

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

The Charismatic Evangelicals contribution to community and social development has not been properly documented or extensively published in South Africa. Therefore many people might have been tempted to think that the Charismatic Evangelicals are apathetic, caught in a persistent culture of non-involvement. There may have been some elements of truth in the criticism; although many of the accusations levelled at them, have been wide-sweeping generalizations. The Charismatic Evangelicals on their journey of faith have ultimately emerged from their often-lamented reactive stance and dualistic theological tendencies, to pursue mission in society. Bosch (1991: 407- 408), “while critical of the *cause and effect thinking* that guided evangelical theologising, affirmed the general direction and quality shift in evangelical thinking,” in the past decades. It has become a reality that Charismatic Evangelicals do not want to be bystanders when it comes to issues of social development and transformation. Therefore, in the context of South Africa, they have to face the reality of widespread impoverishment in the country. They have the challenging task to be witnesses of Christ’s love and care to the majority of the previously disadvantaged people of this nation, who are still lingering in deprivation even after a decade of political emancipation. According to Shenk (1993:73), “Evangelicals have come a long way, both practically and theologically, in their affirmation of a whole gospel ministry. To this extent they have re-appropriated their Evangelical heritage.” They regard themselves to be heralds of the God’s saving grace that has been made possible through Christ’s death and resurrection. They also attest to God’s redemptive power, which breaks the power of sin, oppression, injustice, poverty and all other manifestations of evil and corruption perpetuated by evil forces, both human and demonic. In my investigation, I have discovered that they have re-appropriated their mission mandate to be witnesses who are to make a difference to a situation of deprivation. This is true of both South African Charismatic Evangelicals and of the

worldwide Evangelical community. Sider, Olson and Unruh (2002:13) described this trend as follows:

“The twentieth century saw a divisive argument between the social gospel churches that focused one-sidedly on social action, and evangelistic churches that insisted that leading people to Christ was the only truly important mission of the church. The tragic results of that long argument have not entirely disappeared, but we have made great progress. Evangelical leaders today widely agree that biblical churches must combine word and deed, doing evangelism and social ministry. Scores of historic evangelical congregations that focused almost exclusively on evangelism twenty years ago are now immersed in social engagement – without losing their evangelistic passion. Thousands of holistic grassroots ministries have emerged.”

A remarkable change has taken place in our nation amongst Evangelicals. Many of the Charismatic-Pentecostal Evangelical churches that were once considered socially irrelevant and politically naïve have now transformed. Some have, in their testimony to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, disclosed and confessed their collaboration with the former apartheid regime. But in the post-apartheid society, they are playing a significant role in nation building.

7.1 Reconceptualizing the Charismatic Evangelical Witness and Ministry to the Poor

7.1.1 The Empowering Ministry amongst the Poor

This research has confirmed my understanding that the Charismatic Evangelicals are progressively having a recognizable Christian witness and ministry amongst the poor, through their local churches in almost all communities across South Africa. They have been involved in relief work and some community development and poverty alleviation initiatives throughout the nation. They are coming to age in sharing the good news with the poor and becoming servants of the Kingdom of God, making their mark in the socio-political, educational and economic arena. Below are some of their contributions that

vary in scope and impact from one local church, group and denomination to another within the Charismatic Evangelical family:

- Food distribution and temporary accommodation for the poor
- Rehabilitation of substance abusers
- Ministry to prisoners and rehabilitation
- Care of those affected and infected by HIV-Aids
- Service to abused women and children
- Family enrichment programmes
- Spiritual care, counselling and therapy support services
- Care for the elderly
- Care for people with physical and mental challenges
- Participation in crime prevention
- Rehabilitation of prisoners
- Youth development programmes
- Relief in times of emergencies
- Education – literacy and skills development
- Job creation.

In modest ways the Charismatic evangelicals have been a significant witness in South Africa, making a contribution to poverty eradication. They initially expressed, in their own way, their concern for the poor in their suffering. This was followed by their care in solidarity with the poor. They have progressively extended their compassionate ministry to the poor in the church and sometimes also in the broader community.

Poverty for the majority of the Charismatic Evangelicals is not just a theoretical problem; many have personally experienced real destitution in their churches. There are many who are poor within the ranks of their hierarchy and constituency. Although deprivation is a theological problem for them, yet they are facing and feeling its existential realities themselves. They have not had the luxury of romanticizing it, since it was affecting them negatively. Thus in their theological response to poverty one notices a shift in their thinking, to adopt a theological position that has some convergence with the kind of thinking that is usually associated with Ecumenicals. Although, their theological

positions, however, need further consolidation to reflect a common ground. The perspective of individual leaders speaking in an uncoordinated manner may not fully reflect the position of the Charismatic Evangelical Church. Ministering to the poor is evolving to become an essential part of the life and work of the Charismatic Evangelicals. They have begun to realize that it is an integral part of the mission of the church. For them to witness, now entails both evangelism and social action as essential and indivisible components of their ministry. It should not be either /or in terms of priority for the Charismatic Evangelical witness in society. Ideally this is what the broader Charismatic Evangelicals are seeking to accomplish in their witness. There are, however, still a few dissenters who remain preoccupied with the salvation of souls without embracing social action in that witness. Theirs, however, is just a dying voice in the dawn of change. There is genuine transformation among the majority of the Charismatic Evangelicals, many of whom come from the previously disadvantaged communities. One of the prevailing misunderstandings has been to consider all the Charismatic Evangelical Churches to a few flamboyant, large, and popular local churches in affluent suburbs. Their popularity is sustained through televangelism, mega gospel events, and charismatic leadership. These few but vocal churches are inadvertently considered to be the face of the Charismatic Evangelicals. These are actually a minority sector of the Charismatic Evangelical Church. The vast majority of the constituency of Charismatic Evangelical Churches exist in the obscurity of previously disadvantaged areas; in townships, squatter camps, deserted CBD sections of towns, and rural areas. They have church meetings in tents, decaying buildings, school halls and modest buildings. Few of them have those glitzy infrastructures, TV programmes, mega gospel events and leaders. This is the actual disadvantaged face of the Charismatic Evangelicals who are doing ministry amongst the millions of the starving, unemployed, homeless, and struggling South Africans. Such a face is a marred face, which is an embarrassment that does not actually fit the Charismatic Evangelical image of prosperity presented by ostentatious Charismatic preachers whose style of Charismatic Evangelicalism is American rather than African.

7.1.2 The Consolidation of Charismatic Evangelical Position In Response to Poverty

7.1.2.1 Foundational Reflections

The Charismatic Evangelicals have sought to have a biblical response in their ministry to the poor. *Firstly*, they reflect on the Old Testament texts that emphasize the fact that God is the God of the poor. God identifies with the poor in their suffering and legitimises their struggle for poverty eradication. *Secondly*, they indicated that poverty is not a situation to be idealized by God's people, since God does not want his people to be poor. In fact, God desires that all people should be prosperous without inequality. In terms of God's will all people should share the resources that He has provided for them justly. *Thirdly*, they reflect on the New Testament pointing to the life, ministry, death, resurrection and reign of Christ in relation to the poor. Christ was the promised Messiah, who came to set the poor free from any forces that created their oppression. God had anointed Christ with the Holy Spirit to preach good news to the poor, to heal those who were sick and free those who were exploited. *Finally*, they also reflect on the mission that God has given to the Church to serve the poor. The Church should be a servant of God's kingdom working for the implementation of kingdom values in our society. The Church should not rest in its ministry until love, justice and peace are prevalent in its society. This biblical insight is evident in the position of the Charismatic Evangelicals on poverty, although they still have to broaden their biblical understanding on structural issues implied in the biblical texts.

7.1.2.2 Transformational Ministry Vision

The Charismatic Evangelical churches that are contributing extensively and meaningfully to society, have embraced a compelling transformational vision in their witness. They have both compassion and passion for the ministry that changes society for the good of

all its members. Each local congregation deals with the particular needs of its local community. According to Rastello,

“Our social vision and analysis must be double: from below and from above, that is, a vision of faith from above looking at reality from below. For this reason those who share life with the marginalized are willing to be present in the real situations without fear of being fully involved (even though confrontation with Phil 2:6 –11 is so difficult and demanding)”(Pierli & Abeledo 2002:108).

This vision enables local Christians to understand issues at stake, and creates a sense of ownership for the Church’s ministry to the poor. It empowers their members to participate in ministry programs aimed at helping the poor purposively as value-adding partners. “Great dreams can generate incredible energy but only when shared in inspiring ways. Effective leaders go beyond clarity; their vision is wrapped in enthusiasm, conviction, and sincerity. They consistently convey optimism that labels themselves and others as winners, despite all the odds”(Miller 1997:66). Therefore, vision matters to the church, for having a credible prophetic ministry that results in people’s conversion to Christ, reconciliation to others, and widespread societal and structural change. Nicholls and Wood (1996:1 – 2), however, cautions:

“To sustain a ministry of sharing good news with the poor demands a strong biblical foundation and Christ-centred motivation. As with all missionary work we need to have a strong sense of God’s call to this most difficult of all tasks. We need the empowering of the Holy Spirit to sustain a ministry of love, compassion and justice to those with whom we have little cultural affinity. Unless motivated by God himself we will find the task too hard, too depressing, and too stressful.... The poor are not too slow to observe the waning zeal, the faltering commitment, and even the moral failure of those who have come to help them. They quickly separate the sheep from the goats, the good shepherd from the hireling.”

If the church does not have genuine commitment to this transformational vision it will struggle to fulfil its mission of proclaiming the whole gospel to its community. Local churches that are more effective in their ministry amongst the poor are ablaze with vision. Just as Jesus confessed tremendous zeal for the work of God (John 2:17), an inspiring

vision generates enthusiasm, dedication, creativity, teamwork and good stewardship in ministry to the poor.

7.1.2.3 The Prophetic Role of the Charismatic Church

The Charismatic Evangelicals, if they wish to be true in their calling should rise to the challenge to be more *prophetic*, in their witness, to push an agenda of justice and equality in their ministry so that all the societal disparities that are perpetuating debilitating impoverishment may be addressed. All the unjust structures that persist to promote the exploitation of the poor, mismanagement of environmental resources, corruption, and disrupting *shalom* in communities should be transformed, in order to make opportunities of empowerment accessible to the poor. “Thus prophecy is always confrontational. It confronts the evils of the time and speaks out against them in no uncertain terms... On the other hand prophecy will announce the hopeful good news of future liberation, justice, and peace, as God’s will and promise, naming the ways of bringing this about and encouraging people to take action”(Logan 1988:26). They should not shy away from the public arena, but should lobby government, business, and other civic formations to have an agenda that is pro-poor. They should be bold to engage in dialogue with all the stakeholders in the public domain who shape the national, provincial, regional and local agenda in South Africa. Sider, Olson and Unruh stress on the significance of advocacy as the witness of the church through its justice ministries, to promote transformational development:

“Through advocacy ministries, churches grapple with the reality of social sin and follow in the prophetic tradition of serving as ‘God’s voice,’ proclaiming a biblical perspective on institutional or systematic social problems. Sometimes churches are able to work within channels of official power, sometimes they organize together to exert pressure from outside the system or create alternatives to the system, and sometimes they raise a lone voice of protest, witness, or solidarity. Advocacy ministries might lobby for higher earned income tax credits, or confront city officials about zoning regulations that restrict affordable family housing, or educate the public about an upcoming proposal to legalize gambling.

The goal of holistic advocacy ministries is not to force change through violence or threats but to speak the truth in love and overcome evil with God”(Sider, Olson & Unruh 2002:42).

The South African Council of Churches has provided a good model of partnering with the labour movement to pressurize government to provide for the needs of the poor. For this reason they have been propagating the concept of the “people’s budget.” The Ecumenical movement has been on the forefront of advocacy to push the aspirations of the poor in the national forums of key players in business and government, like NEDLAC (National Economic Development and Labour Council), and other global organizations like the World Bank and the United Nations. It is good to see many of Charismatic-Pentecostals restoring their fellowship with the Ecumenical movement in South Africa joining them in their ministry to the poor. Many who had been in the wilderness have reclaimed and renewed their membership of the South African Council of Churches. That was necessary: Charismatic Evangelicals must shift from their reactive and conservative mode they previously practiced, an attitude decried by the Concerned Evangelicals when it comes issues of public policy. Many Evangelicals are moving away from just having gripes with government on a few moral issues, to focus on fundamental structural issues. According to Nicholls and Wood (1996:136),

“The church of Christ does not complete its mission only by informing the world and governments about the values of the kingdom. What the world and its government needs are not just values of the Kingdom but transformation through the presence and the power of the Kingdom. This is the good news, for the only truly humanizing force in this world is that which comes from the sovereign grace and action of God through Jesus Christ, Lord and Saviour. The power of the Holy Spirit is the most effective moral power acting in this world. In the saving function of the church, evangelism and discipleship should always accompany the prophetic.”

They are becoming more matured engaging in public debates. They are indications that they understand the societal issues, having competent leaders to represent their cause and networking effectively with other strategic partners for them to have a powerful Christian response. Their intention should be clear - inspiring the Christian community to refuse to

accept the status quo of rampant poverty. “They also call Christian to grieve over sin and brokenness it begets and reminds us afresh of our need for the whole gospel”(Sider et al 2002:2). Reminding us about our call to have compassion for the disadvantaged, so that we do not perpetuate Christian apathy when we are surrounded by brokenness, poverty and inequality in society.

7.1.2.4 The Conversion to be more of a Church of the Poor

The larger constituency of the Charismatic Evangelicals is the poor. Yet, the Church has a reputation for being affluent, due to the greater visibility of its minority affluent constituency. In some circles the Church continues to be regarded in stereotypical terms as a ‘prosperity cult’ that serves the interests of the privileged few in society. Charismatic Evangelicals have to shed their plush public image and really identify with the vast majority of its members and community that are impoverished. Otherwise it will run into the risk of compromising its God-given mission. “The mission of Jesus was to the poor (Matt. 11:5; cf. 9:18 –33), and this is the same mission with which the Disciples were charged”(Driver 1997:80). They need to project an image that is associated with Christ’s concern for the poor rather than the glamour of privileged circumstances or rather, to be transformed into a church for the poor. “The church as poor and the church giving good news to the poor are two fundamental coordinates of the Christian mission. Whenever the church is seduced by temptations of power, prestige, and property, it cannot communicate the gospel of the kingdom with integrity. This is so because the full-orbed message has been obscured”(Driver 1997:80). The message of an affluent Church becomes irrelevant to the poor since it cannot relate to their existential realities because their life as a church has been disconnected from the life of the poor. Therefore, its witness will be without credibility amongst the poor.

The Charismatic Evangelicals know what it means to be marginalized. They started as a protest Christian movement amongst the poor that sought to bring renewal to various aspects within the church, prompted by certain biblical and theological positions and convictions. Due to their persuasions they were sidelined as a movement. The Church

should be cautious that its more prosperous members do not alienate themselves from the disadvantaged, by identifying solely with the life and values of the middle class and the more affluent. This does not mean its should idealize pauperisation. This would be contrary to God's vision of *shalom* for his people. Guder (1998:93) indicates, "*Shalom* envisions the full prosperity of a people of God living under the covenant of God's demanding care and compassionate rule. In the prophetic vision, peace like this comes hand in hand with justice." It must be a church that embraces the values, culture and life experiences of the poor rather than any that are alien to theirs. They must be a church that truly identifies with and serves the poor. Its perceived prosperity image must not cloud its primary servant's role in the community. Therefore Quiroz states:

"This function is expressed through service, which is the manifestation of the love of God and one's neighbour. The model is the Lord as Servant, who had for a throne, the cross. Love, service and the cross are the permanent triad through which Christians and the church live and exercise their royalty... The Church is called to be a servant and not a master. It is called to fight against the ever-present temptations of power, pleasure, appearances, prestige and possessions. The Church should participate in the sufferings of the world and suffer in the benefits of the world. What does it mean to give one's life for others?"(Nicholls & Wood 1996:138).

The acclaim and glory of the church is not its material opulence but sacrificial service and love in obedience to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Its ultimate purpose is to shine with ministry that empowers those who are suffering and desperate. "The church is uniquely, divinely both apostolic and prophetic when it ministers to the poor in the fidelity of the words, work, and the life of Christ. This requires being empowered by the Holy Spirit, the one through whom the Son 'made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant,' humbling himself, becoming 'obedient to death' (Phil 2:7 – 8)"(Snyder 2002:27). The Church does not exist for self-glory but for compassionate service to others, especially the disadvantaged.

The Charismatic Evangelicals in the past have not made the involvement of the poor in their transformational witness a widespread standard practice. The poor are not

participating in poverty alleviation in an empowering manner Their involvement should include training and mentoring in order for them to participate as key role players in these transformational development initiatives. According to Nicholls and Wood (1996: 22).

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

At present, however, to a great extent, the poor are just being treated as recipients of charity. These are just the relics of paternalism that are still lingering in some of their ministries to the poor. Charismatics need to shed these paternalistic practices in their witness amongst the poor, who should be invited to participate as value-adding stakeholders.

7.1.2.5 The Quality and Sustainability of Ministries

Many Charismatic Evangelical local Churches, have an array of programmes, organized to deal with a plethora of societal needs. Most of the Charismatic Evangelicals poverty alleviation initiatives were initially relief programs. They were meant to address the immediate needs of the poor without dealing with societal factors that created their poverty. Charismatic Evangelicals in their experience of ministry using relief strategies have drawn important lessons that have highlights of advantages and disadvantages. Relief has its place as a to address issues of poverty that have a short-term span, but it is inappropriate to deal with systemic poverty. Therefore, there has been a gradual shift towards choosing either, development, transformation, or sustainability on aspects of poverty alleviation. Charismatic Evangelicals are now inclined to pursue ministry to the poor that would be more developmental or transformational in making significant impact in improving the quality of life of the poor. The achieved changes should be life long, having uprooted the underlying structural factors that caused those disparities. The quality of the programs in ministry to the poor varies from church to church. But some of their poverty alleviation programs are well structured, resourced and managed.

Meanwhile, others are administered in a mediocre manner that further undermines the dignity of the poor. “Organizing enables the poor to achieve the power which brings unity. It also helps them to have a common understanding of the problems of their exploitation, and therefore develop ways of improving their situation”(Nicholls & Wood 1996:82). Therefore, ministry that addresses the needs of the poor needs to be run excellently. Below are some of the factors that lead to shabbiness and the unsustainability of some of the compassionate ministries of local churches:

- Poor planning, administration and leadership.
- Insufficient training or skills development of facilitators
- Wrong appointment of personnel and misplacement of volunteers
- Over commitment
- Limited resources
- Failure to involve all stakeholders
- Organizational weakness
- Hastiness to show results or progress without attention to detail, no proper project management.

Most of these obtrusive factors are just symptoms of an underlying weakness. They point to the shortcomings that these local churches have in their capacity to manage more qualitative and sustainable ministries that are intended to enable the poor. “The struggle dies on the vine if it is built around a few charismatic individuals without constructing powerful organizations with trained leadership, an expanding network of relationships, and a solid financial base”(Jacobsen 2001:79). This is a correctable deficiency; therefore this situation can be improved.

7.1.2.6 The Local Churches’ Holistic Ministry

There should be clear leadership within the local churches to embrace holistic ministry as part of their calling. This will enable them to consistently express a holistic vision that should culminate in a holistic ministry. The purpose should be to transform local assemblies, to have a church life distinguished by holistic ministry. According to Sider, Olson and Unruh (2002:15 –16),

“Holistic ministry takes place in a holistic church. If you have you been to such a church, you recognize it.... The church might not be perfect – come to think of it, no church is! –and the vision may not be fully realized, but the active presence of the Spirit can be felt, bringing renewal, growth, and transformation both within the church and in the community. A Christian community that is spiritual, dynamic, sacrificing, caring, boldly prophetic, and lovingly nurturing is God’s chosen vessel for authentic change in persons and in society.”

The local churches’ message and actions must reflect a holistic definition of mission. We should preach the gospel of love and demonstrate love in a practical manner that empower the poor and improve their state of affairs in areas of need. People must not see a church building that is only used a few times weekly, with people who keep on going in and out without the Church having a meaningful connection with them. Sider, Olson and Unruh say,

“Holistic Christians love not only ‘in word or speech, but [also] in truth and action’ (1 John 3:18). The coordinator of evangelism and outreach at Germantown church sums it up: ‘Love is an action. People want to see action, not hear so much mouth. You can’t tell somebody about love the love of Jesus Christ if don’t have the love in your heart. The love is what draws people to Christ.’ Without social ministry, evangelism can be perceived as just ‘so much mouth.’ Without the gospel, social activism is stripped of the Holy Spirit’s transforming power”(Sider, Olson & Unruh 2002:45 – 46).

The talk of the church about God’s goodness must be translated into tangible actions of care for people, because this they can comprehend.

7.1.2.7 The Importance of Leadership

In my investigation of the Charismatic Evangelical responses to poverty I have noted the importance of leadership when churches want to address the issues of poverty. Most of the denominational leaders that I interviewed within the Charismatic movement emphasized the issue of leadership when dealing with issues of deprivation in their constituency. Actually many of these denominational leaders displayed some of the

desirable qualities of leadership. They reflect leadership in the following areas of ministry to the poor:

- Vision for the cause of the disadvantaged
- Passionate concern for the plight of the poor
- Connectedness to the poor
- Inspirational positive attitudes and resilience, in the face of adversity
- Courageous spirit (willingness to take necessary risks to solve problems and reach set objectives)
- An insight into the issues of poverty (micro and macro)
- Knowledge and understanding of global trends in poverty alleviation
- Promoting dialogue with all stakeholders
- Lobbying for the interests of the poor
- Exemplary sacrificial lifestyles of some in identification with the suffering poor and dedication to ministry to the poor
- Encouraging leadership amongst laity or ordinary people
- Promoting integrity in ministering to the poor, to benefit the poor
- Strong convictions and a sense of calling for a ministry that promotes justice and empowerment in society.

Poverty is a complex problem, and so enormous that it may dash the hopes of many in communities who have not yet been liberated. Therefore, if these communities do not have the support of dynamic leaders at all levels, the possibility of ever achieving freedom from poverty will be remote. Rastello said,

“Those who hope act. Our saintly founders taught us that a life of communion with God does not become a reality through beautiful ideas, but must be rooted in actual situation of and assume the contradictions of human life and those of contemporary society”(Pierli & Abeledo 2002:105).

Leaders at all levels of leadership have a place in history and in God’s agenda to be instruments of positive change in their societies as they face various challenges, especially leaders who prioritise people’s interests above their own interests. They motivate people to rally around a common goal and to work together for its achievement. “Leadership doesn’t work unless felt needs of the group are being met. Out of this

relationship consensus can arise. The leaders reflects the collective feelings of the group much in the same way much in the same way James verbalized the decision of the Council at Jerusalem (Acts15)...”(Gangel 1998:21). Leaders should always strive to be servants of God’s people, rather than to be self-serving. Such leadership is critical in organizing the poor to use their numbers, potential and resources to uproot poverty in their communities.

7.1.2.8 The Significance of Education in Poverty Eradication

Charismatic Evangelicals have recently started to prioritise education in their ministry to the poor. Many of their churches have started educational programmes that seek to promote the culture of learning, literacy, skills and career development in their communities. The quality of education that people have determines the extent to which they are able to access all available opportunities for their holistic development. Rastello said,

“By educating ourselves and the poor, especially the women and young people, to evangelical citizenship, we consecrated men and women promote a critical conscience, responsibility for the common good, concern in caring for the life of others, and we participate in the construction of the political scene as the civil society becomes a political subject”(Pierli & Abeledo 2002:105).

Education enables people to participate meaningfully in society - economically, politically, or socially. Education is critical to empowerment if it contributes towards the development of a healthy self-image, job related skills, entrepreneurship, creative thinking and leadership abilities. Good education can raise people’s awareness of violations of their human rights and enable them to protest against such abuse. Luthuli (1962:32) had this to say about his education,

“I was fascinated by the horizons which my education opened up, and eager to be instrumental in helping to educate others. The riches of the land and the material opulence of the cities were not for Africans. All the more, then, did we regard education as a thirsty wayfarer yearns for the water-hole.”

Chief Luthuli was aware of the role of education in nation building. He also made significant contributions to educating Africans in an era of segregation. Chief Luthuli was the first distinguished South African leader to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Churches should be investing in educational initiatives that are empowering because they address the vocational needs of the people. For this reason the Charismatic Evangelicals need to participate in public debate that may lead to the creation of appropriate educational policy for the nation.

7.1.2.9 A Warning Against the Tendency to Projectize the Ministry to the Poor

The Church should be lauded for some of its efforts and stewardship when contributing to poverty eradication, especially in how they apply efficient project management principles. But there is a tendency for our Christian witness to dissipate into mere projects that are not pursued in synergy to the whole ministry of the gospel to the poor. These ministry programmes become separated from the entire life of the Church. When ministering to the poor the Church makes the mistake of just referring the poor to these programmes where they are assisted with their material needs. It is like sending them to the customer service centre to deal with a query. But they are not assimilated into the actual diversity of the life of the Church. The poor become clients we serve at our service points that deal with the disbursement of whatever they require. Little effort is made to invite them into the fellowship of the Church where they will be integrated into the life of the Church. Projectization of ministry to the poor can be beneficial and contribute to a culture of good stewardship and accountability, but it does not create a community within the faith. It is in a *koinonia* that the poor become fully empowered, where they meet other people as their peers. In fellowship their dignity can be restored and celebrated and they also will have a chance to grow in their faith as the Disciples of Christ. Otherwise projectization will cause them to remain beggars. Thus the Church will miss an opportunity to know them as humans in terms of their real background, identity, dreams, fears, culture and spirituality.

7.2 Poverty - A Continuous Challenge to the Church

Poverty in South Africa is a complex problem. It will always be an enigma to every human society. Yet, this does not necessarily imply that we should succumb to hopelessness and despair in the face of poverty. Neither should we hide behind escapist theologies and renege on the demands of our calling to be witnesses who fulfil their holistic mandate to serve in a beleaguered human society. My conclusion is that it will be a continuous challenge for the Church and the rest of society in South Africa. The complexity of poverty in this country will destroy the fallacy that quick fixes can resolve the existing issues of deprivation. The kind of poverty that the Charismatic Church is facing in is a macro problem. The current state of deprivation is a calamity. It is a national crisis that has historical ramifications. Destitution in this country is a phenomenon that Charismatic Evangelicals cannot eliminate alone. Rather it is a national predicament that requires the involvement of all the stakeholders within this nation. It needs the collaboration of the government, the entire civil society, the faith-based community and the rest of the population. Poverty is historical, trans-generational and multigenerational, racial, gender orientated and multidimensional. The Charismatic Evangelicals do not have the capacity to handle all the facets of poverty in this land. Their efforts are laudable and certainly contribute to the endeavours of the broad Christian community to respond to the challenges of poverty. But Charismatic Evangelicals would need more than just the unction of the Spirit. In addition they will need pro-poor and transformational macro economic, political, social, and educational vision, policies, and leadership, which would be cascaded to the micro-level of society so that respective communities and regions can all participate in this grand vision to eradicate the national scourge of poverty. Although we may have short-term goals in implementing this vision, the magnitude of the problem demands that we realistically recognize that we are in for a long haul in our mission to uproot poverty, which is so entrenched in society. It might take us decades, even a century, depending on historical factors that influence our commitment to the vision of poverty eradication. All the faith-based community, civil society, business, government and the rest of the populace, will have to be involved.

7.3 Further Areas of Research

- An in-depth study on the kind of Christian witness that effectively contributes to the restoration of the identity and self-worth of the poor who have been subjected to systemic poverty. How the poor can fully recover their authentic ‘self’ that has been marred by absolute poverty.