or both, is inevitably to be also involved in the kingdom of God. Therefore, both mission and evangelism must be seen in the context of the crucified Christ's words to his

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, he has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord". (Luke 4: 18-19) (29)

Our view obviously does not find favour with that of Leslie Newbigin's or Johannes Aagaard's. We do not see a dichotomy between mission and missions or between extraordinary and ordinary missions. The one singular mission is the kingdom of God which rules in justice and righteousness. And to this end we see the aim of mission as the transforming of both individuals and their society to reflect the kingly rule of God. Therefore, as Barth points out, those who engage in mission assume the role of a servant.⁽³⁰⁾ Their singular purpose is to bring the world into the just and righteous rule of God, at the same time speaking and acting against all forms of injustice. This then is their ministry.

Supporting this view The Jerusalem Conference (1928) pointed out that:

"all Christian forces' everywhere, must be bound by their dedication to the preparation for the establishment among all mankind of the kingdom of God' and by Christian teaching to work for the eradication of racial prejudice and adverse conditions due to it, to preserve the rights of people, and to establish educational, religious and other facilities designed to enable all alike to enjoy equality of social, political, and economic opportunity". (31)

This, however, does not mean that we entirely disagree with Leslie Newbigin and Johannes Aagaard. What we are saying is that all other goals that one may attribute to God's mission, in essence, find expression in this one goal, namely, the kingdom of God. This, moreover, does not suggest that all other goals are of lesser or secondary importance. On the contrary, it indicates that anything that has to do with the kingdom of God occupies an a priori position. For instance, as the kingdom relates to the world, through its interaction, the church is borne, and wherever the church is established 'souls are saved' and brought into the kingdom. This then illustrates the singular aim of mission.

We shall now seek to reiterate this view by discussing the link between mission and evangelism.

2. Mission and Evangelism

The Melbourne Conference (1980) expressed the following statements on this particular subject:

"Proclamation demands communication in deed and word, in teaching, learning and serving"(32)

"Genuine evangelism is the proclamation of Jesus as Saviour and Lord who gave his life for others and who wants us to do likewise, setting us free by declaring God's forgiveness. Evangelism is true and credible only when it is both word and deed, proclamation and witness", (33)

True and effective mission then, must speak of two things: Proclamation and Historical Praxis.⁽³⁴⁾ It is not enough to merely speak the word of God, it is essential to also live it. For instance in South Africa it is not sufficient to merely speak of liberation, restoration and deliverance without also removing the causes of oppression and poverty.

Addressing the same subject, Professor J. H. Oldham wrote:

"Christianity is not primarily a philosophy but a crusade hence when Christians find in the world a state of things that is not in accord with the truth which they have learned from Christ, their concern is not that it should be explained but that it should be ended".(35)

The earthly ministry of Jesus in itself shows the link between word and deed. It is true to say that wherever and whenever Jesus spoke he also acted, and wherever he acted he also spoke the word. In his ministry he indicated the will of God to heal all those who were crippled, lame, blind, deaf or dumb. But he did not stop there, he went beyond this in actually giving healing to many.

The main focus in his ministry was that of the kingdom of God. He proclaimed that this kingdom was built on justice, reconciliation, peace and righteousness. And to this end he did everything in his power to make this a reality in his ministry - not by mere word but also in deed.

He ignored the Jewish laws that propagated racial tension by sitting down and speaking to the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4). He transgressed the Rabbinical laws by healing on the Sabbath (Mark 4). His intention was to transform both individuals and society by bringing them into true repentance. We note that to the disfavour of many he went and supped with the most unpopular people, like Matthew and Zacchaeus the tax collectors. The fact that he went to Zacchaeus' home was action loud enough to speak of the love and grace of God. A document produced in 1959 by the World Council of Churches supports this view in the following statement:

"There is no singular way to witness to Jesus Christ There are occasions when dynamic action in society is called for; there are others when a word must be spoken; others when the behaviour of Christians one to another is the telling witness. On still other occasions the simple presence of a worshipping community or man is the witness. These different dimensions of witness to the one Lord are always a matter of concrete obedience. To take them in isolation from one another is to distort the gospel. They are inextricably bound together, and together give the true dimension of evangelism. The important thing is that God's redeeming Word be proclaimed and heard".(36)

Proclamation and praxis then always go together. They are not one alongside the other. They are both part and parcel to an integral Christian ministry. J.D. Gort's comment here is relevant. He states that:

"The church of Jesus Christ must never allow its ministry to be determined by mere theology (word) without ethics (deed), or by mere ethics without theology. Its theology will be ethics and its ethics theology".(37)

Hence relevant mission today must emphasize proclamation and praxis: It is not enough to speak about God, it is also necessary to show and hold him out to those who are blinded to his presence. Jesus did not only touch people spiritually but he also responded to their physical needs. This then must be the path for effective mission today. There is no purpose in preaching salvation and deliverance to those who are hungry and poor, whose concentration is in the groans of their stomach. It is therefore necessary to first feed them in order to obtain their attention. But even then this is in itself proclamation. It is a non-verbal communication of the love and grace of God which speaks for itself.

Therefore, effective mission today must take the form of historical praxis. This must be its method of proclaiming the word of God. Whilst announcing the will of God for the world it must also seek to eradicate all forms of evil that prevents the coming of the kingdom. Where there is injustice, poverty, and oppression the task of our mission will be to identify and eradicate the root causes of such. Many may argue that such is not the duty of those who engage in God's mission. Our view, however, is that such is by no means exempt from God's mission. Verkuyl sums this up clearly:

"Merely to tend the victims of unjust structures in society, without at the same time fighting the causes which perpetuate these structures, is also a way of supporting them". (38)

Hence mission cannot be limited to the mere saving of souls. Witness and evangelism has to concern itself with the whole person. This then implies that the gospel has to bear its influence on all aspects of life, be they political, social or economic. Mission must also seek to bring a transformation to situations which do not exemplify Christ. Situations such as poverty and oppression do not glorify Christ. The task of mission then is to eradicate such so that the kingly and just rule of God may be brought into existence. As we seek to fulfil this we also seek to give credence to a holistic approach to mission.

Our words (kerygma) must give birth to concrete action (praxis). And our historical deeds must truthfully reflect the gospel message of the already coming kingdom. The word must become a living reality rooted in our daily experiences. And from within our experiences the word (kerygma) must find its meaning. Proclamation and praxis then do not work independently of each other as two separate entities. They are both inextricably linked to each other. To proclaim then is to act and to act is to proclaim. Tissa Balasuriya supports this view in the following comment:

"We need today to integrate evangelical witness in word and deed. Social action and Christian mission must be correlated in the depths of our faith as well as in the human situation. This can often result in options which bring down the opprobrium of the powers that be in society. But authentic witness to Jesus may leave no alternative discipleship". (39)

Our point here is that if one takes the aim of mission to be the establishing of the kingdom of God, then one does not see a dichotomy between social action and the Christian mission. The gospel message does not narrow its address only to the spiritual side of humanity. In fact, it addresses the whole human situation be it political, social, economical or spiritual in nature.

This then is the new emphasis in mission today. This, however, does not dismiss the fact that there are many who still see mission as the 'saving of individual souls'. But even they too are coming to recognise that the biblical concept of mission goes far beyond this. Dr Paul Löffler, in a background paper on evangelism presented to the central committee of the World Council of Churches in 1977, states that evangelism represents the core of Christian mission in the world.⁽⁴⁰⁾ But he also adds that inseparable from it are all the other expressions of Christian service and solidarity which make up the totality of mission. He therefore, argues that it is equally true that the struggles for liberation, service among the poor, identification with the oppressed, all centre in the witness to Christ who is the liberator, the servant and the sufferer. This new emphasis in mission obviously justifies its relevance for today. However, this is not the only new trend in modern mission. Added to this, many missiologists have also argued the need for context analysis to mission. We now turn to examine the relevance of such an argument.

3. The Importance of Context Analysis to mission

Over the past years numerous attempts have been made to enable mission to take a relevant outlook. This quest for relevance has resulted in a new definition of mission which encompasses the whole human situation, which we have already discussed.

This, however, does not mean that the struggle for relevance has found its end. In fact it has just begun. The question that addresses us now is: "*Where must we go from here?*" A careful study through D. T. Nel's article *Methods and Models of Context Analysis: The Challenge to Missiology*, helps to shed light on this particular subject. Nel emphasises a new trend which stands out as a challenge to missiology.⁽⁴¹⁾ He questions the possibility of engaging in mission without analysing a context.

He states that if the aim of mission is interpreted as the 'saving of souls' then there is no need for context analysis.⁽⁴²⁾ But if one interprets the aim of mission as the transforming of both individuals and their society to reflect the kingly rule of God, then context analysis becomes imperative.

Robert McAfee Brown also stresses the need for context analysis. He states that theology must no longer be done from 'abstraction', that it is from books, ideas, concepts, and modes of argument. Rather, it must be done from within the context of human experience, that is, from human struggle, anguish, pain and exploitation. This he asserts is the crying need of the present. He thus pleads for the need of "doing" theology from within a context.⁽⁴³⁾ Frederick Herzog also expresses a similar view: "*We can no longer theologise apart from the global social context*".⁽⁴⁴⁾ Gustavo Gutierrez points out that this means re-discovering the bible as the *Biblia Pauperum*, where the kingdom of God is offered to the poor, and all are invited to join in the mission of transforming present reality into the messianic peace of the kingdom of God.⁽⁴⁵⁾

This is precisely where we have faltered. In the past our interest in merely 'saving souls' has enabled us to take the gospel message seriously but has blinded us to the interest, values, potential and conditions of the context. Eugene A. Nida expresses a similar view. He stated that one of our most serious blind spots is our failure to appreciate the circumstances under which communication should take place.⁽⁴⁶⁾ Harold W. Turner also agrees with this stating that any mission needs to know about the people to whom it feels called.⁽⁴⁷⁾ Writing in a similar vein, Caleb Rosado points out that effective mission today demands two types of learning: "*a full understanding of the gospel and a clear understanding of the people to whom the gospel will be given - society*".⁽⁴⁸⁾

He further adds that much of our ministerial training is spent on understanding the message to be given, but very little time is spent on understanding the people who are the recipients of the message. Expressing a similar position, Bultmann points out that textual exegesis is no longer merely a peculiar concern of self-understanding which upon occasion wishes to correspond in understanding. It is more a matter of a special understanding which strives for practical congruence between the biblical traditions horizon of concern and the conditions of the present. It is therefore an understanding which perceives the needs and the opportunities of present social realities.⁽⁴⁹⁾

In response to this, it is true to say that our mission endeavours thus far, has often ignored the context and simply delivered the message in isolation. But we affirm that such cannot be done today. For the more intellectual and modernised context has come to question the relevance of the gospel message.

Therefore, we are brought to say, with many others, that in the present modern circumstances effective mission is not possible without analysing a context. Verkuyl echoes words which seem to lend support to this particular view. He points out that whilst we seek to establish biblical truth yet 'we must keep our eyes trained on the special context and situation in which we find ourselves'.⁽⁵⁰⁾ After all, our chief concern is to achieve relevance in teaching the revelation of Jesus Christ. The answer to our initial question then is that if mission has to go anywhere, it must now direct itself to this new accent we call "contextuality". Our emphasis must be on "doing mission". The mission methods and strategy we employ must come from *within* the mission context and *not to* the mission context.

In allowing this to happen, we are able to find out the immediate factors which prevents the coming of the kingdom in that particular situation.

Robert McAfee Brown sums this up simply, he states that:

"The specific Context will determine the specific Content of the emerging theology (of mission)".⁽⁵¹⁾

A.F. Glasser, however, cautions us on the tendency of over-emphasising the term 'contextualisation'. He points out that those on the more liberal end of the theological spectrum fail to maintain a balance:

"They define the gospel in such broad terms that it tends to get lost in the contextualising process. They are so taken with the dissection of the economic, social and political components of a situation that their contextualising of the gospel within it seems more derived from warmhearted imagination than from hard, biblical exegesis".⁽⁵²⁾

Whilst we do agree here with Glasser, yet we must point out that there are an equal number who show little or no attempt at contextualising. For instance, many evangelicals feel the gospel to be so precisely defined in scripture that one must posit harsh limitations to any contextualising process.

As a result, their contextualising starts with this gospel and they hoist the orange flag of caution when it comes to exploring the legitimate demands the gospel makes within any specific situation.⁽⁵³⁾ Our view is that "contextualising" is an immediate necessity to mission today.

The tendency in the past was to start with God and then move towards humankind. With context analysis we are actually implying a reversal of order. The focus is not theocentric or anthropocentric but both. Leonardo Boff adds that the accent is on the anthropological element over against the ecclesiastical, the utopian over against the factual, the critical over against the dogmatic, the social over against the personal, and orthopraxis over against orthodoxy.⁽⁵⁴⁾

Many may discount this trend as a theological heresy, for the basic claim is that we cannot start with man but with God alone. David J Bosch, quite correctly points out that mission is the action of God in which we share.⁽⁵⁵⁾ J D Gort qualifies this in stating that what we often refer to as 'our mission' is in actual fact 'God's mission'.⁽⁵⁶⁾ That mission, in the first place, belongs to God and comes from Him none can dispute. However, in stressing the need for context analysis we are by no means robbing God of his rightful place in Mission. What we are simply doing then is looking at God from a somewhat different angle. Stephan Bevans explains this quite clearly. He states that:

"God's revelation occurs in a context (culture). Therefore one can speak of finding Christ hidden in a context, rather than of bringing Christ to the context".⁽⁵⁷⁾

Wolfgang Pannenberg also stresses this view: *"The fundamental proof for the divinity of Yahweh exists in his acts in history".⁽⁵⁸⁾* This is how the people of Israel had come to know Yahweh. They saw his self-disclosure in history. This then is precisely the way in which people are brought to a saving knowledge of Christ today. Practically speaking, this means that persons and groups of men are to find their identity in history, never apart from it. Supporting this, Moltmann states that: *"History - whether sacred or profane, ancient or modern - testifies that some sort of contextualisation is necessary if we are effectively to cross cultural barriers with the gospel".⁽⁵⁹⁾* Hence effective mission today must seek to analyse the context of those whom we are 'reaching out to'. In achieving this what we are simply investigating is ways in which God has already been involved with those people.

Having determined this, we must then find within the Christian gospel both the 'analytic tools and the energising power to work for radical change in the world so that the kingdom of God may be fully established'.(60)

The word of God is not given in a vacuum. It is intended for a people and given to be understood. Which then is the best possible way of understanding both God and his message? Is it by looking at God himself or by looking at ourselves? Karl Barth, points out that, it is wrong to take any one extreme as one's starting point. He cautiously opts for a middle course which incorporates both.(61)

Our view, however, is that the logical deduction is to work from the known to the unknown. Information about ourselves are known, that about God is not fully known. When we look at ourselves we are able to see the mysterious hand of God at work, as in the case of the Israelites. Hence we are able to understand and appreciate God as he is 'unveiled' to us in our concrete reality. Therefore, it is true to claim that it is within the context that the message finds its meaning. Thus if mission is to be effective at all in any one particular context it has to start from *within* that context and *not without*.

In stressing the relation between message and context (situation) further we refer to Paul Tillich's theological contribution. Tillich speaks of the dynamics between message and situation. Message, for him, always means kerygmatic theology in so far as it emphasises the unchanging nature of the Christian gospel. He refers to the situation as:

"The creative interpretation of existence under all kinds of different sociological, psychological, economical and political conditions in every period of history".(62)

Tillich speaks of the balance between message and the situation. He points out that the lack of balance results in constant tension.

Our mission endeavours today seems to be clouded with great tension simply because the context has found the message to be quite irrelevant. In a context of poverty and oppression one does not speak of a God who is rich, powerful and Almighty.

Instead one speaks of a God who is poor and humble and yet who provides, liberates and restores. In such a case the message has failed to meet the needs of the context and the context has failed to comprehend the message. Both stand as separate entities without any interaction. There is therefore a need for the restoration of the lost balance. But how can such be obtained?

Here too Paul Tillich provides an answer. He states that there must be constant dialogue between message and context.⁽⁶³⁾ By this he simply means that both context and message must speak to each other. Our mission endeavours must identify human need in a given context and the gospel message must thereafter relevantly address them.

SUMMARY

In this chapter we have stated that mission must not be limited to the 'mere saving of souls' as has often been the case in the past. The new emphasis is that mission must be concerned with the whole person by addressing his/her whole situation be they political, social or economic. We have also pointed out that if one takes the establishment of the kingdom of God as the ultimate goal of mission then one is able to comply with this view. Moreover, we have stressed that mission encompasses both proclamation and praxis. They are not separate entities, rather they are both part and parcel to an integrated Christian ministry. Our final point here is that mission ceases to find relevance if it does not start from within a context. It is only when one understands and knows the context then one is able to witness to it. Since we have stressed the need for context analysis to mission, we shall now seek to focus on a particular context and see how it can be relevantly addressed by the gospel message. The context we choose is that of the poor.⁽⁶⁴⁾ However, even before we attempt to do this we need to ask and answer a few questions concerning the context we have chosen. This, evidently, is the purpose of the next chapter.

NOTES

CHAPTER ONE

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3. JERALD D. GORT, Melbourne 1980: A Missiological Interpretation, *International Review of Mission*, Vol. LXIX, numbers 276-277, October/January 1980/81, p.568.
4. DAVID J. BOSCH, "Evangelism and Social Transformation", in *Theologia Evangelica*, Vol. XVI-2, June 1983, p.50.
5. Ibid., p.51.
6. PAUL G. SCHROTENBOER, Op. cit., p.7.
7. EMILIO CASTRO, *Freedom in Mission*, W.C.C. Pub., Geneva, 1985, p.67.
8. Ibid., pp.68-69.
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10. J.C. HOEKENDIJK, "The Call to Evangelism", *International Review of Mission*, Vol. XXXIX, number 154, 1950, p.170.
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16. Ibid., p.198.
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18. G.E. LADD, *A Theology of the New Testament*, William B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1975, p.111.
19. Ibid., p.113.

20. WILHELM ANDERSEN, Towards A Theology of Mission: A Study of The Encounter Between the Missionary Enterprise and the Church and its Theology, *I.M.C. Research Pamphlet Number 2* (London: S.C.M., 1955), p.10.
 21. Unpublished Report by the World Council of Churches.
 22. J. VERKUYL, *Contemporary Missiology*, p.200.
 23. EMILIO CASTRO, *Freedom in Mission*, p.48f.
 24. J. VERKUYL, *Ibid.*, p.198.
 25. *Ibid.*, pp.198-199.
 26. W. RAUSCHENBUSH, *Christianity And The Social Crisis*, New York: Philosophical Library, 1959, p.13.
 27. WOLFHART PANNENBERG, *Revelation as History*, Sheed and Ward, London, 1969, pp.125-130.
 28. See *International Review of Mission*, Vol. LXXII, number 288, October 1983, p.525.
 29. The Revised Standard Version.
 30. DAVID J. BOSCH, "Evangelism and Social Transformation", in *Theologia Evangelica*, Vol. XVI-2, June 1983, p.51.
 31. Mission and Evangelism, An Ecumenical Affirmation, *International Review of Mission*, October 1982, p.51.
 32. *International Review of Mission*, "Melbourne Reports/Reflections", p.14.
 33. *Ibid.*, p.430.
 34. "Praxis is more than merely "involvement in a situation", or "practice". It is a particular kind of involvement informed by a particular kind of analysis within the historical situation. It is in the last analysis the praxis of participation in the class struggle to bring about the creation of a new society". (Carl E. Armerding, *Evangelicals And Liberation*, 1977, p.17).
- See also Gutierrez' emphasis on praxis as "concrete and creative service to others" (pp.10,11) coupled with the emphasis on the necessity of true charity to express itself by engagement in the class struggle (p.275).
35. *International Review of Mission*, Vol. LXXVI, number 302, April 1987, p.171.
 36. From an unpublished report.
 37. J.D. GORT, "Gospel for the Poor"? in *Missiology*, Vol. 7, 1979, p.349. The words in brackets are mine.
 38. J. VERKUYL, *Contemporary Missiology*, pp.198-204.
 39. TISSA BALASURIYA, "Proclamation and Witness", in *International Review of Mission*, Vol. LXIX, numbers 276-277, October /January 1980/81, p.543.

40. PAUL LÖFFLER, "The Reign of God has come in The Suffering of Christ: An Exploration Of The Power Of The Powerless", in *International Review of Mission*, Vol. LXVIII, number 270 (April 1979), p.115.
 41. See paper delivered by D.T. Nel, "*Methods And Models Of Context Analysis: The Challenge To Missiology*", p.1.
 42. Ibid., pp.2-3.
- Confer also Joe Holland, *Social Analysis*, 1983, for a more detailed discussion on the importance of social analysis.
- "We understand the term (contextualization) to mean making concepts or ideals relevant in a given situation". (B.H. KATO, "The Gospel, Cultural Context, And Religious Syncretism", in *Let The Earth Hear His Voice*, ed. J.D. Douglas (Minneapolis: World Wide, 1975 p.217).
- "(Contextualization) is the translation of the unchanging context of the Gospel of the Kingdom into verbal form meaningful to the people in their separate culture and within their particular existential situations". (Bruce J. Nicholls, "Theological Education and Evangelization", Ibid., p.647).
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 46. EUGENE A. NIDA, *Message And Mission*, p.172.
 47. HAROLD W. TURNER, "New Mission Task: Worldwide and Waiting", in *Missiology*, Vol. 13, 1985, p.17.
 48. CALEB ROSADO, *International Review Of Mission*, Number 305, January 1988, p.207.
 49. RUDOLF BULTMANN, *Glauben Und Verstehen*, Vol. 2, 5th Ed. (Tubingen: Mohn, 1968), pp.117-132. Eng. Trans., *Faith And Understanding*, ed. Robert R. Funk, Trans. Louise Smith (New York: Harper and Row, 1969).
 50. J VERKUYL, Ibid., p.207.
 51. BROWN, Ibid., p.13.
 52. See *Missiology*, Vol. 7, p.404.
 53. See J.D. Gort's article, Gospel for the Poor? in *Missiology*, Vol. 7, 1979, p.336f.
 54. WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES (W.C.C.), *Ministry With The Poor*, 1977, p.15.
 55. DAVID J. BOSCH, "Theological Education In Missionary Perspective, in *Missiology*, Vol. 10, 1982, p.26.
 56. STEPHEN BEVANS, "Models of Contextual Theology", in *Missiology*, Vol. 13, 1985, p.188.

58. PANNENBERG, Op. cit., p.13.
59. DAVID J. HESSELGRAVE, *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods And Models*, 1989, p.37.
60. BROWN, Ibid., p.3.
61. See David J. Bosch, "Evangelism and Social Transformation", in *Theologia Evangelica*, Vol. XVI-2, June 1983, p.51.
62. PAUL TILLICH, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, London: Nisbet and Company 1953, p.4.
63. Ibid., p.3f.
64. In Chapter Three we attempt to provide social analysis on a particular poor community - Isipingo Farm. However, before we attempt to do that we must first justify our choice for such a context. This is the intent of the next chapter (Chapter Two).

CHAPTER TWO

"GOD'S HAPPY POOR"

One of the theological miracles of the late 20th century is the rediscovery of the Biblical witness to God's particular concern for the poor and oppressed. To not a few it has become clear on the basis of the biblical witness that the materially poor are in a special way the "*apple*" of God's eye and that this obliges his people to engage in a special ministry on behalf of the poor. Many Christians therefore have felt compelled to assert that the Gospel is firstly for the poor. Is this assertion valid? Before we seek to answer this question, we must first ask: Who are "*the poor*" for Jesus? Are they the hungry and the materially deprived as the term is so often used today?

1. The Poor in the Scriptures

Poverty is a central theme both in the Old and New Testaments. It is treated both briefly and profoundly, it describes social situations and expresses spiritual experiences communicated only with difficulty; it defines personal attitudes, a whole people's attitude before God, and the relationships of people with each other.⁽¹⁾

1.1 The Old Testament

The Old Testament places different connotations on the questions of wealth and poverty. In the Wisdom Literature, for instance, wealth is regarded as both a blessing from God and the fruit of one's labour. An analysis of the term BRK shows that in the pentateuchal narratives, Yahweh's blessing on the patriarchs become tangible among other things also in their wealth.

Deuteronomy emphasises the close connection between human actions and divine response. If Israel lives according to God's ordinances God will bless her "*in the works of her hands*" (Dtn. 7). This line of thinking is pursued in the wisdom literature as well. Where God blesses he gives numerous descendants (Ps. 112 V. 2; 128 V. 3 ff; Job 42 V. 13), landed property (Ps. 37 V. 22), abundant livestock (Job 1 V. 10; 42 V. 12), and wealth (Ps. 112 V. 1-3; Prov. 3 V. 9 f; 10 V. 15; 18 V. 11; 19 V. 4; 28 V. 8, 22).

Poverty, however, is seen as the result of laziness and a lack of practical wisdom. Moreover, poverty is punishment (Prov. 10: 4.6 : 15 & 16).⁽²⁾

When we turn to the works of the pre-exilic prophets a completely different picture presents itself. We do not find the term "blessing", instead we find an extremely critical evaluation of earthly wealth. Especially in the writings of the eighth century prophets Amos, Isaiah and Micah we find violent attacks on the affluence of their contemporaries. They depreciated the accumulation of wealth which is demonstrated first and foremost in expensive buildings. The well-to-do had summer and winter houses (Am. 3 V. 15) built out of hewn stones (Am. 5 V. 11) a building technique introduced in Israel by Solomon, and later by Ahab in his extensive building projects in Samaria, and finally copied by the upper strata of society. The exterior of their houses was decorated with ivory (Am. 3 V. 15) and surrounded by beautiful gardens (Is. 1 V. 29 - 31) and within they were furnished with luxurious furniture such as ivory beds and couches (Am. 3 V. 12; 6, 4), all signs of the affluent standard of living. This is evidenced also by the quality of food which the wealthy consumed. Only the best types of meat were used (Am. 6:4) and expensive wine bowls were used for drinking (Am. 6:6 f. also So is. 5,11). Dress (Is. 3 V. 16 - 24) and entertainment (Is. 5 V. 11 & 12; Am. 6:4) were also characterised by luxury.

But why did the prophets condemn affluence? G. Wittenberg answers this question simply. He states that the condemnation of luxury is a correlate to the prophetic condemnation of social injustices, and both have to be considered together.⁽³⁾ This is most obvious in Amos 4 V.1:

*"Hear this word, you cows of Bashan
Who are in the mountains of Samaria,
who oppress the poor (dalim)
who crush the needy (ebyonim)
who say to their husbands
Bring that we may drink" (4)*

So, it is evident that the wealthy are condemned because of their exploitation of the 'poor' and needy. The 'poor' then are those who are at the mercy of the rich. They are the underdogs and oppressed of society.

Gort, however, cautions us on viewing the 'poor' in such an exclusive sense.⁽⁵⁾ He points out that the terms poor (rich) and poverty (wealth) are used in several different ways and combinations in Scripture; sometimes they refer exclusively to one group, sometimes inclusively to all; in one context they have a material significance, in another a spiritual meaning. In an attempt to explain this, he points out that there is one way in which all are poor. All human beings are sinners, "*for there is no one who does not sin*" (2 Chr. 6:36). He, however, admits that this is not the whole story.⁽⁶⁾ The Bible also understands poverty in a literal, economic, social and political sense. Walter Kasper also insists upon this broad conception of 'the poor' in Scripture:

✓ "*Poor is taken in a very broad sense: it includes the helpless, those without resources, the oppressed, those in despair, the despised, the ill-tempered, the abused ...*" (7)

Hence poverty must be understood not only in a sense as a term applicable to the materially poor but also to those poor in spirit even when they are not materially poor. This is the correct biblical understanding of poverty. Gutierrez explains this even further. He states that there are two major lines of thought which seem to stand out as the biblical meaning of poverty. Firstly, poverty in the Bible, is a scandalous condition inimical to human dignity and therefore contrary to the will of God (social, political and economic implications). Secondly, he points out that the poor person is the 'client' of Yahweh, therefore, poverty is 'the ability to welcome God, an openness to God, a willingness to be used by God, a humility before God' (spiritual implications).⁽⁸⁾ These two views suggests that poverty in the first instance is to be rejected and in the second sense it is to be desired. John Stott observes a threefold division on the biblical concept of poverty.⁽⁹⁾ Firstly, and economically speaking, there are *the indigent poor*, who are deprived of the basic necessities of life. Secondly, and sociologically and politically speaking, there are the *oppressed poor*, who are powerless victims of human injustice. Thirdly, and spiritually speaking, there are *the humble poor*, who acknowledge their helplessness and look to God alone for salvation. In each case God is represented as coming to them and making their cause his own, in keeping with his characteristic that 'he raises the poor from the dust'. Stott, however, reduces these three categories to two, namely the material poverty of the destitute and powerless and the spiritual poverty of the humble and meek.⁽¹⁰⁾ God concerns himself with both. In both cases 'he raises the poor from the dust', but the way he does it is different.

For the first kind of poverty is a social one which God opposes, while the second is a spiritual virtue which he approves. Moreover, there is only one human community in which the two are combined, namely the kingdom community, the new and redeemed society in which God rules through Christ by his Spirit. In order to obtain more clarity on the biblical view of poverty we shall now undertake a more detailed analysis of the term *Poor* in the Old Testament.

1.1.1 Who are the Poor in the Old Testament?

In the Old Testament there are five Hebrew roots, producing verbs, nouns, adjectives, which are all used to describe poverty - what it is like, what causes it, what are its consequences. They all have different meanings. One stresses lack or inadequacy, and therefore need. Another means unequal, emptied out, impoverished, and therefore frail and weak. A third means poor because dispossessed and therefore also without possessions. Another denotes need and dependence, the poverty in which one needs to appeal for help. The fifth means brought low, humbled, oppressed. Together they give us the Biblical perspectives of poverty which lie behind Jesus' announcement of his ministry.⁽¹¹⁾

1.1.2 Poverty as Lack or Inadequacy

This word, in Hebrew, "chaser", speaks most intensely of hunger, lacking bread and water (2 Sam. 3:29; Amos 4:6; Prov. 12:9; 13:25). It refers to those who lack the basic necessities of life. Perkins describes it as the gap between what you have and what you need.⁽¹²⁾ What is lacking may be shelter (Jud. 19:19 - 20) or wisdom (Prov. 6:32 etc.), or diligence (Prov. 21:5).

Job 30:3 give a vivid description of this type of poverty:

"Through poverty and hard hunger, they gnaw the dry and desolate ground, picking mallow and the leaves of bushes, warming themselves with the roots of the broom tree".⁽¹³⁾

or

from Deuteronomy 28 V.57:

"Even the most refined woman of noble birth will secretly eat her own afterbirth, and grudge it to her husband and children, for want of all things".⁽¹⁴⁾

The poverty of not having anything to eat.

A study of the word "*chaser*" points out some of the causes of this kind of poverty. Poverty tells us that wickedness causes the belly to suffer want (13:25), too much sleep and want will attack us like an armed robber (5:10,11); hasty planning leads to want (21:5); oppressing the poor to increase our own wealth, giving to the rich, (22:16); loving pleasure (21:17) or miserliness and gambling (28:22) all bring us to want. This poverty is caused by personal sins.

The scriptures, however, also speak of the solution: "*The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not lack*" (Ps. 23:1). Those who seek the Lord lack no good things (Ps. 34:9 & 10). And the people are also exhorted by the remembrance that they lacked nothing in the wilderness (Deut. 2:7), that they will lack nothing in the promised land (Jud. 18:10), but will find abundant water, fruit, crops, minerals, eat without scarcity and lack nothing (Deut. 8:7-9). Moreover, instructions are given to help the people to overcome this type of poverty: "*Do not harden your heart or shut your hand to your poor brother*" (Deut. 15:7). Lend him sufficient for his need (v.8). It is hardly worth lending, so give to him freely and without grudging (v.10). Open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor in the land (v.11). What we have here is a structured process of release from debt in the community every seventh year. Charity is the interim action, either by generous lending or by free giving, between the years of release.⁽¹⁵⁾

1.1.3 Poverty as Dispossession

There is yet another cause of poverty beyond the realm of personal sin and the calamities of life. In the Old Testament the term which is used least to speak of the poor is "*Yarash*" (31 times), which has a rather neutral meaning. As Gelin says, the prophets preferred terms which are 'photographic' of real, living people.⁽¹⁶⁾

"*Rash*" means 'the dispossessed poor, the impoverished.' In Sam. 12 : 1 - 4 is the story of two men - one rich with many flocks and herds, the other poor with only one little ewe lamb.

The rich man takes the poor man's lamb and offers it at a feast to a visitor rather than take one of his own. An arrogant and ruthless act of dispossession, and a story of a kind we hear so often between land-owner and peasant.

The Wisdom Literature reflects a lot on the consequences of possessions and of dispossession. The rich man has wealth with which to redeem his life, while a poor man has no means of redemption. (Prov. 13:8) The poor also suffer a social dispossession in that the poor is disliked even by his neighbour, but the rich has many friends (Prov. 14:20; 19:4). Poverty is linked with disgrace (13:18). Moreover, this analysis is not limited to relations of injustice between individuals but extends to systemic analysis of the whole society. *"If you see in a province the poor oppresses, and justice and right violently taken away, do not be surprised. Every official is protected by the one over him, and both are protected by still higher officials".* (Eccl. 5:8)(17)

Therefore, the prophets untiringly rebuked the rulers of Israel for the oppression and impoverishment they brought to the many. Poverty is dispossession. This is essentially a passive phenomenon. It is the people being disinherited: first in the province, then in the city. God looks for an intercessor who will seek justice for these poor:

But this is a people robbed and plundered they have become a prey with none to rescue, a spoil with none to say 'restore'. (Isaiah 42:22)

1.1.4 Poverty as Frailty and Weakness

Poverty is frailty and weakness. In Hebrew the root word is "Dal" (used 57 times). This word is connected with the word "Dallah", the 'class of the poor'. It appears widely in the Old Testament - in historical Books, the Codes, the Psalms, the Wisdom Literature and the prophets.

The Old Testament (2 Kings 24:14) describes the poorest in the land who were left behind during the exile to Babylon. Jeremiah (5:4) tells us that they are easily crushed and abandoned, without the means to recover from loss or calamity. (18) These "Dal" are blessed in the kingdom. In the song of Hannah we read:

*He raises the frail poor (Dal) from the dust,
He lifts the needy (Ebyon) from the ash heap,
To make them sit with princes
And inherit a seat of honour (1 Samuel 2:8)(19)*

What we learn from this word is that poverty is an issue of the exercise of power; that frailty itself confers rights on the frail if justice is to be done; and that the delivering God of the Bible is on the side of the poor, responding to their need for release, seeking their restoration to the community, and working for the transformations of the power structures of the community by making them the test of the community itself. Widows also fall into this category of those made poor by calamity. Their poverty is simply circumstantial. And so God takes responsibility for them:

The Lord watches over the sojourners, He upholds the widow and the fatherless (Ps. 146:9)

1.1.5 Poverty as Need and Dependence

Not all poverty is related to personal sins. The words "Ebyon" and "Dal" describe another kind of poor. "Ebyon" is the designation of the person who finds himself begging - the needy, the dependent. Gutierrez states that "Ebyon" is used 61 times, it describes the poor person as the one who desires, the beggar, the one who is lacking something and who awaits it from another.(20) Job indicates the appropriate response to these "Ebyons" when he describes his personal identification with those in need:

*I was eyes to the blind,
and feet to the lame
I was father to the poor, (Ebyon)
and I searched out the cause of him
whom I did not know. (Job 29: 15 - 16) (21)*

Job recognises the right of the needy poor "to stretch out his hand from his heap of ruins, and in his disaster cry for help (30:24) and declares his readiness for judgment, if he has seen anyone perish for lack of clothing without helping" (31:19 - 20)

Response to need is an essential Biblical response to the needy. So also are the actions to remove the domination of power and structure the possibilities of justice. Harvey Perkins points out that we must not feel that one has priority over the other, or that one is a contradiction of the other.(22) The Biblical call is to do both.

*"Is not this the fast that I choose:
To loose the bonds of wickedness
To undo the thongs of the yoke,
To let the oppressed go free,
And to break every yoke?
Is it not to share your bread with the hungry
And bring the homeless poor into your house;
And not to hide yourself from your own flesh?
(Is. 58: 6 - 7) (23)*

This is not poverty caused by sin; it is poverty caused by natural calamity. It is of these poor that Jesus spoke when answering the query of John the Baptist (Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?):

The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear (Luke 11 : 3 & 4)

Jesus also describes them quoting Deuteronomy 15:11:

"For the poor (Ebyon) will never cease out of the land, Therefore, I command you and you shall open wide your hands to your brother, to the needy (Ebyon) and to the poor (Ani) in the land".(24)

It is to these "Ebyon" that God's kingdom brings healing and socio-economic uplift.

1.1.6 Poverty as Oppression

The fifth Hebrew word used in the Old Testament is "*Ani*" (used 80 times) and its derivative "*Anaw*", which is the word Jesus used when he talks of the blessed poor. The root word means to bring low, to vanish, to isolate or force, and is used for a whole range of exercises in domination, from sexual violation (Deut. 21:14; 22:29; Jud. 19:24) to economic oppression. It was used to denote the response of humble dependence on God to such oppression (Job 34:28; Ps. 34:6).

The "*Ani*" is one who is bowed down under pressure, one occupying a lowly position, one who finds himself in a dependent relationship. It means 'the humble poor of Yahweh' or 'God's poor ones'.(25)

The "*Ani*" are not contrasted with the rich, but with the men of violence, the oppressors who 'turn aside justice from them' (Amos 2:7) who rob the poor of their right by making unjust laws and publishing burdensome decrees (Isaiah 10: 1 - 2). They are poor because they have become the victim of others.(26) Their poverty is not caused by fate; it is caused by the actions of those whom the prophet condemn:

'Shame on you, says Isaiah',

"You who make unjust laws, and publish burdensome decrees, depriving the poor of justice, robbing the weakest of my people of their rights, despoiling the widow and plundering the orphan" (10: 1 - 2).(27)

These blessed poor, then, include the needy (Ebyon) and the frail (Dal), the dispossessed (Rash) and those who lack (Chaser). But within these categories also underlying them, is poverty caused by the ruthlessness of the powerful, who both deny the rights and do not respond to their calamities.

The poor in the Old Testament, then, are those who lack or express want, those who are dispossessed or disinherited, those who are frail and weak, those who show need and dependence, and those who are oppressed.

1.2 The New Testament

In the New Testament the poor replace Israel as the focus of the gospel. As the poor experience the good news of the kingdom, the real nature of the gospel becomes evident to others. The New Testament gives special attention to what that means in terms of children, women, Samaritans, social outcasts, the sick, the 'lost sheep of the house of Israel'.

Jesus was the son of poor parents (Luke 2:24), but there is no reason to suppose He lived in abject poverty. As the eldest son, He would probably have inherited something from Joseph, and it appears that He used to pay the Temple tax (Matthew 17:24). Some of His disciples were reasonably well-to-do (Mark 1:20) and He had some fairly wealthy friends (John 12:3). He and the Twelve, however, shared a common purse (John 12:6). They were content to go without the comforts of home life (Luke 9:58), and yet found occasion for giving to the poor (John 13:29)

In the teaching of Jesus material possessions are not regarded as evil, but as dangerous. The poor are often shown to be happier than the rich, because it is easier for them to have an attitude of dependence upon God. It was to them that He came to preach the gospel (Luke 4:18; 7:22). A poor person's offering may be of much greater value than a rich man's (Mark 12: 41 - 44). The poor must be shown hospitality (Luke 14: 12-14), and given alms (Luke 18:22), though charity was to be secondary to worship (John 12: 1-8).

The early church made an experiment in the communal holding of wealth (Acts 2: 41-42). This led at first to the elimination of poverty (Acts 4: 34-35). Much of the ministry of Paul was concerned with raising money in the Gentile churches to assist the poor Christians in Jerusalem (Romans 15: 25-29; Galatians 2:10). These churches were also taught to provide for their own poor members (Romans 12:12). James is especially vehement against those who allowed distinctions of wealth in the Christian Community (James 2:1-7). The poor were called by God and their salvation brought glory to Him (1 Corinthians 1: 26-31). the material wealth of the church of Laodicea was in sad contrast with her spiritual poverty (Revelation 3:17).

The most systematic exposition about poverty and wealth in the Epistles is found in 2 Corinthians 8,9 where Paul sets the idea of Christian charity in the context of the gifts of God and especially that of His Son who, 'though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might become rich' (RV). In the light of that, running the risk of material poverty will lead to spiritual blessing, just as the apostles were poor but made many rich (2 Corinthians 6:10).

The evangelist Luke seems to display great sensitivity to the theme of poverty. He is not at variance with the rest of the New Testament, but is actually clarifying its intentions.⁽²⁸⁾ We shall, therefore, attempt to briefly summarise his views on this subject. Many of Luke's special parables relate to money matters, examples, the two debtors, the rich fool, the tower builder, the lost coin, the unjust steward, the rich man and Lazarus and the pounds. Those who are 'poor' and 'humble' are; often the objects of the Saviour's mercy (6: 20, 30: 15: 11 ff).

The Pharisees are called 'lovers of money' (16:4). John the Baptist, in Luke's account of his ministry, warns the tax-collectors against extortion and soldiers against discontent with their pay (3:13ff). At Nazareth, Jesus proclaims good tidings to the 'poor' (4: 17-21). In the Magnificat the hungry are filled and the rich are sent away empty (91:53). In the Sermon on the Plain the first woe is directed against the rich, who are said to have received their consolation (4:24), and the first beatitude is addressed to the poor, without the qualification 'in spirit' as found in Matthew (cf Luke 6:20: Matthew 5:3), although the same sense may be intended.

Luke's perception of poverty and wealth is best summed up in the following points: (29)

1. The Christian's concern about poverty and riches is part of his concern for, and dedication to the kingdom of God. People who have a share in the kingdom, in the new creation, are made one and this oneness should express itself also in mutual material help.

For Luke, the sharing of property among the believers is a manifestation of their *koinonia* and of the proleptic presence of the new creation.

2. No one can have a share in the kingdom unless he has made a radical choice for God, against mammon, that means that his hope is entirely in God and not in earthly possessions or human achievements. (Luke 16:13: 14:13).
3. Luke is not concerned simply about the problem of world poverty, but he is definitely concerned about the salvation of the world, about the liberation from the power of evil (Acts 26:18: Luke 1:74-75). For Luke, and for the New Testament as a whole, liberation from the power of evil by Christ and conversion to Christ are the only way to the kingdom to the new creation, of which the *koinonia* is a fruit. Only through the coming of the Kingdom will we reach the stage where there will be no longer any needy person among us (Acts 4:34). For Luke, the preaching of the Good News is the key.

Thus the issue of poverty and wealth in the New Testament is not about economic relationships separate from the experience of the Kingdom of God or the proclamation of the gospel. The concept of poverty in the Gospels must not be interpreted too narrowly, that is, as the spiritually poor (Matthew 5:3). In line with the Old Testament, poverty is associated with and even includes all kinds of physical distress. In the Lucan beatitudes the poor are associated with those who are hungry and those who weep (Luke 6:21). The problem of how salvation can be promised to these people without mentioning faith cannot be solved by spiritualisation. The clue to understanding Jesus' intention correctly can be found in the fact that Good News was proclaimed to the poor in order that they may believe it.

According to Luke 6:20, the first beatitude is not a general statement about the way of salvation, but a word of promise directed to Jesus' disciples: "*Happy are you poor*". This agrees with the fact that the fourth beatitude in Luke 6:22 concerns those who suffer for the sake of the gospel. If poverty itself was the instrument of salvation, Jesus would surely not have allowed his followers to retain any wealth. This was, however, clearly not the case. Zacchaeus, for example, only undertook to give away part of his wealth to which Jesus did not object. The Good News to the poor does not mean that the poor are not, like all others called to "believe the Good News" as Jesus' basic message is summarised in Mark 1:15. What is blessed by Jesus is "poverty in the context of trust in God". Jesus did not, however, make it conditional that the poor should first come to faith before He was willing to proclaim to them that they are blessed. He proclaimed the Good News of God's blessing to the poor to all of them in order that they may believe it. This is part of his message of free grace.

Thus far we have merely discussed the New Testament perspective on poverty and wealth, bearing special reference to Luke's views on this subject. Now we need to answer a more important question: Who are the poor in the New Testament?

In the New Testament the Greek term *ptochos* is used to speak of the poor person. It refers to one who has nothing and has no choice but to be a beggar. The poor were frequently without clothes, hungry, ill and sorrowful. Gutierrez states that "*Ptochos*" refers to one who does not have what is necessary to subsist, the wretched one driven into begging.⁽³⁰⁾

Stegemann points out that the predominant use of "*Ptochos*" in the New Testament for 'poverty' has its basis in the real-life situation of the people under discussions - they are desperately poor, wretched creatures who are fighting for their survival.⁽³¹⁾

Luke identifies the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame, as the poor. What is described in "*Ptochos*" is extreme poverty.⁽³²⁾ This type of poverty is aligned to the "*Ani*" we described in the Old Testament. This is the poor who Luke speaks about and this is the poor with whom Jesus identifies.

Stegemann makes a very useful comment here. He states that in most cases the terms for 'poor' in the New Testament are used in their original socio-economic sense, though they seem to appear in the metaphorical sense.⁽³³⁾ In the light of this, he identifies the poor in the New Testament with whom Jesus associated.

They are: The sick (Luke 14:13;21; 4:18-19; 7:22: Matthew 11:5; 25:35; see also Gal. 4:9); (Mark 10: 46-52).

The naked (Revelation 3:17; Mark 10:50; Luke 3:11; James 2:16; Matthew 5:40; 6:25).

The hungry (Matthew 6:25; James 2:15-16) and the Destitute (Mark 4:7: Matthew 25:35-36: Luke 16:20).⁽³⁴⁾

2. Who are the Poor Today

The Melbourne Conference (1980) pointed out the difficulty of determining who 'the poor' are today.⁽³⁵⁾ It stated that our difficulty comes from the fact that, although we live on the same globe, we come from different situations, and speak of different characteristics (context). Part of our difficulty comes from the fact that, although we serve a common Lord and share a common faith, we read the scriptures in different ways and emphasise different aspects of our understanding of the kingdom of God (context).

Nevertheless, numerous attempts have been made to define 'the poor' today. Gutierrez states that the 'poor' person today is the oppressed one, the one margined from society, the member of the proletariat struggling for his most basic rights; he is the exploited and plundered social class, the country struggling for its liberation.⁽³⁶⁾ He sees in this an evident and inevitable 'political' character insofar as they imply liberation.

According to Moltmann, the poverty intended by the scriptures:

"extends from economic, social and physical poverty to psychological, moral and religious poverty. The poor are all those who have to endure acts of violence and injustice without being able to defend themselves. The poor are all who have to exist physically and spiritually on the fringe of death, who have nothing to live for and to whom life has nothing to offer".⁽³⁷⁾

This is an excellent description of the poor today. These are the type of people with whom Jesus identified. They are the "*Ani*" of the Old Testament and the "*Ptochos*" of the New Testament.

The Consultation on World Evangelisation also gives us a good basis to determine whose poor today. The COWE report concludes:

"The poor refers to the manual worker who struggles to survive on a day to day basis, the destitute cowering as a beggar; the one reduced to meekness, the one brought low ... those weak and tired from carrying heavy burdens, the leper and very often the common people" the majority of references indicate that the poor are the mercilessly oppressed, the powerless, the destitute and the downtrodden"(38)

The Melbourne Conference has provided us with yet a simple definition in one of its papers: To be poor is to have not, to experience lack and deficiency the poor are the "*little ones*" (Matt. 11:25), the insignificant people of no consequence.(39) They are powerless, voiceless and at the mercy of the powerful. The dynamics of being poor are such that the oppressed poor finally accept their inhumanity and humiliation of their situation; they, therefore accept the statusquo as the normal course of life. Thus, to be poor becomes both a state of things and an attitude of life, an outlook, even a world-view. In the final analysis the poor in the world today can be described in a threefold sense:

1. Those who have been deprived of materials and cultural riches (the necessities of life). In some situations, this poverty is a result of natural calamities. In most cases, however, the necessities of life have been exploited by others in an unjust accumulation of wealth by the few. These are the exploited and oppressed ones.
2. Those who, possess riches, still do not live in a state of well-being. In both capitalist and socialist states among persons who have enough - and more than enough - of the necessities of life, there is malaise, anomie and self destructive behaviour that has both social and personal causes. Not all of these poor can be described as the result of unjust exploitation. Some would say that these should not be called "poor", although they are in a situation of need.

3. Those who, possess riches, are prepared to live a life of frugality, or self denial, in order to make responsible use of these riches. For some this goes as far as solidarity with the poor in which they voluntarily give up their wealth and security to join themselves with the poor in order to struggle against the poverty produced by injustice.(40)

We must, however, reiterate that the poor today are not only those who are materially poor. To accept this only is to misrepresent scripture. Julio de Santa Ana supports this view in the following comment:

"..... according to the scriptures, material poverty and spiritual poverty are interconnected, the latter being the result of the former".(41)

It is quite unbiblical to exclusively define the poor as the hungry and materially deprived. However, it is not wrong to stress this fact. Since the majority of the biblical reference to the poor, describes the poor as the oppressed and deprived, not in a spiritual sense but in a material way. The most authentic biblical definition then of the poor today is: *They who are oppressed and deprived; they who suffer economic, political, social, cultural and religious domination. They who are defenceless and at the mercy of another.*

Having defined who the poor are, we are left with yet another question, posed in the beginning: Is it valid to assert that the gospel is for the poor?

3. Good News for the Poor?

Throughout its history the church has given a great deal of attention in one form or another to the poor. Particularly during the Middle Ages enormous amounts of money, goods and possessions were given for charity and works of benevolence. Rauschenbusch, however questions the integrity of this, pointing out that the church had succoured the oppressed on a very large scale.(42) He nevertheless, affirms that the church in some instances had shown a genuine concern for the poor.

It is therefore, true to say that the Christian community has always had an awareness that the Gospel is for the poor. But it is equally true to also point out that in its understanding the two nouns in the phrase were respectively spiritualised and allegorised.

Many scriptural terms, for example, were given an exclusively "personalistic" or symbolical meaning. The oppressed of Luke 4:18 were those downtrodden by guilt, the captives, those imprisoned by sin, the poor, the spiritually destitute. So, when the church professed - as it always has - that the Gospel is for the poor, what was usually meant was a Gospel for the poor sinner.

Gort states that this spiritualising, truncating interpretation which has persisted up to present times is increasingly being called into question.⁽⁴³⁾ He points out that the proponents of Black and liberation theology have quite rightly argued against the allegorising tendency in the church's biblical exegesis. They point out that when Jesus said he has come *"to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, and to set at liberty those who are oppressed"* (Luke 4:18), he meant exactly that - literally.⁽⁴⁴⁾ Hence when they proclaim that the Gospel is for the poor, they mean that it also has implications - literal implications - for the destitute in their poverty, for the destitution of the poor.

It is quite apparent then that the church has always concerned herself with the poor, irrespective of how she understood her involvement with them. The conference at Melbourne also realised the significance of relating mission to the poor. Both these conferences have stated on no uncertain terms that mission must have as its priority a concern for the poor.

The following statement summarises the view adopted at Melbourne:

"the church of Jesus Christ is called to preach Good News to the poor, even as its Lord has done in his ministry announcing the kingdom of God. The churches cannot neglect this evangelistic task. Most of the world's people are poor, and they are awaiting for a witness to the Gospel that will really be Good News

The mission which is conscious of the kingdom will be concerned for liberation, not oppression, justice, not exploitation, fullness not deprivation, freedom, not slavery; health, not disease; life, not death. No matter how the poor may be identified, this mission is for them". (Section 1,16)(45)

Gort, however, cautions us on placing too great an emphasis on the gospel as being 'particularly addressed to the poor'. He states that such an assertion is logically, theologically and biblically untenable.⁽⁴⁶⁾ He further concludes that its use should be abandoned. He, however, admits that it is true to say that the gospel is for the poor in every sense.⁽⁴⁷⁾

We agree here with Gort. The gospel is, of course, for all and not only the poor. But God is a personal God who addresses himself to each one of us personally in each of our own situations. So Melbourne said (Section 1,4), *"To the poor this challenge means the profound assurance that God is with them and for them"*.

To the rich it means the profound repentance and renunciation. To all (both rich and poor) who yearn for justice and forgiveness, Jesus Christ offers discipleship, and the demand of service.⁽⁴⁸⁾

Whilst we have agreed that the gospel is not only addressed to the poor, yet we must point out that the gospel particularly favours the poor. In the Old Testament God always pronounces woe upon the side of the afflicted and poor and will never forsake them in their desperate search for relief and justice (Is. 41:17). This is the special message of Good News God has for the poor. Noordmans points out that in any situation in which there is a question of conflict between the rich and the poor, the Lord will never choose for the rich but always the poor.⁽⁴⁹⁾ Julio de Santa Ana attempts to explain why God sides with the poor:

"The reason for the blessing, the privilege of the poor lies neither in their material circumstances nor in their spiritual disposition, but in the way in which God conceives the exercise of his kingdom: 'Blessed are the poor, not because they are better than others, or better prepared to receive the Kingdom which is to come, but because God seeks to make his kingdom a tangible manifestation of his justice and love for the poor, the suffering and those who live in misery'.⁽⁵⁰⁾

If such is the case, then Good News to the poor must always be a missionary strategy of the church. It is also a formula for our own renewal and faithfulness. Jon Sobrino supports this claim. He states that when the poor are at the centre of the church, they give direction and meaning to everything that legitimately and necessarily constitutes the concrete Church, its preaching and activity, its administration, its cultural, dogmatic, theological, and other structures.⁽⁵¹⁾

The poor in no sense causes a 'reduction' of ecclesial reality but rather are a source of 'concretisation' for everything ecclesial. To start with the poor is to begin where God, in Christ, has already begun. The first people in the kingdom are the poor (believers) not the rich. We, therefore, submit that mission today must take under its umbrella an immediate concern for the poor.

4. Why 'The Poor'?

The Bible is full of references to riches and poverty, to those who are wealthy and those who are poor. And as we have already shown, these references express different attitudes and understandings for example that poverty is caused by idleness (Proverbs 6:11 28:19) and that wealth is a sign of virtue and God's blessing (Psalm 1). Therefore, to choose any particular context is to raise the question, why this one rather than that?

The context that we have chosen is that of the poor. Hence, we shall now propose to examine a few other reasons as to why it is so important to have our mission priority geared towards the poor.

First it was Jesus himself who established a clear link between the coming of the Kingdom and the proclamation of the Good News to the poor. Those to whom he announced the Good News and the way he announced it to them were as important as the content of the Good News. Furthermore, Jesus did not witness to God's life by joining hands with the powerful and mighty, though he did not reject those who turned to him in repentance and faith. However, he associated himself with, and concentrated his ministry upon the powerless and oppressed.⁽⁵²⁾ The announcement of his birth was linked with the hope of the poor and disenfranchised (Luke 1:51 ff). He was born in a stable (Luke 2:8) and his parents could only afford to fulfil the requirements of the Hebrew law with the offering assigned to the poor (Luke 2:24), (Lev. 12:8). He was a despised Galilean (Mark 1:9,14; John 1:46); he also identified himself with the Samaritans (Luke 10:30 ff: cf 21-28; 38-41: John 4:7-42).

He called the poor the heirs of the kingdom (Luke 6:20) and saw in the vulnerability of children one of its clearest sign (Matthew 18:3; 19:13-14: Luke 18:17). Indeed he located his own mission among the poor, the captives, the sick and the oppressed (Luke 4:18). Hence he described the gospel as especially good news for the poor.

He announced, demonstrated and implemented the good news by identification and solidarity with the poor. For Jesus there was no such thing as an understanding of the good news intended with its relation to the poor. The gospel and the poor were integrally related in the announcement and activity of Jesus. That is why even those who were rich, to whom this good news was announced, had to approximate to the poor to receive it (eg. the rich young ruler). This biblical perspective confronts the view that the poor need the generosity of the wealthy as endless receivers of aid. Rather the wealthy need the poor, to learn from them the nature and meaning of the deliverance God brings to both. The basis of the sharing is when those separated by distorted relationships discover that they both equally need each other. Only Jesus Christ can bring this about. For Jesus, true religious commitment was measured not by mere words or outward observances, but rather by ones inward attitude towards God and one's concrete action on behalf of the neighbour.⁽⁵³⁾ Therefore, we may say that to take Jesus seriously is to also take the poor seriously. To engage in mission is to be involved with the poor. Marcella Hoesl supports this view in the following comment:

"The kingdom is not to be found in great wonder or power. It is discovered in all who commit themselves to the poor, in those who suffer injustice and persecution, in persons who experience hunger, thirst and all manner of deprivation. The kingdom is found in all who struggle in love for justice that there may be life".⁽⁵⁴⁾

Secondly, there is much talk today about reaching the 'unreached' people groups with the gospel. The Consultation on World Evangelisation (Cowe) at Pattaya in 1980, paid particular attention to this theme. Moreover, it was affirmed here that most of the 'unreached' people of the world today are the poor. Raymond Fung also supports this claim.⁽⁵⁵⁾ He states that world evangelisation today requires the evangelisation of the poor, who make up the bulk of the human population and who are outside of the church. He further adds that the people who will next come flowing into the Christian church are the worlds poor, the poor of the earth; peasants and labourers and their families who live in slums and work in the fields.⁽⁵⁶⁾ Donald McGavran also calls for the establishment of Christian churches amongst the poor, though for different reasons. His primary interest is in church growth through mass conversion.⁽⁵⁷⁾

Be that as it may then, one fact still remains; the majority of the 'unreached' people are the worlds poor. Therefore, this gives us reason enough as to why our mission priority should be geared towards the poor.

Thirdly, the poor give us the most authentic expression of God and His message. Given the nakedness of their situation they have a lot to tell us about God, about the Bible, about the church and its mission.

Jon Sobrino points out that by their material and historical situation they are in the best position to understand what the Good News is about.⁽⁵⁸⁾ Moreover he asserts that the Spirit is present in the poor *Ex Operato Operato*, though this in no way means simply that with the poor as members the Church will come to exist as the authentic Church.⁽⁵⁹⁾ What it does mean is that the Spirit manifests itself in the poor and that they are therefore structural channels for finding the truth of the Church and the direction and content of its mission. To put it differently, the church of the poor is not automatically the agent of the truth and grace because the poor are in it, rather the poor in the Church are the structural source that assures the Church of being really the agent of truth and justice. We must, however, point out that it is not our intention to romanticise the poor, nor is it our intention to make them the exclusive representatives of God. The voice of the poor is not the voice of God, only that theirs is the voice that God hears, theirs is a cry that God listens to.⁽⁶⁰⁾ The poor are the recipients of the good news as well as its messenger.

Julio de Santa Ana explains this point well:

"Because the poor judge the wrong ways of the powerful and rich, calling them to repentance, because they are bearers of hope, because they bring change into historical reality, and because they provide signs of the kingdom of God, it is possible to affirm that they are heralds of the gospel".⁽⁶¹⁾

Hence, our mission today can only become the mission of God when it is engaged with the poor. To be concerned with God's mission is to be involved with God's people: *the poor*. They are God's happy and favoured people. Marcella Hoesl supports this view stating that we hear the message better when we find our place beside the poor, when we share the good news together. These people and events give us the message of the Kingdom together.⁽⁶²⁾

Moltmann asserts that Jesus is *"already hidden in the world now in the present - in the least of his brethren - the hungry, the thirsty, the strangers, the naked, the sick and the imprisoned"*.⁽⁶³⁾ He, therefore, calls the church to be present among the poor.

In the final analysis, an awesome thought remains; only the poor and those who know that they are poor can inherit the kingdom of heaven.⁽⁶⁴⁾ Those who are not must somehow come to a realisation of their own poverty. The poor know what it means to be absolutely dependent and reliant on God alone. They turn to Him who alone is their support and stay. This is the meaning of the poor. It is to them that the gospel is proclaimed and the gate of heaven is opened. Hence, Jesus promises:

Blessed are the poor, for yours is the kingdom of heaven
Blessed are you that hunger now, for you shall be satisfied
Blessed are you that weep now, for you shall laugh.⁽⁶⁵⁾

Raymond Fung points out that the beatitudes are not a factual description of the poor people around Jesus. They are a declaration of Jesus that those who are meek, poor, hungry and thirsty, those who mourn, are those whom he would regard as important people.⁽⁶⁶⁾ And that their experience and their aspirations provide the substance of which his theology is made. And that their questions and concerns forms the agenda of Jesus' mission. There is no romanticising of the poor. There is no masochistic embrace of poverty. Simply a clear affirmation that the poor are important people in his Kingdom, in direct contradiction with the value system of his day. We must, however, make one significant comment here: Poverty is not blessed, but the poor are - those poor who become disciples.⁽⁶⁷⁾ Those poor were truly "*the poor of Yahweh*". Because of their poverty, they trusted in God in a spirit of dependence.

Having defined who the poor are and having examined reasons as to why we should gear our mission priorities towards the poor, we shall now (in the next chapter) seek to engage socio-economic and religious analysis of one poverty stricken community. Our purpose in attempting this is to achieve relevance in our ministry with the poor. Our aim is to discern the needs in the chosen context, and using the Christian Gospel to thereafter relevantly address them.

NOTES

CHAPTER TWO

1. See Gustavo Gutierrez' discussion on Poverty in, *A Theology Of Liberation*, 1971, pp.287-302.
2. Although this view on Poverty is biblically expressed, however, it is not dominant.
3. See Gunther Wittenberg's paper, "The Message of the Old Testament Prophets during the Eighth Century BC Concerning Affluence and Poverty", in *Affluence, Poverty And The Word Of God*, ed. by K. Nurnberger, 1978, p.142.
4. The Revised Standard Version of the Bible (R.S.V.).
5. J.D. GORT, "Gospel For The Poor"?, in *Missiology*, Vol. VII, number one January 1979, p.328f.
6. Ibid., p.332.
7. See John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today*, p.221.
8. GUSTAVO GUTIERREZ, Op. cit., p.291.
9. JOHN STOTT, *Issues Facing Christians Today*, 1984, p.216.
10. Ibid., pp.218-220.
11. See Raymond Fung's article, in *Evangelism And The Poor: A Third World Study Guide*, ed. by Vinay Samuel and Chris Sudgen, Regnum Books, Oxford, 1987, pp.28-31.
12. H. PERKINS, Ibid., p.44.
13. R.S.V.
14. Ibid.
15. VIV GRIGG, *Companion To The Poor*, 1984, p.37.
16. ALBERT GELIN, *Poor*, p.19.
17. R.S.V.
18. "Poverty was never something to which the prophets could be indifferent. When they spoke of it, they protested against the oppression and injustice of the rich and the mighty. Naturally, they found expressions consonant with their feelings". (Quoted in Gelin, *Poor*, p.19). Confer also Guillermo Cook, *The Expectation Of The Poor*, 1985, p.141.
19. R.S.V.
20. G GUTIERREZ, Op. cit., p.292.
21. R.S.V.

22. See H. PERKINS, in *Evangelism And The Poor: A Third World Study Guide*, ed. by Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden, Regnum Books, Oxford, 1987, pp.28-31.
23. R.S.V.
24. Ibid.
For more details on the Poor in the Old Testament confer Peter Lee, *Poor Man, Rich Man*, 1986, p.50f.
See also Willem Nicol's paper, *The Churches In Southern Africa And The Poor - An Urgent Task*, 1986, pp.5-9.
25. VIV GRIGG, *Companion to the Poor*, p.47. Described as the spiritually poor.
26. "The poor person is also ani, the bent over one, the one labouring under a weight, the one not in possession of his whole strength and vigor, the humiliated one". (See Gutierrez, *A Theology Of Liberation*, p.291).
27. "You ought to give judgement for the weak and the orphan, and see right done to the destitute and the downtrodden, you ought to rescue the weak and the poor". (Ps. 82: 3-4).
28. See Willem Nicol's paper: *The Churches In Southern Africa And The Poor - An Urgent Task*, Brooklyn, Pretoria, September 1986, p.13.
29. See Paul B. Decock's, "Poverty and Riches in The Theology of Luke", in *Affluence, Poverty And The Word Of God*, ed. by K. Nurnberger, p.161.
See also Willem Nicol, Op. cit., pp.9-15, for more details on the Poor in the New Testament.
30. See Gutierrez, Op. cit., p.292.
Ptokos is used 34 times in the whole New Testament; in most cases it refers to the indigent person, one lacking what is necessary. Only on six occasions does this term have a spiritual meaning, but even then the poor person is found at the side of the blind, the mutilated, the leper, and the sick, providing a very immediate concrete context.
31. WOLFGANG STEGEMANN, *The Gospel And The Poor*, p.14.
32. Stegemann points out that the term ptochos is used in the same breath with others that collectively refer to the plight of the poor: one who is wretched, pitiable, blind and naked (Ibid., p.15).
33. Ibid., p.16.
34. Ibid., pp.16-21.
35. See *International Review of Mission, Melbourne Reports/Reflections*, October/January 1980/81, p.390.
36. GUTIERREZ, Op. cit., p.301.
37. JURGEN MOLTMANN, *A Theology of Hope*, 1967, p.16.
38. See *Evangelism and the Poor: A Third World Study Guide*, Op. cit., p.2.

39. See *International Review Of Mission*, Melbourne Reports/Reflections, October/January 1980/81, p.391.
40. Ibid., pp.391-392.
41. JULIO DE SANTA ANA, *Good News To The Poor: The Challenge Of The Poor In The History Of The Church*, 1979, p.37.
42. J.D. GORT, "Gospel for the Poor"? Op. cit., p.329.
43. Ibid., p.327.
44. Ibid., p.334.
45. *International Review of Missions* (I.R.M.), Melbourne Reports/Reflections, p.394.
46. J.D. GORT, Op. cit., p.345.
47. Ibid., p.346-347.
48. I.R.M. Op. cit., p.395.
49. NOORDMANS, *Zondaar en Bedelaar*, Amsterdam, 1946, p.23.
50. JULIO DE SANTA ANA, Op. cit., p.38.
51. JON SOBRINO, *The True Church And The Poor*, p.94.
52. LESSE LUTABINGWA, "The Challenge Of Mission In Christ's Way", in *I.R.M.* Vol. LXXVII, number 308, p.524.
53. PETER LEE, Op. cit., p.111.
54. MARCELLA HOESL, "The Kingdom: Preferential Option For The Poor", in *Missiology*, Vol. 10, 1982, p.62.
55. RAYMOND FUNG, *Mission in Christ's Way*, I.R.M. Vol. LXXVII, number 309, January 1989, p.25.

56. Ibid., p.26.
57. DONALD McGAVRAN, *Understanding Church Growth*, 1970, p.71.
58. JON SOBRINO, Op. cit., pp.94-95.
59. Ibid., p.96.
60. RAYMOND FUNG, *Mission In Christ's Way*, Op. cit., p.26.
61. JULIO DE SANTA ANA, Op. cit., p.39.
62. MARCELLA HOESL, Op cit., p.63.
63. JURGEN MOLTSMANN, *The Church In The Power Of The Spirit*, 1975, p.121.
64. RAYMOND FUNG, Ibid., p.26.
65. MATTHEW 5:3 - 7.
66. RAYMOND FUNG, Ibid., p.27.
67. VIV GRIGG, *Companion To The Poor*, p.48.

CHAPTER THREE

ANALYSING THE CONTEXT

In this chapter we will attempt to outline the major economic and social problems encountered in a community regarded as sub-economic and in that way "poor". The Indian community studied - Isipingo Farm - would rank as a "very low-middle" status group within the spectrum of socio-economic differentiation in the city of Durban as a whole.⁽¹⁾ It is by no means the most disadvantaged area in the city. Most African townships, especially those in the rural areas and a good few Indian suburbs are considerably worse off in material terms. However, in many ways our area of study in general would conform broadly with the socio-economic conditions typical of the latter.

1. Geographical Background

Isipingo Farm is commonly known as "Malakazi". However, the title deeds refer to the area as Isipingo Farm, and it is this name that we use in order to avoid confusion with the adjacent African spontaneous settlement of Malakazi.

Isipingo Farm is bounded by the Isipingo River in the north, the Umbogintwini River in the south and Main Road 197 in the east. On the western side the area is contiguous to the African settlement area of Malakazi, the boundary of the KwaZulu 'homeland' separating the two. The area was originally part of a colonial land granted to Dick King, from whose estate the first Indian settlers purchased land in 1874. More recently, Isipingo Farm fell under the jurisdiction of the Isipingo health Committee until it was amalgamated with the Borough of Amanzimtoti in 1962, when Indian group areas were declared at Isipingo Beach and Isipingo Rail. In 1972 the autonomous Indian controlled Borough of Isipingo was established, comprising Isipingo Beach, Isipingo Rail and Isipingo Hills but not the new industrial area of Prospection which remained in White-controlled Amanzimtoti.

In January 1974 Isipingo Farm was declared a released area in terms of the Bantu Trust and Land Act No. 18/1936 so as to enable the South African Bantu Trust to acquire land for ultimate incorporation into KwaZulu. The plan was to expand the African township of Umlazi southwards and to construct hostels in the area for 'single' African men.

After this declaration, Indian landowners at Isipingo Farm were approached to sell to the Trust, but all declined.

In August 1975 the jurisdiction of Isipingo Farm was transferred from Amanzimtoti to Isipingo. Isipingo Farm is 205 hectares in extent. In the early days of Indian settlement it was a cane-growing area. Later, however, sugar cane gave way to market gardening, and vegetables and sub-tropical fruit were produced for the Durban market. Eventually, the farming units become fragmented and uneconomic over the years and the area became increasingly residential in character.(2)

2. Problems Within the Community

Isipingo Farm and its community have experienced numerous problems over the years which have had a decisive influence on the ministry of the church. For the purpose of our study, we shall here restrict ourselves to the more essential problems which affect ministry in this community.

2.1 Housing

Housing obviously dominates the perception of problems. The reasons of unhappiness in the area support the importance of housing as a problem. A census count of squatter-type dwellings undertaken at Isipingo Farm revealed that there were 411 structures containing 522 dwelling units and a population of 3883 persons. Over 95% of the households in the sample were tenants, although 59% owned the dwelling in which they were living - such dwelling ownership was usually on a 'tenancy-at-will' basis. This has for long been a common arrangement among Indians in Natal, the tenant pays a charge (monthly or annual) for the occupancy of a site on which he then erects a dwelling. At Isipingo Farm the contracts were usually verbal or implied, but were nevertheless regarded as providing reasonable security of tenure.

All ten out of ten housewives interviewed declared themselves to be dissatisfied with their present accommodation. Dominant as reasons for this dissatisfaction were factors relating to poor quality houses, overcrowding of houses and the neighbourhood - particularly the size of houses in relation to numbers residing in them.

What are the objective conditions? The average (medium) size of household is 5,5 persons. Almost 50% of households have above 7 persons. As many as 63% of households accommodate more than 4 persons per room used for sleeping (under the circumstances, not only bedrooms are used for sleeping purposes).

Needless to say, with this kind of occupancy per room, the accepted standards of sex-separation cannot be maintained. There is no privacy for either private or family life. Neither is there room for healthy recreation or rest. The youth live on the streets and only come to sleep in the house - if they do.

Crowding exists not only within families, but within property sub-divisions as well. From our sample results it would appear that close to 51% of properties have more than one individual household residing on it (25% have 3 or more households; 14% have 5 or more households and 9% of properties in our sample had an unbelievable 13 households or more). When asked whether anyone in the household would like to or needed to move to alternative accommodation, over 8 out of 10 claimed that this was the case; of these 9 out of 10 expressed a desire for single family unit accommodation (i.e. separate houses). People wanting alternative accommodation had spent a long time in a fruitless search; over 60% of these cases have been looking for four years or more. Clearly the housing shortage bears heavily upon the community.

In analysing the accommodation, reasons for the households having left their previous dwellings to move into Isipingo Farm, the following were given:

Eviction	28,9
Housing shortage	26,7
Family (marriage, preference)	24,7
Economic (rent, employment, etc)	12,8
Unspecified	6,4

Eviction was one of the major reasons for relocation at Isipingo Farm. Within this category the Group Areas Act was the single most important cause, but households had also been moved because of expropriation by the local authority for slum clearance, and by landlords who required additional living space themselves.

The housing shortage (manifested in overcrowding) was an important factor, while various aspects concerned with family organisation were also mentioned. In summary, therefore, most households appeared to have relocated involuntarily because of eviction or housing shortages which compelled them to leave their previous localities.

Part of the enquiry was directed to exploring the perception of alternative solutions to the housing problem in the area: *"What do you think should be done to solve the housing problem in the Indian community"?*⁽³⁾ Responses to this question varied widely, but can be presented as follows:

Opening up of more land for private development	28%
Public housing by the authorities	26%
Proclaiming more Indian group areas	10%
Construction of flats (apartments)	8%
Removal of parks and open spaces for building	8%
Provision of loans and financial concessions	3%

It is quite clear that the dominant perception is that "the authorities" hold the key to the solution (more land, public housing, repeal of Group Areas Act, etc.). The fact that not more people called for the removal of Group Areas restrictions cannot be taken as substantial acceptance of the system of formal residential segregation - as an entrenched aspect of political policy. Group Areas laws are not likely to be repealed simply because of a housing shortage and our respondents realise this.

2.2 Services and Facilities

A combination of the problems related to facilities and services indicates a roughly 75% level of discontentment on this issue. This is a rather bleak picture, since satisfaction with the external residential environment is an important consideration in community life.

Solutions to problems involving facilities and services are notoriously difficult to accomplish in a short time. Yet, inadequate facilities and services are a source of collective stress that tends to generate and maintain a wide range of community problems.

The perceptions of the community include problems such as inadequate bus services, poor roads, insufficient and inadequately equipped recreational facilities and insufficient shops. It is obvious that numerous practical and financial factors mitigate against an easy solution. Yet the kind of amenities referred to are often central to the enhancement of social contact and the quality of life in the area.

When asked what were the essential needs of the households at Isipingo Farm, the following were given:

Percentage distribution of households by perceived needs:

Item	Isipingo Farm
Water	94,5
Security of Tenure	76,1
Electricity	95,5
Sanitation	61,5
Roads/Streets/Pavements/Drainage	61,5
Schools/Creches	22,0
Recreation Facilities	19,3
Community Facilities (Clinics, Temples)	15,6
Public Transport	12,8
Commercial Facilities (Markets, Shops, Garages)	6,4

It is clear that electricity was the most frequently perceived need followed by water and security of tenure, but the majority of households also mentioned sanitation and streets. There was no electricity at Isipingo Farm with the exception for only one street which was supplied. However, this was not in the area of spontaneous settlement. Paraffin and gas were the most important source of domestic lighting.

The absence of any laid-on water supply into the shacks represented a major problem. Families sent children to fetch water, usually in the afternoons after school. A variety of methods were used to carry water from buckets to specially constructed water carts. Children transporting water were a familiar sight on the streets.

Almost two-thirds of the dwellings at Isipingo Farm relied on purchased water obtained from landlords or shopkeepers while the remainder had access to individual taps or commercial standpipes.

The total absence of or inadequate access to piped water supplies in the area naturally had a significant influence on bathing and toilet arrangements. Thus 76% of the dwellings had individual 'makeshift' arrangements for bathing, while the remainder shared bathing facilities. This obviously created a tremendous amount of discomfort and dissatisfaction. Women, in particular, faced a tremendous sense of insecurity when using these facilities, since privacy was easily interrupted.

2.3 Social "Deviance"

In a community such as Isipingo Farm there are bound to be various forms of social deviance. We, therefore, asked our respondents to indicate whether any of a range of social problems existed in their immediate residential surrounding (ie on their own or adjacent properties).⁽⁴⁾ More than two-thirds of our representative sample conceded the presence of serious problems around them. The most prominently endorsed items were:

Heavy Drinking	56%
Juvenile Delinquency	42%
Serious family and marital friction	41%
Drug Abuse	30%

An incidence of serious problems as high as these is disturbing in what is, after all, a residential neighbourhood. It is disturbing not only because of the nature of the problems, but also because living among such problems must undermine pride in the community and set a poor example to the emergent generations.

Clearly there is a need for an increased provision of professional welfare services of all appropriate types; not necessarily only of the type presently available.

When specifically probed about their own teenagers behaviour problems, a large majority of our respondents indicated the presence of such difficulties. A number of parents complained of having to keep their children, especially their daughters, indoors because of the fear of them becoming influenced and exposed to the 'wrong company'.

Major problems, in order of frequency of mention, were:
education-related problems (truancy, etc),
general disobedience,
undesirable company and social life; and
work shyness.

A specific question was also asked about youth gangs in the area. In terms of the perceived seriousness of the problems, the results were as follows:

Gangs - a very serious problem	46%
a serious problem	40%
not a serious problem	15%

2.4 Education Problem

A large number of our respondents mentioned educational problems in response to the general question on problems in the area. These issues referred mainly to a shortage of high school facilities or school facilities generally, in the area. Other probes, however, brought to light additional issues related broadly to education.

Among people with children who had left school, a majority indicated that the child had left school earlier than he or she should or could have. Reasons, in order of priority, were:

- economic;
- children disliking school;
- children's behavioural problems;
- lack of aptitude.

A majority appeared to have left school at Standard 6 or earlier, and the remainder at Standard 8 or earlier. Only a few, if any, managed to obtain their matriculation pass.

Of families with children in school, almost 50% declared that there were no particular problems in the school situation affecting their children. It must, however, be pointed out that the majority attended schools outside the area.⁽⁵⁾ The remaining half of the parent population who did discern particular problems mentioned the following:

transport problems for children;
syllabus and homework problems;
teacher quality.

2.5 Marriage and Family Life

Basic to the life of any community is the quality of its most fundamental institution; the family. In any poor community where there are high rates of male unemployment or perhaps even work shyness and alcohol misuse, the mother is forced to take over more and more responsibility for the day to day affairs of the family. Mother-dominated families can emerge as a basic institutional pattern. This was also our findings in Isipingo Farm.

We asked our housewife respondents the following questions:

In your house, who makes the decisions - Who has the most say - as regards -

	Answer		
	Wife	Both	Husband
"how much to spend on various things"?	X		
"whether your (wife) should work or not"?		X	
"what children are allowed to do"?	X		
"when to buy large consumer durables"?		X	
"what to do of an evening"?	X		
"what to do over week-ends"?	X		

(the X indicates the answers in rate of frequency)

Although there is obviously great variation in family roles in the community the overall pattern seems to be for the wife/mother to be more dominant in decision making than the father/husband.

2.6 The Religious Life of the Community

The Isipingo Farm community comprises of a number of religious groupings. Especially dominant (in order of numbers) is Hinduism, Christianity and Islam. By and large, our findings attests to a very high level of formal religious identification in the area. This could also be matched by the frequency of church attendance:

once per week or more	55%
+ - once per month	22%
less frequently	15%
never/hardly ever	7%

Most of the religious participation is passive (ie attending services). Only some 18% of the population take part in religious activities connected with the church. The largest single type of activity is singing in the church choir followed closely by active devotional meetings, serving on fund-raising bodies, committees connected with church welfare activities, church councils and youth groups.

Our respondents were presented with fixed response alternatives in the following way: *"Thinking of religion and attending religious meetings which of the following is very important, quite important or less important to you"*? The rank order of endorsement of the alternatives presented was as follows:

- 1st "feeling close to God"
- 2nd "feeling moved and inspired by the Spirit of the Lord"
- 3rd "feeling comforted and secure"
- 4th "helping to think deeply about oneself"
- 5th "finding Jesus and being saved"
- 6th "feeling confident and stronger"
- 7th "working for social reform and justice in our country"
- 8th "feeling one has to do ones duty"
- 9th "a place to be with good friends and people"
- 10th "something interesting to do".

These results broadly support the quality of the religious outlook of the community. The primary importance of the spiritual experience for its own sake emerges clearly. Following this is a concern with personal support and salvation. The lower priority placed on a concern with the so-called "social gospel" is particularly noteworthy.

We would like to remark, however, that the endorsement of terms such as "feeling close to God", "feeling moved and inspired by the Spirit...." can reflect a deep and sincere spirituality and can embrace an abiding concern with fellow humanbeings and their communities. In general, though the tone is one of egocentric inspiration rather than dedication to service.

In view of the intensity of formal religious participation, we considered it necessary to assess the community's evaluation of their own churches and congregations.

We asked: *"Nowadays people seem to criticise the churches quite alot. Thinking of your own congregation, which of the following is true"?*

Deliberately we presented our respondents with a list of negative statements simply in order to gain insight into the perceived shortcomings of the churches and hence gain insight into the religious needs of the community. The results were as follows:

	% Agree
<i>"Does not take enough interest in the social problems of the Indian community".</i>	49%
<i>"Does not help one enough with personal problems and difficulties".</i>	46%
<i>"A little dull and uninteresting".</i>	46%
<i>"Too concerned about raising funds".</i>	40%
<i>"Does not give a feeling of togetherness with fellow worshippers".</i>	38%
<i>"Does not help one feel deep faith and closeness to God"</i>	38%
<i>"Does not help one to feel saved and feel the spirit of Jesus".</i>	38%
<i>"A little out of date and old fashioned".</i>	31%
<i>"White ministers not sincerely concerned about Indian people".</i>	31%

Here we find an interesting but understandable contradiction. While many people seem to feel a strong need for some socio-political concerns by the church, it is a passive need; they themselves wish to pursue their purely spiritual concerns. The rank-order of the remaining items is not in contradiction with earlier results; as expected the greatest need after the "social concerns" is for personal support, greater emotive appeal, togetherness and salvation.

The problems of dullness in the established churches may be quite serious, if the apparent rapid increase in support for Pentecostal sects and charismatic movements in the area is anything to go by. We have noticed that the established churches in the area are losing members to "tent" or "school" churches and ever, more expressive denominations.

While in no way judging this trend, we considered it important, as an insight into needs, to assess reasons for the attractions of the newer congregations. We asked: *"Some churches, like the Pentecostal Church, for example, seem to be attracting more and more people away from the older churches, why do you feel this is happening?"*

Answers indicated clearly that, compared with older churches, the services were captivating, allowing of free emotive expression, providing greater personal contentment and reassurance, as well as providing a sense of cohesion and shared closeness to God.

2.7 Leadership (Political)

A large majority of our respondents expressed little or no confidence in leaders within the community. The only ones held in high esteem were those involved in humanitarian activities. Our respondents blamed the Isipingo Borough and parliamentarians for their poor and pathetic conditions. They feel that the government could do a great deal to assist them, yet such is never achieved, despite many appeals. The government holds the answers to the environmental problems, housing crisis, etc. Many of our respondents viewed the Tricameral system with great suspicion, stating that it is a further entrenchment of the Apartheid Policy in South Africa.⁽⁶⁾ Consequently, they reject participation in such a system, since it is of no benefit to them.

As a result the majority do not support the House of Delegates nor its leaders. The majority expressed no trust or confidence in Dr Reddy or Mr Rajbansi since nothing is being done to help them. They seem somewhat suspicious and uncertain of Mr Mandela. This could be attributed to the fact that they are somewhat concerned by the faction and fights that occur regularly between the Indian people and the neighbouring black community. It is quite clear that the community is facing tremendous problems in acquiring good leaders. As a result, many have turned to religious leaders for guidance and assistance.

3. Assessment

We will now attempt to draw together the diverse and often contradictory threads in the research findings as a basis for setting out tentative conclusions relevant to a Christian ministry in the Isipingo Farm Community.

1. Social Problems

The problems of individual social isolation in the community referred to earlier deserve consideration under this heading as well. They are joined by a number of other problems which, in our judgement, are seriously undermining morale in the area. These are firstly the more visible problems of which any community programme or Christian ministry should take cognizance:

housing;

Over-crowding;

lack of playgrounds and other recreational facilities;

improvements needed in various services and amenities.

No less difficult to solve, however, are a range of less openly manifest problems which include:

high alcohol intake;
 disturbed marital relations;
 inadequate family role performance by a substantial proportion of husbands and fathers;
 premature school leaving and/or truancy on a widespread scale;
 unemployment;
 evidence of dissolute, alienated youth and some extent of youth gang formation.

2. The Perception of Social Problems - Moral Consciousness in the Community

We have briefly outlined the rather substantial range of serious problems which exist in the community. The dominant attitude of the community, however, is one of strictly conventional morality. The majority of the community are somewhat conservative in nature. Furthermore, the sharp contrast between behaviour and expectation seems to produce a widespread sense of moral failure. Group work needs to be undertaken in order to allow people in the area to become more reflective and open in their approach to problems in their midst.

The same contradictions apply in the area of child rearing and the socialisation of young people. Parents are dominantly concerned with inculcating respectability and the success - ethic in their children. Signs of a more expressively - oriented approach to child training were rare. Yet the children are beset with problems and conflicts which incline many of them to dropping out of school, taking jobs which offer immediate reward, and, in some cases to mild or serious delinquency.

In the approaches to these problems of community self-evaluation, the church can play an important part. In their approach to religion, the people in the area tend to reflect a need to evade their day to day problems in their search for highly emotive religious experience. It would seem appropriate that church leaders and ministers be given encouragement and opportunities to consider the possible relevance of their parish activities to the troubled consciousness of their parishioners, not by offering only consolation and emotional relief. But also by exploring the possibilities of a more positive, supportive gospel in a community context.

3. Leadership

We have already outlined how critical the leadership issue is in the Isipingo Farm Community. One of the main problems is a remarkable lack of leader recognition in the area. Substantial proportions of people recognise no community leaders. Leaders and office bearers in organisations were all too often seen as ineffectual, opinionated and all too patronising in their manner of interacting with the ordinary people. People in the area are generally highly pessimistic about the possibility of change in their own civic and political affairs. Their very powerlessness and pessimism causes them to deny the possibility of leaders being effective, hence leading to a withdrawal of interest in and support for leaders and community organisations. Leaders on the other hand, have to operate outside of any effective formal civic context, which makes effective representations on behalf of the community almost impossible. The majority of leaders, however, were aware of the criticisms directed at them, and a substantial proportion accepted the input from the community which we were able to provide, in good spirit. The leaders saw the community as lacking an appropriate response to leadership as well, however.

Our assessment, and that of the leaders themselves, is that there is a potential community responsiveness to local civic issues, and that existing campaigns have shown considerable talent and initiative. (7) It seems necessary for programmes to be run, initially of a simple and low level kind, which will allow: (1) leaders and the community to interact more successfully; (2) more representative spokesmen and women for the area to be drawn into the leader circle; (3) leaders to demonstrate the ability to achieve some success; and (4) the sense of pointlessness about organised community endeavour among both leaders and the rest of the community to be combated. Unless the relationship between the community and its leaders improve there can be no hopes of community development.

The fact that the majority in the Isipingo Farm Community are turning to religious leaders for help and guidance indicates that the church has a very significant role to play in addressing the problems within the community. The church must address the evils within the Isipingo Farm Community by identifying and eradicating its root causes. Moreover, the church must seek to heal the rift that exists between the community and its leaders

The church can no longer ignore the problems in the area if it is to find relevance in its ministry with the poor in Isipingo Farm. The church should aid in a community development programme. (8) In the next chapter we attempt to illustrate how we, as Christian workers, had tried to assist in the development of the Isipingo Farm Community

NOTES

CHAPTER THREE

1. Most of the information provided in this chapter were given to us by our respondents who answered the questionnaires we provided.
2. Information provided by the Isipingo Borough.
3. Questions appeared on our interview schedule.
4. Altogether, about fifteen people were interviewed.
5. Presently a school is about to be established in the area.
The authorities are now attempting to upgrade the community.
6. Though apartheid legislations have been scrapped yet the situation within the South African communities (example, Isipingo Farm), remains essentially the same.
7. Assessment deduced from questionnaire and personal interviews.
8. "What is development? Development is a *process*. Development is a process by which people gain greater control over themselves, their environment and their future, in order to realise the full potential of life that God has made possible. Development is a process towards a goal.

What is theology of development? Theology of development is *reflection* on the reasons for christian involvement in development, the method of involvement, and the goal of involvement from a christian and biblical perspective". (See *Evangelicals and Development: Towards a Theology of Social Change*, Ed. By Ronald Sider, Exeter the Parternoster Press, 1981, p.19).

CHAPTER FOUR

MINISTRY WITH THE POOR

In the previous chapter we analysed the conditions prevalent in the Isipingo Farm Community. The task that awaits us now is to determine how we can most relevantly minister the Christian gospel in the given situation. Having served as a pastor within this community, I now propose to relate the more essential features of ministry with the poor in Isipingo Farm. It is hoped that through the ensuing discussions a few basic principles for mission amongst the poor in general will emerge.

1. Identification

We discovered in our ministry at Isipingo Farm that the first step in working with the poor is to become poor ourselves. We are to become poor for the sake of the kingdom so there will be no more poor. This, however, is subject to interpretation. What does it mean 'to become poor'?

Firstly, it could mean that we must assume poverty in a literal sense. (1) It means that we should give up our riches and assume destitution. A notable example of this type can be seen in St Francis of Assisi who took Matthew 19:21 very seriously: *"If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasures in heaven; and come, follow me"*

This view obviously has its merits. In the scriptures greed (or covetousness) and excessive luxury are just as bad sins as immorality or adultery (Ephesians 5: 3-5). Indeed we are not even to have lunch with a brother who is greedy (1 Corinthians 5:11). For any person who would live out a gospel of justice and grace, to live luxuriously in the midst of poverty is a denial of justice.

Secondly, becoming poor does not necessarily mean embracing poverty in a literal sense. It means identifying with the needs of the poor. (2) Though Jesus became poor, he ate daily, he had a finely woven robe, he grew up with a skilled trade as a tekton (a cross between a carpenter, cabinet maker and stone mason - a skilled job, perhaps equivalent today to that of an engineer or architect). He loved to celebrate and freely went to rich men's homes. He and the twelve disciples gave to a class of poor yet poorer than themselves. (3)

Imitatio Cristi is an old phrase of the church that describes this life of identification with the poor, of incarnating Christ. The choice of such a life leads one deep into the very nature of Jesus' deity. It tells us something of His type of poverty. Jesus identified himself with the poor. But he never was identical. Though he would classify himself as a poor man, as one of the "anaw", he was always God. He had two natures. (4)

Becoming poor amongst the poor involves recognising this duality; its not becoming hopeless among the hopeless. It is not becoming destitute amongst the destitute - the destitute poor have no respect for this themselves. They themselves are moving upwards, at least to the level of sufficiency for their own needs. Jesus' incarnation was not that of becoming a malnourished beggar, but becoming fully human in the context of inhumanity. Identification is not destitution but demonstrating by actions and revealing by deeds of spiritual power by miracles and deeds of love, the fullness of Christ's deity in the midst of depravity. (5) In seeking a just society to live as poor amongst the poor, we cannot live a life of destitution.

The latter view best describes our position for ministry in the Isipingo Farm community. We observed here that the poor looked to us for help in fulfilling their needs and addressing their problems. They naturally expected us to have the material resources and contacts to assist them in their distressing circumstances. Imagine then living as a destitute among the destitute poor. How would they see us?

We discovered that identifying with the poor in Isipingo Farm required two movements. The first movement in becoming poor is faithful commitment to be with the poor. It is impossible for us to develop a compassionate understanding of the plight of the poor until we step out of anonymity and apathy in order to become involved with them, in order to see the faces of poverty, in order to feel their hurt, in order to take the suffering of another and make it our own. The way and means of living out the personal and communal decision will come through prayerful and reflective listening to daily experience and the message of the gospel.

We therefore submit that the first step in liberating evangelisation consists in "being evangelised" not in "speaking", but in "listening", not in "finding" but in "being found". Because to be able to hear the voice of the poor from the very inside of their world, their life and their struggle is not merely "to seek" the Lord. It is, first of all, to be found by Him (John 15: 1-16; 1 John 4: 7,13; Matthew 11: 25-27). (6)

At the heart of the matter is the admonition repeatedly put forth by Jesus to his followers. "Have eyes to see and ears to hear" (Matthew 13: 1-30; 11:25; Luke 10: 21-24; Mark 13: 16,17) that which the Lord is working out in the heart of history by means of those who "hunger and thirst after justice" (Matthew 5:6). This position leads us to penetrate deeply into the depths of the people's soul, their history, their culture, their language, their symbolic world, their wisdom and in the final count their own historical process. What is at stake is not only the discovery of Christ in the people, but deeper still, the unfolding of the Lord along with the people. Before we seek to tell them about God, perhaps if we first listened we will discover that the poor have something to tell us. Jon Sobrino points out that the poor have something to tell us about God, about the church, and about love and hope that none other can equate. (7)

Another movement in becoming poor and bringing the kingdom near is educating ourselves and others to take a prophetic stance in light of the gospel - Identification with the poor is not enough, however, their struggles must actually become our struggles, their pains must become our pains. Dr Choon Chee Pang has expressed it well: *"Social concern like practically all other Christian concerns, is ultimately a concern for truth the world becomes our arena. Unless we are involved in it we have no right to address ourselves to it, let alone do it convincingly and effectively. Our involvement thus becomes our credibility"*. (8)

Becoming poor thus involves taking up the struggles of the poor, against poverty and injustice. Identifying with the poor means a concrete involvement with the poor man's suffering and pain. This is what we discovered to be the starting point for effective and relevant ministry with the poor in Isipingo Farm. We had to consciously submit ourselves to the plight of the poor.

2. Proclamation and Praxis

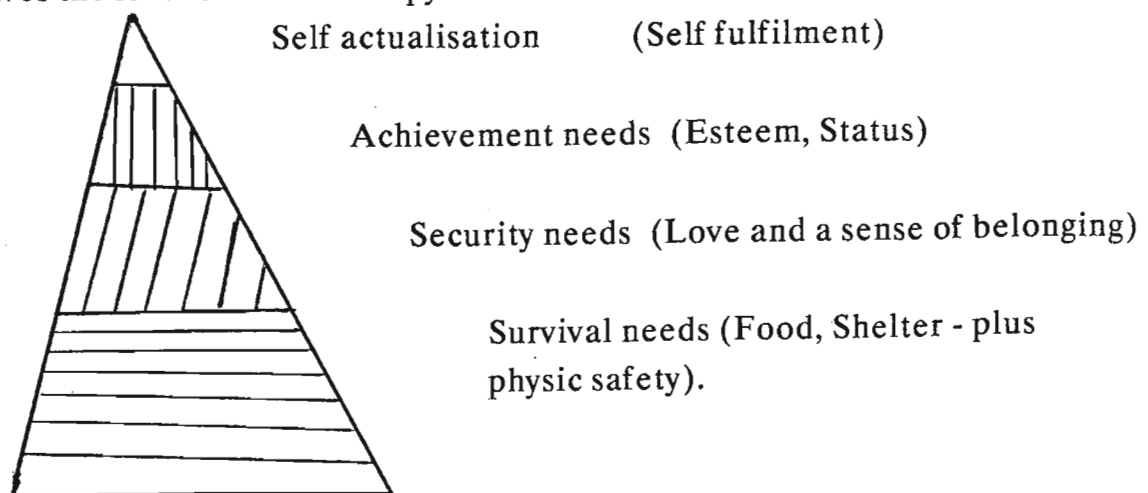
Whilst identification with the poor is of absolute necessity yet we must not side step our main reason on being with the poor. Christ's commission commands us to 'disciple the nations' (Matthew 28: 19ff). This is our mandate: to bring Isipingo Farm under the authority of the Kingdom of God. Hence, whatever it is that we seek to do for the upliftment of the poor, we must not loose sight of our main objective as the Christian witness. The methodology we employ is that undertaken by Jesus.

Matthew reports that the Lord went about Galilee "teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people" (Matthew 4:23). Thus Jesus saw his ministry as a three-fold task, the elements of which were interdependent and inseparable. (9)

However, in the event of separating them in the order of priority, as some people tend to do, I would contend that in the community of the poor deeds precedes words. It is particularly important to note how many times Paul departed from his task of verbal proclamation to the task of carrying out missions of relief (see, eg Romans 15:25). Indeed, it is striking that Luke states that Paul's first mission on behalf of the church was one of relief - carrying famine relief from Antioch to Jerusalem. Luke then follows this with the Holy Spirit's commissioning of Paul and Barnabas (Acts 11:27-30; 13:2). Paul does not seem to have any internal dilemma. Even though he sees himself as set apart as the "Apostle to the Gentiles", concerned with proclaiming the good news of the gospel, he is still concerned with the physical needs of the Jewish Church Community. As Karl Barth has so aptly pointed out in his commentary on Romans, we should not be surprised that after eleven chapters of well thought out doctrine Paul turns to the consequence of that doctrine: ethics - how we live! (10)

We observed in Isipingo Farm, that the poor best understood the gospel through concrete actions. They were not just interested in hearing of what God can do for them, they were more keen to see what God is doing amongst them. Therefore as Christian leaders within this community we realised that we had to become the instruments of God's peace, justice, righteousness, love and mercy. We had to proclaim the gospel with decisive actions, not empty words. Hence we needed to allow God to use us to fulfil the basic needs of food, clothing and shelter.

Abraham Maslow points out that human beings have various kinds of needs. He perceives the level of needs on a pyramid as follows: (11)



Maslow also states that until certain need levels are met, the next level of growth of a person cannot be expected. (12) When a person's basic food, clothing and housing needs are unmet all attention is focussed on providing for those needs. Thus we realised that unless we become involved in addressing and fulfilling these basic needs we could not effectively minister in Isipingo Farm.

According to our findings in chapter three this is precisely what our respondents expected and desired. They wanted the church to be involved in their struggles. They wanted the church to speak on their behalf, to stand up for their rights, since they were quite incapable and incompetent of doing this for themselves. The two main criticisms levied against the church by our respondents, points this out very clearly:

"(the church) does not take enough interest in the social problems of the Indian Community.

It does not help one enough with personal problems and difficulties". (13)

In stressing the need for involvement with the needs of the poor, Raymond Fung states:

"Christians must get involved with the poor in the context of the poor's struggle, because that context is an evangelising context. There is no point in preachers telling the poor from the pulpit that you are sinners. By the way Jesus never said this to the poor, you can look it up in the gospels. There is no point because the poor will say: "of course we are sinners, we steal from the factories, we are unfaithful to our wives, and we cheat each other. Of course we are sinners, so what?

Only when the poor realise that they are human beings made in God's image and realise that they also try to exploit other people, will they come to a serious recognition of their sinfulness and do something about it - namely, ask for forgiveness". (14)

Our emphasis on deeds, however, is not intended to belittle the necessity of verbal proclamation. Whilst we are bringing Isipingo Farm under the authority of God's Kingdom we need to teach the poor about God's will and ways. The poor too are sinners. They too must repent of their sins and confess Jesus Christ as Lord, God and Saviour. They too must know the expectations of the Messianic King and what it takes to be a true child of God. It is true to say that God is on the side of the poor, but the poor must also be on God's side.

Poverty is not an inherent right to the Kingdom, as some may think, repentance, faith and obedience to God's will is.

The poor in Isipingo Farm are very much aware of this. They display a tremendous desire to be close to God. They are people of deep spirituality. Richard Dickinson in writing on Christian Responsibilities for development outlines the need for addressing the spiritual crisis in individuals. He states:

"Unless the spiritual crisis is confronted, the moral and knowledge dimensions of our current situation cannot be met effectively. The spiritual crisis is at the root of at least the moral crisis " (15)

What better way is there to challenge the spiritual crisis in people other than through preaching? Jesus knew that preaching was the most effective way of telling the multitudes about the Kingdom of God, therefore, his life revolved around this central activity. Professor Friedrich recognises this when he writes, *"when heralds proclaimed the Year of Jubilee throughout the land with the sound of trumpet, the year began, the prison doors were opened, and debts were remitted. The preaching of Jesus is such a blast of the trumpet". (16)*

By proclaiming the Kingdom Jesus was emphasising that salvation is a gift of God - not something to be achieved by human effort. Proclamation itself does not bring the Kingdom; yet, it awakens faith (Romans 10:14); stirs men to repentance (Luke 3:3) and re-orientes them as "fishers of men", to selfless activity in line with the kingdom. (17)

Emilio Castro reminds us of the priority of preaching in the following comment:

"According to Matthew, Jesus teaches, preaches, heals. Perhaps we need to start with preaching because that is what he did, coming after John the Baptist, proclaiming that the "kingdom of God is at hand". (18)

However, he goes on to qualify this in relation to the poor. Castro states that: "Jesus' proclamation centres around the Kingdom, announcing good news to the poor (Luke 6:20) and denouncing the rich (Luke 6:24), the scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 23: 23-26). He rebukes the political powers (Luke 13: 31-35; Mark 10:42). The proclamation of Jesus has a double function: it announces the inbreaking of the Kingdom of God that brings the good news of redemption, of liberation for the poor and the outcast, it also contains a warning of judgment on all those who are powerful in society and reject the call to repentance. (19)

Moltmann points out that both the nature of the Kingdom that we proclaim and the personality of the King who commissions us make it impossible for us to be satisfied with a purely conceptual, intellectual proclamation. Because the Kingdom is life, Jesus is the living Lord, and the Spirit is empowering reality, the proclamation needs to be acted upon, manifested and incarnated. (20) It is impossible to speak of the Kingdom of God in a convincing way unless we manifest the powers of the kingdom. Paul said that the "kingdom does not consist in words but in power" (1 Corinthians 4:20).

The church is thus called to witness to God's powerful acts in history. It is the carrier of the secret to all history in Christ. Its vocation is to bear Christ, and it is implemented through proclamation. But given the nature of the reality that is proclaimed, this proclamation can take place only through participation, service, intercession, suffering, love that is lived.

In the final analysis, mission amongst the poor must involve both proclamation and praxis. In a situation of poverty and hunger (as in the case of Isipingo Farm) one cannot preach saying, "*Blessed are the poor in Spirit*" (Matthew 5:3). In this case one should come up with ways of helping the poor. For instance a project can be set up to help the poor acquire skills that can in turn help them and others.

3. Dignity and Self-Worth

The Isipingo Farm community consisted of people who had little or no respect for self. Their concept, value and appreciation of life reached alarmingly low proportions. The abuse of alcohol and drugs, the low morale, violence and suicide in the community is a sheer indication of this. The lack of money, food and comfortable dwellings further added to the miseries of life. In addition, the social, economic and political domination and exploitation enhanced the feelings of hopelessness and worthlessness. They often felt ignored, forgotten, ridiculed and abused by the rich and powerful. In such a case, many may, and often do, conclude that God also has forgotten them. Everything, if you live in poverty and under oppression suggests that God is not with you! God is not here! If God lives, God has forgotten you, ignores you or even worse, God is punishing you! How do we minister to people in such a context?

In Isipingo Farm we established Home Bible Study groups. The purpose of this was to teach the members of this community that they too have been created in the image of God, and that they too are the children of God. This fundamental biblical assertion is of enormous importance to the dignity of all human beings, to their personhood and relationship with the Creator. We had to teach them that our Creator has also redeemed or recreated us, at great personal cost, through the incarnation and atonement of his Son.

And the costliness of God's redeeming work reinforces the sense of human worth which his creation has already given us. William Temple expressed this truth with his customary clarity:

"There can be no Rights of Man except on the basis of faith in God. But if God is real and all men are his sons, that is the true worth of every one of them. My worth is what I am worth to God, and is a marvellous great deal, for Christ died for me. Thus, incidentally, what gives to each of us his highest worth gives the same worth to everyone; in all that matters most we are all equal". (21)

Our value depends then on God's view of us and relationship to us, not on what others think of us or do to us. The destiny of people made in the image of God is to be fully human - "subjects" (active participants in the history of their lives) and not "objects" (passive recipients of the dictates and impositions of others). (22)

The message that we give to the poor in Isipingo Farm, is that Jesus is the bringer and restorer of life. This, after all, is the primary reason as to why he came:

"I have come in order that they may have life - life in all its fullness". (John 10:10)

This was the mission of Jesus, that God's kingdom may come and his will be done on earth. This is still his mission; this is what Christ, through the Holy Spirit, is doing and we are called to take part in this work of God. This is the good news to the poor in Isipingo Farm, that Jesus gives life to them in particular. God is on their side. Jon Sobrino states that the poor are able to understand this message well. He points out that they are accepted as constituting the primary recipients of the Good News, and therefore, as having an inherent capacity to understand it "better" than anyone else. This historical disposition of the poor pre-supposes their historical capacity to know the Good News in its formal character as "grace" that is, as something totally unexpected and freely given, and as "content", that is, as life itself. (23)

However, affirming human dignity and self-worth is not only achieved through teaching and preaching. It is more concretely realised through praxis. Any plan for transforming human existence must provide adequate life - sustaining goods and services to the members of society. When a society has only minimal food, water, shelter and clothing as in the case of Isipingo Farm, existence becomes subhuman, distorting God's provisions for humanity's well being. The Old Testament establishes God's desire to meet these basic needs:

"Is not this what I required of you as a fast: to set free those who have been crushed? Is it not sharing your food with the hungry, taking the homeless poor into your house, clothing the naked.....?"
(Is.58: 6&7)

Jesus said that the struggle to meet the needs of the poor - for food, water, shelter, clothing, health care, and spiritual nurtance - would be seen as an indication of true salvation on judgment day (Matthew 25: 31-46). Similarly, the apostle James indicates that out of a true and vital faith will spring the desire to supply the bodily needs of others (James 2: 15-16)

4. Compassion

As a result of our involvement with the poor in Isipingo Farm, we have come to realise that ministry with the poor must be governed by compassion. However, by compassion we do not mean the popular unexamined notion of being sentimental and soft or pitiful - Compassion is not mere pity; it is tenderness, a heartfelt sense of identification with those in need. It is a passionate, loving response leading to action on behalf of those who suffer, and thus presupposes personal contact with the needy. (24) The poor in Isipingo Farm taught us the profound difference between pity and compassion: Pity weeps and walks away, compassion comes to help and stay! Pity is an emotional response. Compassion is an action response. Pity touches our feelings, compassion engages our will.

Indeed, we discovered that the poor in Isipingo Farm were not wanting us to feel sorry for them or to merely pray for them - They wanted something more! They wanted our help. They were in need of compassion. They were not poor because of laziness or choice. They were made poor through exploitation and oppression. Hence we realised that any form of effective ministry amongst the poor must militate against the causes of poverty. People who are suffering don't really care how much we know until they know how much we really care.

We can learn all about the problems and gather information about solutions but only when our concerns are translated into compassionate actions will we be able to heal some of the hurts of our world,

Jesus, in His ministry on earth, set the pattern for compassionate ministry. Matthew talks about Jesus going ashore and saw a great throng; and he had compassion on them, and healed their sick (Matthew 14:14). Jesus told his disciples to feed the people: "I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat and I am unwilling to send them away hungry lest they faint on the way" (Matthew 15:32). Luke paints a similar picture - When the Lord saw a woman whose son had just died he had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep" (Luke 7:13). And when the Samaritan saw the man beaten and wounded by robbers, *"he had compassion, and went to him and bound up his wounds...."* (Luke 10:33).⁽²⁵⁾

Jesus and his disciples travelled all the towns and villages of Galilee. He taught in their synagogues. He preached the good news of the kingdom of God. And when he saw the crowds, "he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36).

The Son of God did not merely "weep or walk away" when he observed earth's suffering from the heavens. He came to help. To stay. To pitch his tent among us. To pour out his very life for those who hurt and suffer. He saw people under the religious bondage of the Pharisees and he was concerned. He saw people under the grinding bondage of the Evil One - living out their days under the shadow of sin and death, and he was concerned. ⁽²⁶⁾ He came not to be ministered unto, but to minister. It was his compassion, his merciful heart that caused him to relate to the burdens and sorrows of his people, Hence if we are to minister to the poor in Jesus name, we must do the same.

But how do we make the good news of Jesus Christ real and meaningful to the sinned-against in Isipingo Farm? How do we show them compassion? Its easy to be problem oriented. To be compassionate is to be solution oriented. The compassionate heart acknowledges that one cannot do everything but one can do something. I will now seek to illustrate examples of how we exercised compassion amongst the poor in Isipingo Farm.

As we observed the wretched faces of the hungry, we were moved to distribute food parcels containing the basic necessities. When Jesus saw that the people were hungry, he fed them (John 6).

This concrete, tangible action, however, pointed beyond itself to spiritual reality. Jesus' purpose was not merely to feed the multitudes but vividly to portray the mission for which the Father had sent him. (27) He refused to be crowned as the earthly king. The bread with which he fed the people was a symbol of himself as the bread of life.

Thus we realised that even as we feed the hungry in Isipingo Farm we must be careful to point them to the true bread of life. Sometimes compassionate service can lead the church to be regarded as an agency of social and health welfare and nothing more. We must be absolutely cautious of such exclusive perceptions. The church is called to be a sign-post to the kingdom and not to serve as a mere social institution.

End

The distribution of food parcels to the poor can also cause a great deal of problems. On observation we noticed that those who received these hampers eventually became quite dependent on them. True compassion must not seek to make people dependent, it must train them to be self sufficient and responsible. The best thing we can do for the poor is not to give handouts (although that is needed at times, such as after disasters), but to non-violently fight the structures of injustice and oppression which cause people to be poor. The poor of our world need not so much a handout as they need a helping hand. (28) We need to understand their problems and then work with the individuals affected by the problems to help find a solution. That involves a commitment thorough enough to produce results. "Give a man a fish" the saying goes, and you feed him for a day. But teach a man to fish and you feed him for a life-time. (29)

In John 13 we find Jesus in humility, washing the feet of his disciples. When He comes to Peter, Peter objects to Jesus washing his feet. But Jesus answered, *"Unless I wash you, you have no part with me"*. The ecstatic Peter then responds: *"Then, Lord, not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!"* But Jesus answered, *"A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean"*

What is Jesus saying to Peter in this text? Perhaps He is saying that he is only prepared to address Peter's immediate need, *"because you have walked so much the most needy part of your body is your feet. I will wash your feet, you must do the rest!"* (30)

The poor in their struggle for betterment can sometimes become quite demanding. They can sometimes abuse opportunity and kindness, even though it may not be intently.

We found in Isipingo Farm, that our generosity in providing groceries was abused by the requests for clothing, money and the paying of accounts. However, like Jesus, we learnt with time that we should only address their immediate and essential needs and teach them to do the rest for themselves.

As a result, we encouraged people to find jobs. This, of course, is no easy solution. The majority of people had little experience and education, this obviously complicated matters when trying to find employment. However, something had to be done. We approached Christians in other communities to either provide jobs or information on available jobs. The results were remarkable. Through our contacts we were able to find jobs for a number of people in the Isipingo Farm community. ⁽³¹⁾ For example, in the nearby White community we were able to get numerous odd jobs, such as, painting, gardening, building and domestic help for a number of people from the Isipingo Farm Community. We were also able to arrange jobs for several more in neighbouring factories. In addition we established a link with the Department of Manpower to train unskilled people for various kinds of jobs. We also arranged sewing classes for about 40 ladies within the community who met at least once a week. They were taught to make things which they could eventually sell. Thus a good number of people were starting to fend for themselves. When they had completed the course they were issued certificates, which were intended to help them find jobs. Compassion in this sense, helps people to retain their lost dignity, pride and self-worth. Only when such is achieved can we truly say that the kingdom of God has come.

Compassion is an action response. As we observed the poor in Isipingo Farm face eviction because they were unable to pay their rent we felt moved to respond. Is this not the message of the parable on the Good Samaritan in Luke 10: 25-37? When we see needs we must respond! Initially we actually assisted a number of families to pay off their outstanding rent. However, we soon realised that this was not a very good practice. People tend to get spoilt, they expect you to help them in this way all the time. Eventually, the only thing we could do in this regard was to approach the Isipingo Borough and landlords to plead grace on behalf of those affected.

Another form of compassionate ministry exercised in Isipingo Farm was to be found in home visitations. The fact that we visited the poor already triggered a message in communication. It told them that they had value and worth, and that we considered them important.

Thus we have come to realise that when we minister to the poor it is of absolute necessity that we go to them, not expecting them to come to us all the time. Generally, amongst most congregations today the minister establishes an office and expects people to come to him by appointment. Amongst the poor, we have discovered that the office must be their home, that is where we make the real contact, that is the real meeting place. (32)

The conversations in the homes of people visited in Isipingo Farm usually revolved around their problems and difficulties. However, intermingled with these were the best testimonies that one could ever hear about the gracious work of God amongst his people. Indeed, the poor have so much to tell us that no other group or people could ever possibly relate. The poor in Isipingo Farm always provided renewal and encouragement for our ministry with them.

Whilst visiting the poor can at all times be uplifting and gratifying, yet at certain times it can be embarrassing. I remember on one occasion visiting a very sick lady in the community. I obviously expected her to meet me with excitement and joy, however I soon discovered that my visit had brought immense discomfort to her. She was extremely poor, a woman with nine children living in a house which only had two rooms. As a result both were used for sleeping which meant that she had no place to accommodate visitors, so we had to talk outside. This made her feel terribly uneasy. But I had learnt something about that lady's condition which I never would have if I had not visited her.

I have only illustrated a few ways in which one can exercise a compassionate ministry among the poor, there are lots more that one could do. However, the point that I have attempted to make is that compassion is one of the most essential principles for ministry with the poor.

5. Confrontation

Confrontation is an essential principle for the Christian ministry, especially amongst the poor. In chapters one and two we illustrated how Jesus confronted and dealt with unjust social, political and economical factors. Hence we concluded that mission must embrace all these concerns since they are all part and parcel to the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth. Having made this standpoint, we shall now seek to illustrate how we confronted and tackled such issues in our ministry with the poor in Isipingo Farm. We shall give particular concentration to the problems in the community outlined in chapter three.

5.1 Housing

The housing crisis, of course, has no easy solution. The answer to this problem according to our respondents, lies in the hands of the government. The economic injustices and the unfair distribution of wealth and land are the root causes of the housing crisis. In South Africa the minority group (whites) live on eighty percent of the land whilst the vast majority share the remaining twenty percent. ⁽³³⁾ Hence the problem encountered in Isipingo Farm is a direct result of the unfair distribution of land and resources. The evils within the community must be addressed. The governmental authorities must be confronted for their demonic systems and practices. This system of institutionalised evil must be broken. But how do we achieve this?

As Christian leaders within the Isipingo Farm community we were forced to educate people to stand up for their rights. We helped them realise that their plight was not God's plan for them in as much as it was peoples greed. We helped them to plan and arrange protest marches and rallies to persuade the mind of governmental authorities to do something about the housing conditions. We called on the government to build more and better houses and to provide more land for private development. We also asked the authorities to provide housing subsidies so that more people could afford to purchase houses, and to also provide public housing for the majority who could not afford to buy their own.

Apart from this, we also got involved in community developmental programmes. However, our role in all this was not to lead but to encourage. It was not our intention to become the leaders in the community but the servants to God's people. It was not our intent to do everything for the members of the Isipingo Farm community, but to teach them to do things for themselves. ⁽³⁴⁾ Our purpose amongst them, as part of our ministry, was to help them to identify and utilise the skills and talents that God has given them. We did not have the financial resources to support housing projects, but we called on the government to assist in this matter.

5.2 Services and Facilities

The problems related to facilities and services created a huge discontentment in the Isipingo Farm community. It is clear that the lack of electricity and laid-on water supply into the houses represented the major problems. (35) As a result we were part of several delegations to the Municipal offices in Isipingo. We pointed out to the authorities what benefits and improvements electricity and water provisions will bring to the Isipingo Farm community. For example, electricity encourages literacy and helps provide more jobs (since industries may develop in the area), and improves the whole of life. The provision of water supply into the houses will improve sanitary conditions, personal hygiene and subsequently lead to healthier conditions. Moreover the provision of electricity and water will enable people to have more time to pursue other interests, be it hobbies or trade, since a major part of their time is taken up in fetching water and collecting wood. Hence, they will have more time to devote themselves to the life and work of the Church.

5.3 Social "Deviance"

The problems of heavy drinking, juvenile delinquency, family and marital friction and drug abuse were the further evils in the Isipingo Farm community that had to be confronted. The church cannot avoid these issues, it must address them in a realistic way bearing in mind that most of these problems come with the emerging circumstances in which people are found.

5.3.1 Drinking and - Men's Bible Study

Drinking with friends is a way to fill up the day and to drown out the sorrow, the despair and the lack of manliness inherent in unemployment. Throughout the community you would find groups of men drinking in street corners. One of our main priorities in our ministry in Isipingo Farm was to take the gospel of Christ to these men right there in those street-corners. Did Jesus not do the same? In John's gospel Jesus is accused of being a glutton and a drunkard, why? It's not because he did the things they accused him of, it's because he associated with those whom society rejected. Jesus joined them but he did not allow them to influence him, he influenced them. He changed them as he pointed them to the Kingdom of God.

Hence we realised that if we wanted to confront the evils of alcohol and drug abuse we needed to break into these groups on the streets and share the good news that Jesus saves and cares for everyone, particularly for those who feel abandoned. We also established ties with alcohol and drug abuse organisations, to whom we recommended those who were seeking help. It must not be the churches' aim to reduplicate services or re-invent the wheel. We must seek to use existing structures and facilities if possible.

5.3.2 Youth Group

To deal with the problems of juvenile delinquency we established a group for young people to come together, where they shared each others company and dealt through pressing issues concerning teenagers. They were also actively involved in community projects. The sole purpose of this group was to keep these young people off the streets where experimenting with drugs and alcohol usually takes place. The group was also geared to meet the spiritual needs of teenagers.

5.3.3 Family Bible Studies

The friction within families led to the establishment of a Bible Study focussed on the Family. We here provided biblical teachings on the Christian family. We helped parents and children to determine and fulfil their roles in the family. We also outlined and explained the biblical views on marriage. The church must play a role in helping people to ascertain what God expects of them in their roles as spouses, parents and children.

5.4 Education

Especially amongst the poor education is a very sore issue. A large number of children become totally uninterested in obtaining a good education. The lack of electricity and transportation are disturbing factors interrupting educational interests.

As Christian leaders within the Isipingo Farm community we tried to encourage people to educate themselves. In an attempt to encourage weaker students we held educational classes during the holidays tutoring them in their weaker subjects. We also held literacy classes for people who never really had any education.

All this we believe is Christian responsibility. If such services are not available in the community of the poor then the church must seek to assist in this area. It is by no surprise we learn that the first schools and hospitals were established by churches. It is God's desire that we be turned into better and more abler people. Hence, we realised that all these were part and parcel to our ministry with the poor in Isipingo Farm.

5.5 Other Religions

We pointed out in chapter three that the majority of people in Isipingo Farm are not Christians. Whilst we have stressed the need for the church to be involved in the social economic and political concerns of the Isipingo Farm community yet we must also stress that this should not be our only concern. We are not called into Isipingo Farm to be social-workers, economists and politicians. We are called to be Christians. We are there to proclaim Jesus Christ and to bring Isipingo Farm under the Kingdom of God. We are called to be the salt and the light in Isipingo Farm, sharing and leading others to Christ, the king in the kingdom. Hence, we must stand up for the gospel of Christ. However, our confrontation with other religions must not be one of vehement opposition but one of religious dialogue. We must be prepared to listen, share and work with each other.⁽³⁶⁾ Perhaps we will not be able to reach a compromise in our faith but, at least, we could work together on social, political and economical issues.

We mentioned also in chapter three that the Pentecostal and charismatic movements are highly popular in Isipingo Farm. The reason we attributed to this is found in the different styles of worship and formats of services as compared to the mainline churches.

We discovered in Isipingo Farm that when one works in the community of the poor one should not be prescriptive of a particular ecclesiastical tradition. The patterns and forms of worship must be determined by the community itself. They must be allowed the freedom to choose their own patterns, styles and forms of service and their own ecclesiastical structure providing that it is biblically based.

5.6 Summary

In this chapter I have attempted to outline and discuss a few principles for mission with the poor in Isipingo Farm. We have examined the socio-economic, religious and political conditions prevalent in the Isipingo Farm community (Chapter Three) and in this chapter we have attempted to show how one can minister the Christian gospel in the given situation. Our plea here is for directed research. There should be no more random, hit-and-miss mission methods. There should be a measure of faithful goal setting, after the essential needs of the people in the situation have been determined. In that sense the research on which this study is based can be regarded as a model which can be copied in every micro-situation.

Every situation is, of course, unique and it therefore needs its own description. However, it would be true to say that the conditions described in Isipingo Farm is typical of all poor communities throughout South Africa. It would therefore follow that the methods for mission applied in Isipingo Farm could be used among South Africa's poor majority at large to some considerable measure. If the majority in South Africa are poor then it means that the church must re-define and reconsider its mission priorities and strategies. This is what we attempt to show in the next chapter.

NOTES

CHAPTER FOUR

1. VIV GRIGG, *Companion To The Poor*, p.89.
2. See Mark W. Thomsen's article, "Jesus Crucified and the Mission of the Church", in *I.R.M.* Vol. LXXVII, number 306, April 1988, p.255.
3. *International Review of Mission*, Sixth Assembly: a Missionary Perspective, Vol. LXXII, number 288, October 1983, p.632.
4. VIV GRIGG, *Ibid.*, p.61.
5. *Ibid.*, p.88.
6. World Council of Churches, *Ministry With The Poor*, *International Review of Mission*, 1977, p.17.
7. JON SOBRINO, *The True Church And The Poor*, p.93.
8. CHOON CHEE PANG, "Working Together in Social Concern", unpublished paper presented at the First National Christian Conference, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, February 1979, p.9.
9. J.J. KRITZINGER, *The South African Context For Mission*, *Lux Verbi*, 1988, p.34.
10. KARL BARTH, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Trans. E.C. Hoskyns (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), p.41.
11. A.H. MASLOW, *Motivation And Personality*, N.Y., Harper and Row, 1954, p.35.
12. *Ibid.*, p.39.
13. Confer Chapter Three.
14. VINAY SAMUEL AND CHRIS SUGDEN, *Evangelism And The Poor: A Third World Study Guide*, p.26.
15. RICHARD D.N. DICKINSON, *To Set at Liberty the Oppressed*, W.C.C., Geneva, 1975, p.112.
16. See article on *Kerusso* by Gerhard Friedrich in Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 3, Trans. Jeoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1965), pp.706-707.
17. MATTHEW 4: 17 - 20. For a comprehensive discussion of the meaning of the phrase "fishers of men", see William H. Wuellner, *The Meaning of "Fishers of Men"* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962).
18. EMILIO CASTRO, *Freedom In Mission*, p.77.
19. *Ibid.*, p.78.

20. JURGEN MOLTSMANN, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, p.76. See the agreements but also the differences in emphasis between Karl Barth and Liberation Theologians. Both insist on word as well as action, but Barth - of course! - giving priority to the word and the others to action! (Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. IV, number 3, p.860f).
21. WILLIAM TEMPLE, *Citizen and Churchman*, pp.74-75.
22. JON SOBRINO, Op. cit., p.94.
23. Ibid., p.137.
24. WALDRON SCOTT, *Bring Forth Justice*, p.122f.
25. ART BEALS, *Beyond Hunger*, p.41.
26. Ibid., p.47.
27. See Rene Padilla's, Bible Studies, in *Missiology*, Vol. 10, 1982, p.323f.
28. B.N.Y. VAUGHAN, *The Expectation of the Poor*, p.10.
29. A quote from the famous Chinese philosopher Confucius.
30. This may not be theologically accurate, however, its usage is intended to make a point.
31. This may not be quite possible in some communities.
32. To minister *to the poor* one must be *with* the poor.
33. HANS FLORIN, *Lutherans in South Africa*, p.11f.
34. "The Church in mission must be involved in providing understanding, encouragement, support and opportunity for the groups of people in need who are trying to work together and organize to improve the situation. Without telling these groups what to do, the church can take the risk of speaking out objectively about what is going on in the process and can lend a hand in group and leadership development as opportunities occur". (See *International Review Of Mission*, Vol. LXXVIII, number 310, April 1989, p.207).
35. See Chapter Three.
36. Confer Edward B. Seeger's paper on Inter-faith Relations, in I.R.M. Vol. LXXVIII, number 310, April 1989, p.187f.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE TRUE CHURCH AND THE POOR IN SOUTH AFRICA

In Chapters Three and Four we only analysed one poverty stricken community, Isipingo Farm. However, we pointed out that the majority of South Africa's communities are poor like Isipingo Farm. If that is the case, then it is about time that the Church in South Africa started to redefine its nature and structure. Our ministry in Isipingo Farm made us painfully aware of where the Church in South Africa *is* and where it *ought to be*. The Church seems to be sitting on the fence between the poor and the rich. It would be a sad, even fatal day for the church if it could never come down off the fence and say, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer did: 'this is God's Word to us here and now'.

The Church must be able to say the Word of God, the word of authority, here and now, in the most concrete way possible from knowledge of the situation. The Church may not therefore preach timeless principles, however true, but only commandments which are true today. God is 'always' *God* to us '*today*'. (1)

The alternative is the church, as Barth put it, making a habit of coming to the scene too late, of entering the fray only when its opinions no longer involve any risk and can no longer exert any particular influence. (2)

1. The Church in South Africa

The Kairos document (September 1985) has pointed out to us that there are in fact two churches in South Africa - a white church and a black church.⁽³⁾ The one is built on power and affluence and the other is built on powerlessness and poverty. The one stands in allegiance to the State, the other in confrontation and conflict with the policies of the State. The question we need to ask ourselves is this: "*Which of these is the true church*"? Our question is not meant in the traditional technical sense; that is, we are not trying to distinguish true churches from heretical or schismatic churches. We are simply asking whether the basic substance of ecclesiality, namely; faith, hope, love, the presence of Christ and mission, exists in greater fullness in the church of the Rich or in the church of the Poor. Jon Sobrino in his book, 'The True church and the Poor,' attempts to show that the Church of the Poor is more closer to the biblical affirmation on being the church of Christ.⁽⁴⁾ He concluded:

"The church of the poor is a church the social and historical basis of which is to be found among the poor. As such, it is a church that has as its basis the majority of human beings, who both individually and collectively constitute the real poor, not only because of their natural condition of poverty, but also because of their historical condition of impoverishment by others. It is these poor, therefore, that are said to constitute the very basis of the church".(5)

In answering the same question the New Testament scholar Schmidt observes that Jesus called the whole people of Israel to repentance and to a new life-style which will be in keeping with the coming Kingdom. This life-style is depicted in the following comment:

The invitation to the kingdom of God must be accepted in metanoia; for its sake all the other things of this world - riches and fame - must be abandoned. We are not to be like those invited to the wedding who pleaded all kinds of obstacles (Matthew 22:1-14 par Luke 14: 16 - 24). Again there are various parables which emphasise this with particular sharpness. For the sake of the kingdom of God, which is like the treasure hid in a field or the good pearl for which all else will be exchanged (Matthew 13: 44-46), we must pluck out the treacherous hand (Matthew 5:29 ff). The most startling is that we must reflect that many have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of God (Matthew 19:12). At any rate, true regard for the kingdom of God requires the most serious decision, the most serious weeding out of the few from the many (Matthew 22:14). A sharp alternative demands a pitiless decision. 'No man, having put his hands to the plough and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God'. (Luke 9:62). (6)

The above comment infers that the Church of the Poor is more inclined to the true Church of Christ. It is not a church which rules in power and authority but one which serves in powerlessness and humility. The church is not there to be served but to serve its community, as did Jesus Christ Himself. The church is not there to acquire wealth and possessions but to dispense and distribute these among the poor and needy (Acts 2). The church is not to exist as a private privilege for a few. The calling is to a mission. It is to engage in the announcement of the King, Lord Jesus; to challenge in his name all powers that afflict and oppress; to be a priestly people interceding for others, Christ's servant people, projecting Jesus' spirit of love in the world, a waiting people pointing towards the promises of God. The churches are sent to love God and neighbour, to follow the path and model of Jesus and with the assurance of the actual power of his kingship to proclaim, teach, discipline and baptise all nations.

The church is sent as a servant to all people, with a priestly, missionary and evangelistic vocation.⁽⁷⁾

2. Challenge to Action

If the church of the poor is more closer to the church of God then a challenge is offered to the more wealthy and powerful churches in South Africa to bring itself in line with God's will and purpose. The implications thereof is, of course, very serious:

Firstly, it means that the church must now take sides with the poor and oppressed.⁽⁸⁾ It can no longer identify itself with the powerful and wealthy, even though it ministers among them. Moreover, the church can no longer remain neutral, it must take a side. The Kairos Document, however, reminds us of the position in South Africa. It states:

"To say that the church must now take sides unequivocally and consistently with the poor and the oppressed is to overlook the fact that the majority of Christians in South Africa have already done so. By far the greater part of the church in South Africa is poor and oppressed. Of course it cannot be taken for granted that everyone who is oppressed has taken up their own cause and is struggling for their own liberation. Nor can it be assumed that all oppressed Christians are fully aware of the fact that their cause is God's cause. Nevertheless, it remains true that the Church is already on the side of the oppressed because that is where the majority of its members are to be found. This fact needs to be appropriated and confirmed by the Church as a whole". ⁽⁹⁾

Secondly, in order to side with the poor the church must itself become poor.⁽¹⁰⁾ Jon Sobrino advises that the true church of the poor must look at poverty from the perspective of the beatitudes.⁽¹¹⁾ They propose in effect a salvific kenosis, which in order to be salvific must be a kenosis. It must be emphasised, however, that this spiritualisation cannot be achieved by a mere desire to become poor.

In order to be truly a sacrament of salvation, if salvation is understood as a real kenosis, the church must accept real poverty, must become poor itself in an act of solidarity with the poor, and must actively defend the causes of the poor.

Poverty, powerlessness and persecution constitute the real and material conditions for a church in keeping with the will of God to arise and for the possibility of an experience of God within such an ecclesial channel to take place.

Perhaps some will resent this notion that the church must become poor. However, let us be reminded that the way of salvation is the way of downward mobility. It is the way of the cross.⁽¹²⁾ It is the call to give up our privilege and power and to identify with the poor. But that is good news, not bad. It is bad news only for those who worship Mammon. The upward way is the way of death. The cross leads to life. We have been called from death and slavery into life.

After the resurrection and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the early Christians were given to live out what Jesus taught them. It looked something like this:

And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need. (Acts 2:44-45). Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet; and distribution was made to each as any had need. (Acts 4: 32-35)

If we look forward to the time when God's kingdom is fulfilled, when there will be justice for all, when love and sharing will characterise all relationships, why not begin living that way now? Why should we pattern our lives after the fallen world with its private property, competition and alienation? The Church and Christians ought to be different. What should keep us from sharing our possessions, from living as brothers and sisters? Only our double-mindedness. But we cannot serve both God and money. The will to possess and the desire for community are opposites.⁽¹³⁾

The call of Jesus is to become poor, to identify with the oppressed, to cast our lots with the downtrodden. Real love leads us to become one with the homeless (maybe by opening our homes and churches to them). This is the logic of the Incarnation.

We are called to a life of poverty because of our deep identification with Jesus as our norm and example. He became poor, vulnerable, empty. He put his whole trust in God. He gave up all he had. Love calls us to give up all we have, too.

Thirdly, the church in South Africa must fulfil a role of prophetic denunciation of the grave injustices rampant in South Africa.⁽¹⁴⁾ This has to be concretised in criticism of injustice and oppression in the struggle against the intolerable situation which a poor person has to tolerate. The church must not impose a law of silence when the real need is to lend a voice to those who offer injustice and to develop the social and political responsibility of the People of God.

This denunciation is a manner of expressing the intention of becoming disassociated from the existing unjust order. When a system ceases to promote the common good and favours special interests, the church must not only denounce injustice but also break with the evil system.⁽¹⁵⁾ The denunciation of injustice implies the rejection of the use of Christianity to legitimise the established order. It likewise implies, in fact, that the Church has entered into conflict with those who wield power.

The church must teach both the law and the gospel of God. This is the duty of the Church's pastors, teachers, and other leaders. And when the church concludes that biblical faith or righteousness requires it to take a public stand on some issue, then it must obey God's word and trust him with the consequences.

But why must the church do this? John Gladwin sums up this argument in his 'God's People in God's World':

"It is because this is God's world, and he cared for it to the point of incarnation and crucifixion, that we are inevitably committed to work for God's justice in the face of oppression, for God's truth in the face of lies and deceits, for service in the face of selfishness, for co-operation in the face of destructive antagonism, and for reconciliation in the face of division and hostility".⁽¹⁶⁾

Fourthly, we must remember that the primary call of Christians is neither to change the structures of the old age which is passing away, nor to just change individuals and leave them as part of the old society. The primary task of the church is to be a *New Society* (koinonia) into which we call people to enter through repentance.

The Christian community is the alternative to the sick society. For the church is meant by God to be his new and redeemed community, which embodies the ideals of the kingdom.

But how does the new community change the old? The answer is well expressed in the Grand Rapids Report:

"....the new community should constitute a challenge to the old. Its values and ideals, its moral standards and relationships, its sacrificial life-style, its love, joy and peace - these are the signs of the kingdom and present the world with a radically alternative society....."(17)

The mediating agent of God's saving grace is primarily the church. The church can create the alternatives, do the experimenting and take the risks with new and needed forms. After all, who would we expect to be in a better position to be open to God's spirit?

The church can stop blessing worldly values which make oppression acceptable. The church can question the moral legitimacy of the corporations; it can proclaim biblical truth which will result in undermining the legitimacy of the powerful and mighty. The church can follow the radical path of Jesus instead of being Sadducees who stay with the system of oppression and oppose radical repentance.⁽¹⁸⁾ This is not a retreat from the world. It is a creative way to be in the world, yet not of the world. It is not enough to live the alternative and forget the world, however, we can both live the alternative and confront the world with the truth.

The prophetic task of the church is both constructive and critical and is exercised in the midst of a process of change. The prophetic task of justice demands, on the one hand, that the church point out these elements within a revolutionary process which are truly humanised and encourage the determined, dynamic, and creative participation of its members in this process.⁽¹⁹⁾ On the other hand, the church must point out the dehumanising elements also found in a process of change. But this function is not appropriate if the creative participation of the Christian community within the society has not already occurred.

Fifthly, if the Church's focus, in South Africa, is geared towards the evangelisation of the oppressed and the poor, then we have to admit that the present structures through which the church operates are quite inadequate to meet the serious challenges of our times. The very structures in which we operate often prevent us from acting in a manner that accords with the Gospel. This, too, deeply concerns us; for we see that it greatly complicates the chances of bringing the Gospel to the people. The Church cannot be a prophet in our day if she herself is not turned to Christ. She does not have the right to talk against others when she herself is a cause of scandal in her interpersonal relations and her internal structures. It is sad to realise that within our churches in South Africa there exists a tremendous amount of discrimination. Moreover, within the same denominations the church is divided into four chambers, namely; White, Indian, Coloured and Black. We cannot point a finger at the government in South Africa when we as a church are no less guilty of the same sins. The disparity in stipends and living conditions between White and Black clergy is usually attributed to the economic inequalities in our country. But why does the church have to be a party to this? Is it not called to be a new society?

The overall pastoral structures within the church must be reworked if it is to be adequate to the sociological situation in which it is to be carried out. Unless this happens you will always have the poor (black) clergy at the mercies of the rich (white). Hence, the poor black churches will always be dependent on the rich white churches. The rich will always lead and the poor will always follow. In such a situation you will find that the poor (black) clergy will be afraid to share their views or criticise the structure of the church lest they may 'cut the hands that feed their mouth'.

If the church in South Africa is to be true to its calling then it is about time that we addressed and changed these structures of inequalities. Why not appoint Black ministers to white congregations? Why not White congregations call Black ministers? Why not White Christians join Black congregations?

Finally, if the church is called to be the new society, there will be a need to change the current life-style of the clergy. We need to move away from our ivory towers and narrowed parish ministries in order to appropriate the ideals of the kingdom. We must embrace within our ministries a concern for justice and a desire to stand up for truth. The exercise of our ministry must inevitably lead us to commitment and solidarity with the poor. There is need for change also with regard to ways of earning a living:

"New, ways must be found to support clergy. Those who do not wish to live on stipends or from teaching religion should be allowed to experiment. A secular job could be very healthy: they would find themselves in the real world of men, it would lessen the temptation to servility on the part of those who depend totally on the clerical institution; it would likewise diminish the financial problems of the institutional church".(20)

Finally, it would contribute in many of us to the development of a strong apostolic vocation disengaged from all unhealthy ties.

3. Conclusion

If the church in South Africa is the church which has as its priority the evangelisation of the poor and oppressed and the establishment of a new society in the perspective of the Kingdom; then it means that our present mission strategies must be re-examined. Our present mission strategies hardly befits the numerous grass-root communities in South Africa.(21) When churches think of mission today, these are some of the questions they ask:

Do we have funds to pay stipends?

Do we employ a full-time worker?

Is it worth an investment?

Are there grounds available for building a church?

Is there money to build a church?

How much financial support should we offer?

By the time we have found answers to all these questions we already decide to abandon the project. We forget that our allegiance is to God and not to Mammon. Whilst it is reasonable to be realistic and ask all these questions, yet we must be warned that our vision is far too ecclesiocentric and not kingdom centred. To appropriate the ideals of the kingdom one does not need full-time workers, church grounds and church buildings.

One needs to educate, train, disciple and mobilise Christians to maintain the ideals of the kingdom wherever they are found.⁽²²⁾ This inevitably will lead to the establishment of a Christian community as believers seek to come together. This may subsequently require the services of a Christian worker, be it full-time or otherwise.

The point we are attempting to make can be clearly seen in the following illustration:

Our attempts in appropriating the ideals of the kingdom in the Isipingo Farm Community subsequently led to the establishment of a small Christian community. We met regularly on Sunday mornings and Thursday evenings in a nearby school outside the area. In a 'congregation' of over 120 about ninety percent of them were new converts from hinduism. The Lord seemed to have been working miraculously amongst us! But then, the authorities within the denomination we represented decided that the work in Isipingo Farm was not financially viable, it should therefore be closed down. The 'congregation' only brought in about R500 a month and that was quite insufficient to pay stipends or erect a building for worship. Eventually all financial ties were curtailed because the work in Isipingo Farm was considered to be a 'bad investment'. Nevertheless, the work started in the area still continues today.

The questions posed earlier gives us an indication of how those responsible came to the decision of closing down the work in Isipingo Farm. Their decision is based on 'results' and 'success'. However, their focus is not on the Kingdom of God but on the church. Generally, those who make the decisions come from wealthy and affluent churches who know little or nothing about the plight of the poor communities. When the church is pre-occupied with measurable results and concerned about being "successful" it can become a hindrance too, rather than a vehicle for the working of God's Spirit.

If the Church in South Africa is to gear its mission priorities, towards the poor then it has to seriously reverse its attitude on 'money' and 'success'. If this is the basis on which we so desire to operate then we should forget about the poor, their circumstances disqualify them from achieving any good.

The goal of mission must be the Kingdom of God not the "planting" of churches. Those who maintain the latter place their emphasis on secondary issues, such as church sites, church buildings, stipends, etc. In any case, the Greek word for church (ekklesia) does not speak of church in the sense in which we understand it today. We are apt to think of the church as an institution and an organisation with buildings and offices, services and meetings, organisations and all kinds of activities. The word that Jesus almost certainly used was "qahal", which is the word the Old Testament uses for the congregation of Israel, the gathering of the people of the Lord.

When Christians come together there must not be this great urgency to erect a prestigious building for worship. Why not worship in schools or other suitable buildings? In any case, in the community of the poor it might be more appropriate to build a community centre or multi-purpose building rather than to raise an extravagant looking church. If the church is to be the servant of the community, will this not be more appropriate?⁽²³⁾ The church must move away from its materialistic notions to engage a simple life-style, a spirit of service, and freedom from temporal ties, intrigue, or ambitious prestige. Faith requires that we do not base our continued efforts on visible or measurable outcomes when the cause is just. With Paul, we must maintain our assurance in that which we hope for without requiring evidence of results not yet seen, because in time the results will come.

If we are to take seriously the purpose of the church as outlined in chapter five we will realise that it has numerous implications for mission today, especially as we seek to evangelise the poor and the oppressed.

In this research I have made some suggestions with regards to the principles and methods for mission with the poor. However, I have only managed to scratch the surface, an insurmountable amount of work in this area must still be done. More research, especially in the area of church growth in grass-root communities is very much needed.

NOTES

CHAPTER FIVE

1. DIETRICH BONHOEFFER, *No Rusty Swords*, London, Collins, 1965, p.16f.
2. KARL BARTH, *Against the Stream: Shorter Post-War Writings*, 1946-52, London S.C.M., 1954, p.47.
3. *Challenge to the Church: A Theological comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa*, *The Kairos Document*, Springs Advertiser (Pty) Ltd., February 1986, p.8.
4. JON SOBRINO, *The True Church and the Poor*, p.134.
5. Ibid., p.135.
6. K.L. SCHMIDT, article on Basileia, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. by G. Kittel. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964, p.584.
7. "The specific task of the churches is to disclose the final revelation of God Himself in Jesus Christ, and by the assistance of the Holy Spirit establish such visible signs of the Kingdom of God and offer new hope to all who long for a more human world". (I.R.M. Melbourne Reports/Reflections, p.398).
8. "If, as Vidales says, "The poor are the sacrament of Christ's presence", I feel we should give new content to the old definition of the church as the body in which the sacraments are celebrated and the Word is proclaimed. The sacraments of His presence are not only the bread and wine, not only the fellowship of believers wherein when two or three are gathered in His Name there He is present, but also the poor of the earth in whom we meet Christ. The church is there when in Christ's name the oppressed are liberated". (Sam Amirtham, "Training The Ministers The Church Ought to have", in *Ministry With The Poor*, I.R.M. p.51).
9. *Challenge to the Church*, Op. cit., p.22.

10. What this means is that genuine involvement with the afflicted and oppressed, in an "out of the depth of" their "needs and life situations", will lead the church to deep conversion: its posture, commitments, attitudes, ideas, ethics, loyalties and thinking will undergo thorough transformation. "A church is a *church* when it embraces the poor, when it participates in the yearning search for justice and emancipation". (J.D. Gort, "Gospel for the Poor"?, Op. cit., p.334).
11. JON SOBRINO, Op. cit., p.150.
12. ROSGATHE MSHANA adds, "The church is generally an instrument of justice and social integration and transformation. It has inherited the cross and must not accept to be comfortable in society". (Rosgathe Mshana, *The Relationships between Development Work and other Church Ministries*". A paper presented to the Lutheran World Federation - organised consultation on communication and development, Limuru, Kenya, 1986, p.2. See also G. Cook, *The Expectation of the Poor*, p.129.
13. ROBERT G. CLOUSE, *Wealth and Poverty*, p.139.
14. A church that lives in a situation of injustice but is not able to discover in the light of the Gospel entrusted to it the injustices within its own fellowship is no longer an authentic sign of the Kingdom of God.
15. G. GUTIERREZ, *A Theology of Liberation*, p.115.
16. JOHN GLADWIN, *God's People in God's World*, I.V.P. 1979, p.125.
17. EMILIO CASTRO, Op. cit., p.42f.
18. R.G. CLOUSE, Op. cit., p.131f.
Confer also Ronald Sider, *Evangelicals and Development Towards a Theology of Social Change*, 1981, p.47.
19. W.C.C., *Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation*, Paragraph 6.
20. G. GUTIERREZ, Op. cit., p.118.

21. "The church in mission, striving to be faithful to its Lord, seeks to avoid: (1) Being obsessed with buildings and pre-determined results; (2) Being narrowly concerned about a limited time-table related to budget expectations; (3) Being dominant and controlling in compelling results; and (4) Being sectarian and exclusive in its approach". (I.R.M. Vol. LXXVIII, number 310, 1989, p.204).
22. "Instead of starting with building projects or pre-determined tangible results, the church in mission starts with people, especially people in dialogue, people to be included in a fellowship, a "community" or "colonia". Through community conversation the people develop consensus and determine what is needed in their "colonia" or "community". (Ibid., p.205).
23. The following statement describes the churches position for mission today which seriously needs to be reworked: "All too frequently a church will identify a need and develop a mission strategy with little or no dialogue with the community in need. The strategy then reflects the church's need to be visible (a building) and successful (a programme) more than a commitment to the genuine interests and needs of the community. While buildings and programmes are often useful, there are numerous cases in where they inhibit a mission of empowerment and perpetuate dependency. A common scenario is one in which a church begins a mission effort by putting up a building in a "colonia". It does not become a vital part of the community because it did not emerge from the community. Even so, the church has made an investment and feels it must maintain the building and fill it with programmes. The cart is leading the horse. The residents of the "colonia" remain "objects" of mission, rather than "subjects" shaping their own destiny". (Ibid., pp.205-206).

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