

# **THE CHRISTIAN WITNESS IN THE CONTEXT OF POVERTY**

**WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE SOUTH AFRICAN  
CHARISMATIC EVANGELICALS**

**By**

**EZEKIEL MOKWELE KATISO MATHOLE**

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**PROMOTOR: Prof. PGJ Meiring**

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**To God Be The Glory**

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## **DEDICATION**

Dedicated to my late mother, Sophie Musi – you have been and continue to be an inspiration to me. For your sacrifice, faith, dedication and compassion for the poor. You overcame adversity as a single parent to raise us. We, thank God for you.



## SUMMARY

The topic of my study is: *The Christian witness in the context of poverty, with special reference to South African Charismatic Evangelicals*. The big challenge that I am addressing is the endemic poverty that is facing our entire nation. The issue of the Christian's response to poverty needs to be addressed adequately. In this case, particularly, the focus is on the response of the Charismatic Evangelical Church to the plight of the poor. Poverty is more than just a theoretical theological question. Poverty is about existential problems faced by real people in their struggle for freedom from powerlessness and marginalization. Therefore, I seek to reflect on the many human faces of poverty in South Africa, highlighting the causes of poverty and the unique experiences of the poor.

I am also exploring the theological foundations of the Church and its witness amongst the poor. Reading through the Scriptures one discovers the foundational principles that are imperative in defining the Church's mission, ministry and message. This is followed by a theological reflection on key aspects of poverty eradication in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. This includes a reflection on relief, development, transformation and sustainability. These concepts have all influenced various responses of Christians in dealing with the issue of poverty in their witness.

Poverty should not continue unabated in the Christian community, the very people who received the commission to minister to the poor in their suffering from the Lord Jesus Himself. Throughout the centuries, the Church was challenged to minister to the poor in distress. The challenge has not disappeared. In our time, in our country, also in the circles of Charismatic Evangelical Christians, we are called to respond to the cry of the poor. Thus, in this study I present a brief background to the Charismatic Evangelicals in South Africa, looking at their fundamental teachings and theology, and the development of their missiological thinking when facing the realities of poverty. This is followed by their practical responses to poverty, based on a report on interviews that have been conducted with various leaders within the Charismatic

Evangelical Church, which often has been accused of being apolitical and socially irrelevant.

Finally, I reflect on the conclusions that I have drawn on how the Charismatic Evangelical Churches have reconceptualized their Christian Witness amongst the poor. I examine the manner in which they have pursued an empowering ministry in poor communities, and how they have consolidated their theological and practical positions in their ministry to eradicate poverty.

#### **KEY TERMS**

- Christian Witness
- Mission
- Evangelism
- Pentecostal
- Charismatic Evangelical
- Kingdom of God
- Poverty
- Development
- Transformation
- Sustainability

## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACDP	African Christian Democratic Party
AFM	Apostolic Faith Mission
ANC	African National Congress
CE	Concerned Evangelicals
CWME	Conference on World Mission and Evangelism
CPF	Community Policing Forum
EFSA	Evangelical Fellowship of South Africa
FGBMFI	Full Gospel Business Men’s Fellowship International
GCOWE	Global Consultation on World Evangelisation
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEAR	Growth, Employment, and Redistribution Macroeconomic Strategy
IDASA	The Institute for Democracy in South Africa
IFCC	International Fellowship Christian Churches
LCWE	Lausanne Congress of World Evangelisation
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa’s Development
NGO	Non-profit Organization
PSLSD	Project for Statistics on Living Standards and Development
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
RSF	Rhema Service Foundation
SAPS	South African Police Services
TEASA	The Evangelical Alliance of South Africa
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission

UNDP United Nations Development Programme

WCC World Council of Churches

WEA World Evangelical Alliance

WEF World Evangelical Fellowship

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Background**

Interest in this research has been triggered by my own background that has been influenced and shaped by the realities of our country, and by my personal family and ministry experience.

#### **Contextual Realities**

South Africa is a nation of contrasts that has elements that characterize both the North and the South in terms of the quality of life of its citizens. It is a nation of extremes in terms of the existing disparities in how wealth is distributed. There is a minority within the population that lives in relative comfort and privilege. On the other hand the majority of the population live in dire poverty. This kind of impoverishment seems to be increasing, while the gap between the rich and the poor is widening in disturbing proportions.

#### **Personal Family Experience**

I have the experience of being raised in hardship by a single parent taking care of a family of six children, not forgetting to mention regular guests from our extended family. It is out of this upbringing in poverty, living in a four-roomed [one bedroom] municipal house in the township, that I was nurtured into adulthood in the most difficult circumstances. I learned to make do with bare necessities in terms of clothing and food in an overcrowded dwelling. We had to survive on the meagre income of a single parent

who had seasonal jobs as a domestic worker, cleaner at a supermarket, fruit and vegetable hawker and a traditional healer. To these problems were added those difficulties that almost every Black South African had to endure in the previous dispensation of segregation and oppression.

### **Personal Ministry Experience.**

I started working full-time for a church on the 1<sup>st</sup> December 1996. The office of the church was a garage built for a car, which was shared by four staff members. This garage also served as a storeroom for household goods that could not be accommodated in the house. This was my small beginning in the ministry in an ill-equipped 'garage office' in the township of Soweto. Ministry was rough in the heyday of apartheid whilst I worked for a small independent Charismatic Evangelical church known as Grace Bible Church. At first, we congregated at a school hall, and then moved to a rented church sanctuary that we also shared with another church that met on Saturdays. Subsequently, we moved to the classrooms of Hlengiwe Secondary School that had been burnt down during the student upheavals in White City Jabavu. These classrooms had roofs without walls, since the sides were destroyed. Then, we moved to a larger exhibition stall, which also was without walls, and it became our church sanctuary for seventeen years. We just became a pilgrim church moving from one bad situation to an even worse one. Conducting ministry at the height of apartheid was hard in Soweto, since we were not only confronted with the issues of poverty, but also of injustice, police brutality, educational disruptions, and a long list of other societal problems. Theological tensions emerged along the way, since we were in a broader Evangelical movement that shunned socio-political issues and taught a gospel that was heavenly but irrelevant to people facing social tensions. Many of us began to question and reject such apolitical spirituality since we had been politicised by defiant students movements like the 1976 uprising from the time when I was a learner in Tlhatlogang Higher Primary a school next door to Morris Isaacson High School [which I attended in the late seventies for two years after it was reopened when the unrests subsided. It was closed indefinitely when our group once again became involved in protest action]. I was politically socialized by the Azanian Student Organization

(AZASO) [as student at the Soweto College of Education], which was affiliated to the United Democratic Front. Also, I was affiliated to other youth movements like Youth Alive Ministry and other civic organizations. Then later on, one was seconded to work in Orange Farm, which is situated to the south of Johannesburg. I worked there, in an informal settlement, for ten years facing conditions of squalor. Subsequently, I was appointed as head of a department coordinating missions for five years. My job responsibilities caused me to spend long hours working in previously disadvantaged communities. When working within those communities I was confronted with serious social problems, like poverty.

## **1.2 The Problem Statement**

### **1.2.1 Growing National Poverty**

Our nation is facing a crisis of rampant poverty. Throughout the country we have to deal with problems like malnutrition, unemployment, and homelessness. A sizeable section of our citizenry is living under inhumane conditions. The irony is that South Africa is rated as one of the richest and best-developed nations in Africa. The big question is; “What is the nature of the Christian witness within a nation that is a young democracy, that is facing the challenges of deprivation?” Poverty is a point of concern, because it is affecting almost half of the South African population. The question of destitution is a dilemma that is a concern to all conscientious citizens in this country. It is not just a theoretical or fictitious difficulty. Poverty is about existential problems faced by real people in their struggle to free themselves from the powerlessness and marginalization that is destroying their lives. It is these ordinary people who are feeling the actual pain, inconvenience, shame and prejudice of poverty.

### **1.2.2 A Theological Challenge**

The Christian faith has a foundation of a kind of spirituality that is pro-poor. According to Escobar and Driver (1978: 38 – 39),

“Poverty and wealth are not accepted anymore as a kind of natural order, and with rising expectations has come an awareness that these differences are man-made differences that have developed in the process of history. The concept of a divine hand behind the economic process, giving much to those who worked hard and deserve the fruit of their labour, is being questioned... Poverty is no longer a simple datum you consider neutrally. Missions have to do something about it. After all, they could be part of the system that produces poverty or maintains it.”

The issue of the Christian’s response to poverty needs to be addressed adequately. Poverty should not continue unabated in the presence of the Christian community, which has a calling to minister to the poor. “The Bible is packed with numerous injunctions and commands calling the people of God to minister to the foreigner, alien, fatherless, widow and the poor. Such ministry on the part of the church is not optional – it is commanded by our Lord”(Christian 1999: IX). Throughout the centuries, the Church was challenged to minister to the distressed population. The challenge has not disappeared; it is still a summons to Christians of our generation. In our time, in our country, also in the circles of Charismatic Evangelical Christians, we are called to respond to the cry of the poor.

### **1.3 Goal of Study**

The goal of the study I am individually undertaking, is to ultimately discover how the Charismatic Evangelical Church can become an authentic agent of the gospel, participating in poverty eradication within our society. This brand of Christianity should have some form of compassion, driving it to serve the have-nots. According to Bosch (1980:53 –54),

“Compassion is also the essence of the New Testament message, especially that of Jesus... It is striking to note the way in which the people on whom Jesus had compassion are described. They are referred to as the poor, the blind, the crippled, the leprous, the hungry, those who weep, the sick, the little ones, the widows, the captives, those who are lost, those who are weary and heavily burdened with legalism, the lost sheep.”



This is the constituency that the Charismatic Evangelical Christians should prioritise in their witness.

I intend to use a contextual approach to this study, since, when we preach, teach, and engage in social action we do all these activities in a particular situation. This is what is called our socio-economic and political context. Therefore, our ministry activities, programmes, theories, social analysis, prayers, proclamation and participation are pursued in that context. Thus, our mission must be concretised to be suitable to the context of our ministry.

Charismatic Evangelicals have been known in the past for being apolitical and often socially irrelevant in their witness, despite the clear injunctions of the Scriptures that have outlined the mandate of the church as a mission that embraces social issues. This negative perception is compounded by the fact that very little has been written about their ministry in response to poverty. In the past, the Church has often failed to become an effective agent of social change in society. “Most evangelical groupings with their narrow view of life and their fundamentalistic approach to the Bible tend to uncritically support existing oppressive systems”(Concerned Evangelicals 1986:15). In essence, it has a legacy of having failed the poor. I wish to explore the fact that Christians can rise to the challenge of having a credible witness and ministry that contributes significantly to either the alleviation or the eradication of poverty amongst the destitute in our society, especially in the context of what Jesus said, "For the poor you have with you always"(John 12:8). If this is the case, can we claim plausibly that our ministry meaningfully contributes to either the alleviation or eradication of poverty? Poverty, it seems will continue to be a human challenge.

In the course of this thesis, I therefore propose to give attention to the following:

- To investigate if the Charismatic Evangelicals’ witness within the context of poverty is compatible to the mission mandate that Jesus Christ gave to the church. It has not been the tendency of the Charismatic Evangelicals in South Africa to

document their ministry activities, therefore not much is known about their actual witness in response to the circumstances of impoverishment in this country.

- To discovering alternative responses to poverty alleviation/ eradication. To explore the possibility of finding an appropriate, relevant, and practical Charismatic Evangelical Christian witness in the face of deprivation.
- To define the theological and biblical responses when there are apparent contradictory contextual realities characterized by widespread impoverishment.
- To search for an authentic ministry that will empower the poor. To analyse whether their contribution should be focused on poverty alleviation or eradication.

#### **1.4 Research Methods**

- I intend to review all relevant publications on poverty, as well as on the Christian's response to poverty, since my research would be descriptive.
- I have conducted a field study of various Charismatic Evangelical Churches and movements involved in poverty eradication or alleviation programs in urban and rural communities. This research sampling of Charismatic Evangelicals is critical because in my preliminary investigation I discovered that very little has been published about their witness amongst the poor.
- I have interviewed key leaders within the Charismatic Evangelical Church. These leaders are at different levels of leadership; some are leading nationally whilst others are leading locally within the Charismatic-Pentecostal Evangelical movement. The purpose has been to study various Charismatic Evangelical churches in their broad and diverse presence within the South African Christian community.
- The interviews were conducted according to a preset interview schedule that had questions that were asked and the reason why they were asked. The interview schedule had five sections to solicit relevant information from the interviewees responses on the following issues: the interviewees experience of poverty, theology or teaching in relation to poverty, response to poverty, the relationship between poverty and the work of the church and other general issues. For a complete interview schedule refer to the Appendix.

## 1.5 Definition of Terms

### 1.5.1 Concept of Poverty

Poverty may be an overused word, but in our times it is still an explosive term. It is a word that evokes various emotions amongst its different users. It is a word that has been encumbered by various ideologies, philosophies and beliefs, each with its own agenda. “Poverty is a complex phenomenon. It is a value-loaded concept involving evaluative judgments regarding minimum, basic needs and desired levels of living”(Christian 1999:17). Poverty is a phenomenon that has many stakeholders; therefore each stakeholder would look at it from a different perspective.

#### Poverty as Lack

Poverty depicts a scenario where people experience a shortage of essential resources and services necessary for their survival as human beings. Many definitions have been used to describe poverty. According to Myers (1999b: 578) view,

“Poverty results from lack of things. It is obvious that poor people do not have enough to eat, a place to sleep or clean water. We also recognize that some poor people lack knowledge and skills. Their land is poor, there is no water for irrigation, the roads are poor and there are no schools for their children.”

The lack we are referring to is a shortage of the basics necessities of life to live a decent human life. “Poverty as defined here is the unfulfilment of the basic human needs required to adequately sustain life free from disease, misery, hunger, pain, suffering, hopelessness and fear, on the one hand, and the condition of defenceless people suffering from structural injustice on the other.”(De Santa Ana. 1979:76). Those who are disadvantaged live a life of dependency in which they survive owing to the goodwill of others rather than self-support. Humbert says, “The poor person is, therefore, *ebyon*, the one who desires, the beggar, the one who is lacking something”(Gutierrez 1988:165). In terms of the scriptures they are deprived, without self-reliance. Barclay (1975:91) further explains,

“In Hebrew the word is *ani* or *ebyon*. These words underwent a four-stage development of meaning. (i) They began by meaning simply poor. (ii) They went on to mean, because poor, therefore having no influence or power, or help, or prestige. (iii) They went on to mean, because of having no influence, therefore downtrodden. (iv) Finally, they came to describe the man who, because he has no resources whatsoever, puts his whole trust in God”.

This is the reason why the poor, out of their scenario of lack, are called the have-nots.

### Poverty as Limited Options

Other authors describe poverty as having limited options. Even when poor people have the God-given power to make their own decisions about improving their livelihood, they have few alternatives available to improve their present maladies. Like Perkins (1982: 11–12) who says, “Poverty, you see, is much more than lack of money; poverty is the lack of options. For millions in our land there is no justice. For them, ‘equal opportunity is at best an elusive dream; at worst a cruel taunt.’” To be poor means to have limited options. One has to qualify to have access to opportunities. Many are aspirant entrepreneurs but they have limited access to seed capital to launch their self-empowering initiatives. They do not qualify for loans that are granted by commercial banks since they are considered as a higher risk because they have no collateral. For some, jobs are available but they do not have the required vocational qualifications. Therefore, their options are limited as job seekers and they become domestic workers, gardeners, cleaners, shop assistants, and labourers in the building industry and factories. The worlds of the rich and of the poor are marked by great contrasts when you compare the options available to them. Nicholls says:

“The difference between the poor and those who are rich is not that some suffer and others do not. Both the rich and the poor may be subject to physical pain, emotional stress, and spiritual depression. But the rich have greater control over themselves and their situations. They are free to make choices. Not so with the poor. They have little or no freedom over their bodies and lifestyle, and little hope for the future”(Nicholls & Wood 1996:1).

The poor cannot exercise their preferences in terms of their quality of life; rather, they always have to settle for things that are mediocre. They have no better alternative in their choices of food, accommodation, transportation, medical care, employment, education and neighbourhood. The products they have access to are usually substandard.

#### Poverty results in Broken Relationships

Marginalization also means alienation from other fellow human beings. It implies living in a context of animosity that disrupts the harmonious relationships that should exist within the family, community, workplace and any other human arena. According to Myers (1999b: 579-580):

“Poverty involves being excluded. We make poor people when we label them as other, the outsider, and the outcast. We begin the process of exclusion when we say people are lazy, dirty, uneducated, crazy or unsafe to be around. When we withdraw because one has leprosy or AIDS, is homosexual, has a different colour or comes from a different culture, we impoverish them and ourselves. Labels and stereotypes devalue the image of God in people. This kind of poverty is both powerful and debilitating for those who do this and as for those to whom it is done.”

When you are disadvantaged you become a social outcast. Your deprivation makes it difficult to fit well in all the facets of life in society. Poverty makes you stick out in society as the odd one out, whose appearance and quality of life are below those of everyone who is empowered.

#### Poverty's Consequence as Subjection to Abusive Power

In society today people are poor as a result of exploitation by the rich and the powerful. Their rights are violated almost with impunity. Therefore, many of the poor are victims of violence, especially the women and children. They are constantly subjected to physical, emotional and spiritual abuse in their relationships. Myers (1999b: 580) says,

“When those who have power over others use it to benefit themselves, poverty results... People in positions of social privilege are often tempted to use power for personal advantage, ignoring the consequences of their decisions for those who

have less power. Managers can misuse the power they have over subordinates. Pastors can misuse the power they have over lay people. Even if we desire to be fair and righteous, we continually face temptations to believe that we are due to certain privileges because of the position we hold... It means we too, are part of the causes of poverty.”

The poor continue to be exposed to changing circumstances in a society where they are vulnerable to ill treatment at the hands of the affluent and powerful. “The rich by definition have power, while the poor are powerless; they are pawns in the hands of others. They are subject to institutionalised structures”(Nicholls & Wood 1996:1). Those who are disadvantaged have little or no power to contend with forces that marginalize them.

#### Absolute Poverty and Relative Poverty

A distinction should be made between absolute poverty and relative poverty. Absolute poverty is closer to the New Testament description of destitution. The Greek word is “*ptochos* which describes absolute and abject poverty.... *ptochos* describes the man who has nothing at all”(Barclay 1975:90). This is a state of utter helplessness and extreme powerlessness. Grigg (1999:583) writes, “Absolute poverty is a term used to describe poverty when people have an absolute insufficiency to meet their basic needs – food, clothing, housing. Indeed many who are in absolute poverty starve to death. Within this category there are many levels.” The poorest of the poor are stripped to their bones in terms of their resources, dignity and power to improve their lives favourably. They are in a state of total desperation, being unable to cope with demands of meeting their overall subsistence responsibilities. In contrast, Grigg (1999:583 –584) states,

“The measure of this relative poverty or secondary poverty is often in terms not of material or economic level, but own capacity to own and consume goods and services and to have opportunities for development. It is often an exclusion from opportunity and participation, a marginalization from society.”

Those who experience relative poverty are better off than those facing absolute poverty, since; they are just being sidelined from various avenues of more empowerment and upward mobility. According to Nicholls and Wood (1996:76):

“The relative poor are those who live above subsistence level who ought to be approached in a different way from the paupers. They would welcome material support and other assistance which enable them to climb up the social ladder to middle or upper class...Their immediate and primary need is restoration of their dignity and justice because they suffer more from social discrimination and injustice than from material destitution.”

The absolutely poor are experiencing a worse situation of poverty than their relatively poor counterparts.

#### Poverty Causes Psychological Stress

Deprivation has stressful and detrimental psychological consequences. It subjects people to trauma that goes beyond mere material inconveniences out of lack. Impoverishment has a negative effect on the mental, emotional and spiritual health of the impoverished. According to Nicholls and Wood (1996: 70):

“What makes poverty still more painful is its social and psychological effect. The poor feel not only helpless, desperate and angry but they are also ashamed of themselves. They feel inferior, and deprived of their human dignity. The sense of shame and indignity is subjective but depends to a great extent on the attitude of others towards them.”

The above-mentioned negative experience of the poor is also affirmed in the Scriptures. Proverbs 19:7 reads; “All the brothers of the poor hate him; how much more do his friends go far from him! He may pursue them with words, yet they abandon him.” Poverty is just a vicious spiral of humiliation and this is the reason it hurts so much.

#### **1.5.2 Definition of Charismatic Evangelicals**

Evangelicals, like any other Church that is within the Protestant tradition, have a tempestuous history. They have experienced strenuous divisions over the years that they have tried to resolve. Despite those taxing divisions, the Evangelicals have shown a commitment that has given birth to unifying global movement amongst them. There have been many groupings with the Evangelicals namely: the Fundamentalist,

Dispensationalist, Pentecostal, Charismatic, Ecumenical and Non-Orthodox Conciliar Evangelicals. According to Warren (1962:1):

“The General Secretary of the Church Missionary Society, offered a helpful definition of evangelicalism when he said that it consists of ‘a particular balance’ in the following cluster of biblical themes: (1) unquestioned submission to the trustworthiness and authority of the Scripture as the Word of God; (2) the essentiality of the atonement of Christ; (3) an existential saving encounter with the Holy Spirit; (4) a concern for the proper, scriptural use of sacraments. Most evangelicals would add the obligation to evangelize non-Christians throughout the world.”

According to Glasser, “the Charismatic Evangelicals whose grouping ranges from the traditional Pentecostals to newer mainline Charismatics.... Charismatics are burdened to bring renewal to all the churches whether within the WCC, and whether Catholic or Protestant”(Anderson 1991:70). They seek to revive a kind of spirituality and ministry that characterized the early Church; to revive those charismatic gifts, worship, signs and wonders that it assumed had subsided in the church. Driver (1997:222) says,

“The church’s participation in God’s mission must also be pneumatic and charismatic, in the power of the Spirit and dependent on the gifts of his grace...A people willing to live and survive by the grace of God, whose character bears the stamp of God’s Spirit, will by the very nature of things be an effective witness.”

It seem that secularisation had dampened the Church’s beliefs and practices of the evangelical element of *Charismata*. Therefore, they sought renewal, so that the Church should return to the experience of the power of the Holy Spirit. The Charismatic Evangelicals believe in the work of the sanctifying and empowering presence of the Holy Spirit within the lives of believers as witnesses for Christ in the world. Just like the Pentecostals, this experience of the phenomenon of the Spirit is manifested with the practice of speaking in other tongues. According to Thompson (2004:129),

“Charismatic Christianity in the 1990s has come to provide meaning for a diversity of South Africans who believe in Jesus Christ as the saviour, healer and friend. This knowledge of God, mediated by an experiential spirituality, has led to a personal charismatic piety open to the power of the Spirit – a shaping of



perceptions and values by means of the immediacy of the miraculous, a literal interpretation of the Bible, and oral theology reiterating the unchanging nature of God (as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) in an uncertain world. Yet, Charismatic Christianity in South Africa has its fluidity shaped by its Pentecostal and mainline church pasts, a “third way” spiritual economy, and a cultural adaptability of the discourse of the Spirit. Each of these factors has enabled changing, even contradictory, charismatic responses to the social and political context during the years of the end of apartheid and the birth of the New South Africa.”

But, they go further than the Pentecostals, to emphasize the exercising of Charismatic gifts to edify the church and expand the kingdom of God in the world. These Charismatic gifts are not just the domain monopolized by a select group of individuals, who are ordained for ministry, rather, they continue to be exercised by all the Spirit-filled believers as inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit as He wills. Within the Charismatic Evangelicals, you find varying practices of certain aspects of their theology and positions on socio-economic matters. These are to a great extent determined by a specific context of Charismatic Evangelicals in question. Whether they are placed in a situation of poverty or wealth, maybe of high political activism for justice or non-political engagement.

### **1.5.3 The Concept of Missions**

The word ‘mission’ too, has different connotations in the Christian community. I prefer to use the word mission as a collective term to describe all the words and actions of the Church, in its efforts to spread the whole gospel of the kingdom of God to the world. “Mission means being sent to proclaim in deed and in word that Christ died and rose for the life of the world, that he lives to transform human life (Rom 8:2) and to overcome death”(Bosch 1991: 400, c.f. Memorandum 1982:459). The church has been given a mandate, in terms of the great commission by Christ, to be involved in God’s enterprise to transform the world, with the full gospel of the kingdom of God that addresses all essential aspects that characterize human existence. Christians, have a role in extending the Kingdom of God in society. Apple said,

“To spread the Kingdom of God is more than simply winning people to Christ. It is also working for the healing of persons, families, and relationships. It is doing the deeds of mercy and seeking justice. It is ordering lives and relationships and institutions and communities according to God’s authority to bring in the blessedness of the kingdom. The presence of the kingdom of God is the means of renewal of the entire world and all dimensions of life”(Sider, Olson & Unruh 2002:45).

The idea is to approach mission from an all-embracing position. Therefore, I prefer a holistic understanding of the concept of mission. According to Kritzinger and Saayman (1994:36) view,

“The Christian mission is a comprehensive ministry with various dimensions which can be distinguished, but never separated. We believe, therefore, that the goal of mission can only be accomplished through a holistic approach... The various dimensions of this comprehensive approach were expressed in terms of the church’s task of *kerygma* (proclamation), *diakonia* (ministry of service), and *koinonia* (communion or fellowship). Under these three rubrics, it was argued, the total mission of the Church could be accommodated: preaching, witnessing, healing, teaching, developing, and the building up of the Church. The threefold goal of mission, as we have described it here, can indeed largely be accommodated in this approach. We will, therefore, link up with this approach, but wish to extend it by adding a fourth rubric: *leitourgia* (public worship service of God).”

This comprehensive mission definition is currently accepted by almost all missiologists, since; it embraces elements of *kerygma*, *diakonia*, *koinonia*, and *leitourgia*.

The word ‘mission’ also expresses the evangelistic fervour of the church. The church in its witness in society has a task to evangelize. Therefore, according to Bosch (1991:11 – 12):

“Mission includes evangelism as one of its essential dimensions. Evangelism is the proclamation of salvation in Christ to those who do not believe in him, calling them to repentance and conversion, announcing forgiveness of sin, and inviting

them to become living members of Christ's earthly community and to begin a life of service to others in the power of the Holy Spirit."

The consequence of Christian mission is that those who have welcomed God's saving grace are assimilated into the Christian community, to be co-workers with other active members of this community, to be engaged in ministering to those who have various needs in society. Samuel proposes, "Building up communities of change. The emphasis of the gospel as transformation is on change and hope. The book of Acts for example is not about merely calling individuals to Christ"(Samuel & Sugden 1999: 231). When we receive Christ, we might have a personal experience of that encounter, but we are called into a larger family of God with those who have also responded to the call of Christ. Together as a Christian community, we are assigned to usher God's transformation into other communities so that they may become part of this changed Christian community. "When you accept and experience Christ there has to be a transformation of your relationships. Without that commitment to community building there is no transformation in the long haul"(Samuel & Sugden 1999:231). Our encounter with Christ through the gospel should ultimately result in the renewal of our communication and interaction with others. If those relationships have been disrupted, there should be some move towards reconciliation; on the other side the relationships that have been ordinary should become better.

Evangelism is the testimony of the Church to the world about God's redemptive acts of grace that have been and are being accomplished for the benefit of the world. According to Bosch (1991:412):

"Evangelism involves witnessing to what God has done, is doing, and will do.... Evangelism is announcing that God, Creator and Lord of the universe, has personally intervened in human history and has done so supremely through the person and ministry of Jesus Christ of Nazareth who is the Lord of history, Saviour, and Liberator. In this Jesus, incarnate, crucified and risen, the reign of God has been inaugurated."

As Christians we tell a story about the incredible love of God that has been shown through the entirety of Jesus' life, that God has made provision for us to live a new life

through him, enjoying Christ's freedom, forgiveness, love and our service to him. Therefore, through witnessing, we extend an invitation to others who have not as yet received this new life that Christ has given to us.

The Church as a witnessing community that heralds the good news is expected to exemplify to society through the message it bears. "Evangelism is only possible when the community that evangelises is a radiant manifestation of the Christian faith and exhibits an attractive lifestyle"(Bosch 1991:414). As a Church, part of our evangelistic endeavour is to incarnate the gospel. Our behaviour must be compatible with the message we are preaching to the world; otherwise we lose our evangelistic potency. Just as the scriptures purport, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven"(Matt 5:16). "If the church is to impart to the world a message of hope and love, of faith, justice and peace, something of this should become visible, audible, and tangible in the church itself"(cf. Acts 2:42 – 47; 4:32 –35) (Bosch 1991:414). The church has a challenge to portray the integrity of the gospel in its life as a witness to this holistic gospel.

I prefer to use the term *Christian witness* to express my view of missions. For me, it is a more appropriate word to articulate our ministry as Christians and to describe the way we reach out to our own society with good news and good works. Myers (1999a:4) explains the term in this manner:

"*Christian witness* is the term I use to describe this news that Christians are compelled by the love to share. I deliberately choose the phrase *Christian witness* over *evangelism* for several reasons...First...evangelism is also a loaded phrase. Images of street evangelists yelling through the megaphones and of crusade evangelists exhorting stadiums full of people come to mind.... Second, and more important, evangelism tends to refer to verbal proclamation of the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. I need a phrase that includes proclamation, but that is not limited to it. I understand *Christian witness* to include declaration of the gospel by life, word and deed. By *life* I refer to the fact that Christians are the message. We are the sixty-seventh book of the Bible. People read our lives, our actions and our

words and believe they know what being a Christian means. By *word* I refer to the need to say what the gospel story is and to invite others to make it their story. By *deed* I refer to the fact that the Christian faith, at its best, is an active faith, engaged with the world and seeking to make it more for life and for enjoyment of life... Christian development promoters are witnessing all the time.”

Within Charismatic Evangelical circles, the term evangelism is sometimes understood in a narrow and stereotypical way, as simply punting the message of the Bible to people without necessarily incarnating that gospel. There is a tendency to emphasize preaching to convert souls, without the accompanying actions that model that message to those who are being reached. The gospel is both proclamation and deeds. These two should go together; otherwise we cease to have an authentic Christian witness.

## **1.6. Overview**

Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the overall thesis. It clarifies the scope of the study by providing the background, motivation, problem statement, relevance and purpose, and the planned methodology behind this study. At the end of the chapter, some definitions of key concepts that are explored in this research are offered.

Chapter 2 describes the many faces of poverty in South Africa. I reflect on state of the poor in South Africa, with the intention to give a human face to the phenomenon of deprivation. It also indicates the occurrence and the extent of poverty, which forces us to look at poverty as a critical theological and social problem. Poverty is not merely an issue for political, social, economic and theological debate and reflection. It is a human reality that affects real people who have names, aspirations, feelings and hopes. Impoverishment is about people who are desperate, whose image has been marred and dignity dented by pauperisation. There is also an exploration into the factors behind poverty in South Africa. This is followed by notes on the practical experiences and the worldview of the poor. Finally, it looks at the dehumanising effects of destitution. Poverty is not just a material inconvenience. It has terrible outcomes for the poor. These disadvantaged members of society still remain the people of God, despite their being downtrodden.

Chapter 3 offers a theological and biblical reflection on poverty, looking at various theological and biblical concepts such as: God and the poor, salvation, the Kingdom of God, and the Church and the poor. Those concepts are discussed to point the missiological implications that should shape the Christian witness within conditions of deprivation. They form the theological foundations of the Church and its witness amongst the poor. These foundational principles are imperative in defining the Church's mission, message and ministry.

Chapter 4 is devoted to a theological reflection on key aspects of poverty eradication in the world. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, discussions on poverty eradication revolved around the issues of relief, development, transformation, and eventually sustainability. Theologians and missionary strategists followed these discussions closely, providing a theological reflection on these issues, and on how the mission of the Church is continually shaped and reshaped by them.

Chapter 5 is a historical overview of the emergence of Charismatic Evangelicals in South Africa. Linking the growth of the movement to its global connections. It includes a brief exposition of Charismatic Evangelical teaching and theology, indicating on how their missiological thinking when dealing with questions of poverty and the way it is influenced by that teaching and theology. This chapter concludes with a critique on Charismatic Evangelicalism in South Africa.

Chapter 6 offers an account of an empirical investigation of various Charismatic Evangelical Churches response to poverty. It reports on the outcome of a number of interviews that were conducted with a selected group of eminent national and local leaders within the Charismatic Evangelical Community, referring to the positions of five national leaders on poverty. Issues are discussed, followed by a comparative analysis of the various perspectives of these leaders. The chapter concludes with a comparative analysis of the positions of leaders at a local church level, their respective ministries amongst the poor.

Chapter 7 is the closing chapter of the entire research. By way of conclusion to re-conceptualise the Christian witness to the poor, offering a number of challenges in this regard, also, indicating other areas for further research.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE MANY HUMAN FACES OF POVERTY IN SOUTH AFRICA

Poverty is not just an issue for political, social, economic and theological debate and reflection. It is a human phenomenon that affects real people who have names, aspirations, feelings and hopes. It is about people who are desperate, whose images might be marred and whose dignity dented, even though they still remain the people of God. Former President of South Africa Mr. F.W De Klerk expressed his concern about poverty thus: "...Poverty, unemployment, housing shortages, inadequate education and training, illiteracy, health needs and numerous other problems still stand in the way of progress and prosperity and improved quality of life..."(Webb 1994: 120). Poverty is not a matter to trouble our conscience, but a reality that impacts deeply on the lives of real people. Most significantly, poverty is the context in which the Christian witness in South Africa functions. Christians should not just accept this situation as the norm, as if God's people were meant to be disadvantaged perpetually. Gutierrez condemned poverty when he said: "Material poverty is a scandalous condition... Then a witness of poverty cannot make of it a Christian ideal. This would be to aspire to a condition which is recognized as degrading to man" (In McLellan 1997: 117 – 118). Christians, if they are to be credible witnesses of the gospel, must vehemently denounce this abhorrent situation of poverty and seek to assist the poor in improving the quality of their lives, to equal their appropriate dignity as God's children. "The Christian community is to be a sign of the kingdom, in which evangelism, social action and the Spirit are present and inseparably related" (McAlpine 1995:2). We cannot just be bystanders who tolerate the unabated growth of poverty in our backyard. Our ministry must become relevant, real good news to those who live in poverty.

#### 2.1 The Prevalence of Poverty

Even in post-apartheid South Africa deprivation still continues to be a major social challenge. The reality that people face is that some South Africans are still poor even



after several years of democracy. The quality of their lives has not improved meaningfully, even when statutory discrimination has been abolished. Questions on the status quo should not be dismissed as the cynical voices of the poor who just want to linger in a culture of dependency and entitlement. Some of these people are casualties of our insufficient socio-economic, political and spiritual models of societal restructuring. It is true that there have been social improvements in society that are visible. Yet, we still see increased joblessness, homelessness, poverty, crime, sluggish economic growth and graft in political circles. One cannot help but use a hackneyed expression: ‘the gap between the rich and poor is continuing to widen at a distressing pace.’ Giliomee lamented, “The vast discrepancies in wealth between Blacks and whites are simply not compatible with nation building. At the very least, a *progressive equalizing of life chances* is essential” (Vorster 1991: 26). If this inequality continues, it will derail us as a nation in achieving our vision of becoming a truly democratic, just, peaceful, reconciled and prosperous nation. We cannot afford to be a society in which only a few privileged citizens achieve affluence whilst the majority struggle for survival. This would mean that the poor would never be able to fully celebrate their freedom. Slovo pointed out: “The basic objective of liberation cannot be achieved without undermining the accumulated political, social, cultural and economic white privileges. The moulding of our nation will be advanced in direct proportion to the elimination of these accumulated privileges” (Vorster 1991:34). We have to ensure that the leftovers of skewed distribution, a feature of the past unjust dispensation, are removed. Consequently, life for the previously disadvantaged should change radically for the better.

The kind of poverty we refer to in this study is chronic poverty. It is when people continue to live under circumstances of deprivation for a very prolonged time without any sustainable means to support themselves. Aliber (2001:v) describes it as follows:

“Households or individuals are understood to be in chronic poverty when their condition of poverty endures over a period of time... Alternatively, and perhaps more meaningfully, chronic poverty can be understood as the inability of households or individuals, perhaps for lack of opportunity, to better their circumstances over time or to sustain themselves through difficult times.”

There is a vast majority of our citizens whose lives have persisted in poverty. Their daily existence is that of hunger, unemployment, poor health, lack of basic necessities and disempowerment. These people have continued to live below the poverty line even when others are fortunate enough to continue improving their quality of life. They are forced to accept chronic poverty as their normal way of existence.

South Africa is a country of abundance, yet essential resources are not readily available to the poor. The poor live shabby lives, even when our country is well resourced for them to experience a better life. It is poverty in a country of plenty that we probe and grapple with in its persistent growth. Julian May (2002:2) states,

“South Africa is an upper-middle-income country with a per capita income similar to that of Botswana, Brazil, Malaysia or Mauritius. Despite this relative wealth, the experience of the majority of South African households is either one of outright poverty, or of continued vulnerability to becoming poor. Furthermore, the distribution of income and wealth in South Africa may be the most unequal in the world.”

Even though we are a well-resourced country, the majority of our citizens are still in distress. “What people can or cannot do and how they survive in a market economy depends to a large extent on access to the necessary financial resources and assets to meet an increasing portion of their needs”(UNDP Report 2003:70). Many South Africans are still deprived of decent shelter, clean water, appropriate health facilities and many other necessary amenities. This does not imply that nothing is being done to tackle poverty. According to Aliber (2001: 3, 10):

“South Africa has many initiatives in place to address poverty, emanating both from government and civil society... The principal strategy of the new government for poverty alleviation appears to have been to promote economic growth, which in turn would expand employment opportunities and raise incomes. However, real growth in the economy since 1994 has been modest, and has failed to reverse the trend of formal sector job losses and that has been evident since the early 1990s. Meanwhile redistribution of assets has been very limited. The most tangible anti-poverty impact attributable to the post apartheid government is the

improved access to services and infrastructure in many areas, both rural and urban.”

The government has also initiated a move to supply certain limited quantities of water and electricity to poor communities for free. Yet, such attempts towards poverty alleviation do not seem to be enough, since the same communities have numerous real needs that exceed the support they get from the state.

## **2.2 The Causes of Poverty in South Africa**

### **2.2.1 Poverty and Inequality**

One of the reasons for the occurrence of poverty in South Africa is *apartheid*. The plethora of *apartheid* legislation, policies and repressive practices created an environment, which bred the poverty in the Black community of our country. Years of *Apartheid's* overt and covert practices systematically and progressively turned Black people into paupers and produced a racially polarized society that was founded on deplorable inequality. Chief Albert Luthuli berated racism in 1952 when he stated that; “the past thirty years have seen the greatest number of laws restricting our rights and progress, until today we have reached a stage where we have almost no rights at all”(Louw & Kendall 1986: 31). It contributed to a people being condemned to living in appalling conditions. Poor housing, inferior education, unfair and discriminatory labour practices, a biased judicial system and restrictions of movement, economic and political exclusion, racial and ethnic hostility, and spiritual repression adversely affected their lives. In contrast, Sider (1997:xii) said,

“I feel absolutely confident, however, that the biblical understanding of ‘economic equality,’ or equity demands at least this: God wants every person, or family, to have equality of economic opportunity at least to the point of having access to the necessary resources (land, money, education) to be able to earn a decent living and participate as dignified members of their community.”

It is clear that conditions in our society were previously unjust, not conducive to any kind of equality. This has resulted in the poor, having to be sidelined in such a manner that, they could not achieve economic empowerment.

One should be careful not just to generalize and put all the blame for the current state of affairs surrounding poverty, on the previous discriminatory system. Yet, it would be a serious oversight not to recognize that apartheid has fundamentally contributed to today's social problems in South Africa. According to Julian May (2000: 20):

“The specificity of this situation in South Africa has been the impact of institutionalised discrimination... The result was state-driven underdevelopment that encompassed dispossession and the exclusion of the majority of South Africans. An important outcome brought about by these policies was the loss of assets, such as land and livestock, and the simultaneous denial of opportunities to develop these assets through the limiting access to markets, infrastructure and education.”

The *apartheid* government action seriously disadvantaged the majority of Black people. It disrupted their potential for empowerment culturally, socially, politically, economically educationally and spiritually. It has had a multigenerational impact, which is being felt even today, in this era of democracy, human rights and freedom in South Africa. The damning effect of *apartheid* that is dead, is still lingering on those who are descendants of the disenfranchised in the past, when it was implemented. *Apartheid* deliberately stifled the progress of the Black community on many significant fronts. A brief review of this dark past is necessary in order to shape a better vision for our future as a nation. Thus, I agree with Barrington Moore Jr. who said, “But if the men [women] of the future are ever to break the chains of the present, they will have to understand the forces that forged them” (Louw & Kendall 1986:3). Some of the problems that we have as a nation such as poverty arise out of a sad history of inequity. Although we cannot put the blame for all of poverty on the door of on *apartheid*.

It is clear that in South Africa there is a correlation between inequality and poverty. One has however, to be prudent in defining inequality, since South Africa has transformed

significantly since the pre-apartheid era. Servaas van Der Berg alludes to this fact when he says, “It is useful to distinguish inequality between race groups from inequality within race groups”(Star Newspaper, February 25, 2004:22). In South Africa other race groups were more privileged than blacks prior to 1994. After 1994, the government introduced new legislations, policies and programs to rectify all the historical imbalances that created inequality. Some of the government’s policies like affirmative action, and economic empowerment, have had some success in that they have created a new group of the Black elite. In a positive sense, it seems that such interventions are slowly narrowing the gap of inequality between the races. But, at the same time these policies also are increasing inequality within the race groups, especially within the black community. When you look at the issue of employment within the Black community, you see unequal access to the labour market. Servaas van Der Berg says,

“Thus black South Africans with access to education and training opportunities (typically from the middle class backgrounds in urban areas) are benefiting the most from the changes in the labour market rules in their favour, while unemployment is more prevalent among the less skilled”(The Star Newspaper, February 25, 2004:22).

The existence of the new middle class does not mean that interracial inequality has disappeared. “With little doubt we can say that inequality between race groups is less than before the transition, but the decline has not been spectacular”(The Star Newspaper, February 25, 2004:22). However, the laws, policies and practices of segregation have been abolished. The new dispensation is characterized by new values of equity for all the people of South Africa. All major statutory forms of discrimination have been outlawed.

We, South Africans must not allow ourselves to be prisoners of our dark past. Our legacy is quite horrendous, and all of us accept that fact. There are some individuals and groups who are always searching for scapegoats to bear the blame for their miseries. I think such an attitude is counterproductive and will stall progress in creating a better nation for all South Africans. Connor, OP (1998:12) stated,

“History cannot be undone. Those killed cannot be brought back to life, nor can lost years of suffering and anguish be given back. Though some people may be

returned to the places from which they were evicted, they cannot take their former lives up again. Reconstructing their homes, communities and work will often be difficult. Even those who can go back may still have bitter memories of being callously rejected at the time of their eviction or having had to run away in fear.” But, blame shifting creates resentment between those who have been oppressed and those who have been perpetrators and beneficiaries of injustice. Furthermore, this will retard all progress being made towards reconciliation. Without being naïve or simplistic or excessively optimistic, one has to be hopeful that better prospects for the poor in South Africa are possible. Connor, OP (1998: 120) says,

“Building up all facets of people’s humanity is a process that has to work from the bottom upwards. It must also be set in a far longer time-frame – over generations – than that currently used by either government or business. Here the non-governmental organizations, who do not have to show profit for shareholders or please an electorate, can play a special enabling role.”

All the civic structures that are committed to the national vision of social transformation can make a significant contribution in ensuring that the new values of our democracy, a culture of human rights and moral integrity are entrenched in society. Such socialization and education of our people are necessary in order create a new national psyche and identity that will foster unity and a new vision.

### **2.2.2 Poverty and Race**

There is a high degree of racial disparity in South Africa today despite the current dispensation of democracy, and this is evident in the levels of the distribution of poverty that is prevalent in this country. Racial discrepancies can be seen in the quality of life of people within our society. “Living standards are closely correlated with race in South Africa”(May 2000: 31). The Coloured community has a significant number of poor people when compared to the White and Indian population, which have relatively low incidents of poverty. We are a nation of contrasts in which the very affluent and despondently hungry groups coexist side by side. “Race, then, is not the problem; racism is. Racism consist in a belief that one racial group is inherently superior to another racial

group”(Thompson 2000:102). The racial group that assumes its own superiority to the other groups feels entitled to better privileges than the so-called “inferior” racial groups. In this country, one finds these discrepancies in the quality of life of its citizens. Some live in opulence whilst others are in conditions of squalor. Within one nation, there are elements of the First World and the Third World, respectively. If one looks at just one indicator, like income distribution, one will see tremendous inequality. According to the UNDP Report (2003:70):

“From the perspective of the new economics of poverty and inequality, unequal income and wealth distribution become economically costly and growth reducing when the large numbers of a country’s citizens are unable or unwilling to work or engage in entrepreneurial activity, unable to save and invest, and unable to meet charges for provision of essential services.”

We need to eliminate all prevalent disparities that create distortions in the distribution of destitution according to racial lines. All South Africans citizens, in their diversity should share the burden of equal exposure to deprivation and access to resources essential for poverty alleviation.

The majority of those affected by poverty are black. There is a direct link between the incidence of poverty and the legacy of apartheid. The occurrence of poverty is distributed according to the racial divide in South Africa. Aliber (2001:5) says,

“Firstly, South Africa’s circumstances have shaped the present configuration of poverty and opportunities according to racial lines. Disadvantaged groups were systematically left with relatively little in the way of land and other resources, were not afforded education of a quality comparable to that of whites, and were compelled to adopt coping strategies – such as spatially divided households – which have left a complicated and painful social legacy.”

It is clear that through the agenda of the system of segregation, Blacks have been systematically marginalized politically, economically, socially, spiritually and culturally over a considerable time. Thus, the majority of Blacks were turned into the ‘have nots,’ whilst the whites became the ‘haves’ of the country. “Poverty [we see] is no accident; it is determined by the structures of society”(Boerma 1979:3). The current socio-economic

problems of our nation are related to how this nation was structured in the past. It was previously structured unjustly and violently for the disempowerment of the poor. We cannot just imbibe change without a proper understanding of our history. Pillay reminds us that:

“We are far more conditioned by our past than we can hope to understand. Many of our present crises (be they economic, socio-political or the daily trauma of violence and conflict) are the fruit of a historical harvest; a confirmation of the truism that in spite of the good intentions of the harvesters, one can only reap what one sows”(Vorster 1991: 1).

This does not necessarily imply that we are helpless prisoners of our negative past without a better vision of the future. Rather, we have to realize that our present reality with its good and bad elements has a link with our legacy as a nation. It would be delusional to deny this historical racial link to poverty. Grundlingh indicates,

“Even a cursory survey of the country’s socio-economic history reveals the stark division of wealth; is not too far-fetched to state that the ‘haves’ and the ‘have nots’ actually form two nations which divide largely along racial lines”(Voster 1991:23).

For further reflection, lets examine some statistics, from the United Nation’s Development Programme report of 1998. The table below shows how different population groups are affected by poverty in varying degrees:

**Table 1: Poverty Distribution**

<b>Blacks</b>	<b>Coloureds</b>	<b>Asians</b>	<b>Whites</b>
61 %	38 %	5 %	1 %

This, demonstrates the fact that “poverty is not confined to any one race group, but it is concentrated amongst blacks, particularly Africans: 61% of Africans and 38% of coloureds are poor, compared with 5% of Indians and 1% of whites”(UNDP Report 1998:8). The challenge we face is to pursue developmental policies that may equalize people’s living standards and neutralize racial disparities in how people are exposed to the burden of impoverishment. It is not fair that only one section of the population should



be disadvantaged, whilst everybody else can afford to live a respectable life. The experience of poverty should not be reserved for specific people while others are excluded.

### **2.2.3 Poverty and Gender**

The majority of those who make up the constituency of the poor are women. Largely, women in our society carry the burden of poverty. Poverty is unevenly distributed according to gender lines. According to the World Bank Conference, Nairobi 2002:

“Within Africa poverty affects women and children disproportionately. The voiceless and the powerless are most often women. The most vulnerable group affected by gender inequality and the access to the assets are women in rural communities and informal settlements”(Belshaw, Calderisi & Sugden 2001:9).

The situation of impoverishment for some black women is that of double jeopardy. Their marginalization is not only as a consequence of gender inequality, in a male dominated society, but also of their race. “In modern times, African women have struggled under the dual oppression of racism and sexism...”(Aliber 2001:7). Blacks and women have always received a raw deal in South Africa. The legacy of injustice is a society in which, when you are white and male, you are guaranteed a better life. Thus, we must create a society that is anchored on new values of justice that would eliminate gender inequality. Giliomee says,

“Nation-building means achieving an equitable but manageable redistribution of life’s chances... The concept of life chances embraces the entire spectrum of average mortality rates, income and employment rates and the quality of housing”(Vorster 1991:46).

This implies that all disparities between men and women in all aspects of the quality of life would be abolished. We have to develop a nation in which all citizens are afforded the right to live decent lives. With women attaining their genuine freedom, to live their lives with dignity having access to all the important resources they need to progress.

Some of the women living in poverty do not necessarily come from poor households. People should not assume that these poor women come from squatter camps and rural areas only. “In reality, there may be many women who, although they live in non-poor households, should be counted as poor because of the inequalities in intra-household allocations”(May 2000: 34). Due to unfair patriarchal structures that are endemic in families and broader society, they are worse off than men. They are deprived through the uneven distribution of resources. De Santa Ana (1979:28) says,

“Sexism is another form in which the values of the dominant find expression. In an exclusively male dominated society, women are accorded an inferior status, and prevented from developing their potential or freeing themselves from poverty.”

These women are more likely to be dependant socially and spiritually, having to rely on their brothers or other men for their welfare. It is encouraging to have our present constitution try to redress these gender disparities statutorily. “Sexism is characteristic of every society and culture on earth... Although some nations have made significant progress toward the goal of gender equality, no society has reached that goal”(Thompson 2000:98). In real life we still have a long way to go in addressing the repercussions of decades of sexism for women. They still live a life of dependency in male orientated structures such as family as well as religious, socio-political and economic institutions.

Also, there are many female-headed households that live in poverty. Most of these women have a low and unstable income as compared to male-led households. According to PSLSD (Project for Statistics on Living Standards and Development) data: “The poverty rate amongst female-headed households was 60 %, considerably higher than the rate of 31 % in male –headed households”(May 2000: 34). The legacy of male domination has disadvantaged women even in the era of equality. Post 1994 there has been a concerted effort by government in its policies and programs to promote women empowerment. According to Julianne Malveaux view, “empowerment is simultaneously a political and an economic process”(Jennings 1992:46). To use her phrase, we need to look at the “feminisation of poverty”(Jennings 1992:44), since women are a significant

sector of a society beleaguered by poverty. Our society has a legacy of patriarchy, which has complicated women's struggle for emancipation from poverty.

#### **2.2.4 Poverty and Children**

The other major victims of poverty in our society are children. Children are the ones who are also hit the hardest by poverty. Poverty devastates them because they are very delicate. They are still in their development stage that unfortunately gets compromised due to over-exposure to deprivation. Tshotsho states that,

“Children and youth account for over 50 % of the South African population of approximately 43 million people. The majority of these children and youth are from disadvantaged backgrounds and the majority of these children fall under the category of children with special needs.... The government considers the needs of the children to be paramount throughout its development strategies, policies, programs and services” (ISPN Website 2004).

They are the members of our community who are most vulnerable to poverty. These are the ones you see going to school barefoot, without provision, and walking long distances. The UNDP Report (1998:8) states the following:

“Three children in five lived in poor households, and many children are exposed to public and domestic violence, malnutrition, and inconsistent parenting and schooling. The risk of poverty varies widely by province: in the Eastern Cape 78 % of children live in poor households, compared with 20% in Gauteng.”

It is clear these innocent children are the ones who suffer the most from poverty and lack of adequate security. Yet, Jesus sternly said: “But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better, if a milestone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea”(Mk. 9:42). These children, as a result of poverty, become exposed to other social problems that aggravate their suffering. They become vulnerable to sexual abuse, neglect, and violence. May (2000: 33) says,

“A child who experiences poverty is exposed to the risk of impaired physical and mental development... If hungry, they cannot concentrate properly at school. If their homes have no electricity, they cannot study easily in the evenings. If girls

have to assume domestic roles of cooking, cleaning and child-care, this leaves them less time for homework.”

Poverty creates an abnormal environment for child development. The kind of situation that complicate their upbringing because they will be disadvantaged by having lack of basic necessities, such as nutritious food which is important for their healthy psychological and physiological development.

The problem of dysfunctional family life goes hand in hand with poverty. Children are supposed to grow up in a loving and stable environment in a home with proper parental nurturing, guidance and discipline. Yet, dysfunctional families are common, exposing children to a host of other social problems that impede their growth. Many children are subjected to homelessness, disrupted education, inconsistent parenting, and poor nutrition and health hazards. At the Second Moral Summit organized by government and the civil society, concern was raised about the undesirable state of the family in the nation. Albert Nolan writes, “The breakdown of the family life has reached crisis proportions. So many children have never known a father or mother with the consequence of lack of parenting; role modelling and control”(Challenge Magazine, July 2002). This implies that their childhood has been deprived of the necessary socialization into the values, behaviour, and relationships of a healthy family life. These children lack critical basic education, culture, psychological affirmation, love, emotional support and a sense of belonging. Furthermore, children affected by poverty are becoming more vulnerable to abuse. They are ultimately forced into child labour and other vices like child prostitution, where they are exploited. Networks of paedophiles are taking advantage of these children for their own perverted pleasure. Pais (1991:16 –17) says,

“Children are innately powerless to do anything about their oppression. The only ‘actions’ available to children in reaction to their abuse, such as conforming to adult wishes, running away, dropping out, suicide, substance abuse, behavioural problems, and mental illness, tend not to liberate children, but rather to make their oppression worse.”

Today street children begging at malls and traffic lights are a common sight in our major cities. On the streets, they become streetwise and they experiment with crime for

survival. These children miss the chance to develop normally like other sheltered children, protected in functional homes. They struggle to survive in the company of other homeless children. Their destitution is on the increase in our society, and the Church must be moved and be involved in the plight of these powerless little members of society.

### **2.2.5 Poverty and Class**

In post-*apartheid* South Africa poverty has mutated into an issue of class. In this developing democracy deprivation has evolved to as a factor that afford people a certain social status. It determines the kind of life they could enjoy. According to the United Nations Development Programme Report (2003:73),

“The upper class in South Africa consists of a small, wealthy and mainly white segment of the population. Its members dominate the top echelons of business and institutions and own a large proportion of all privately held corporate stock in the country... The wealth of the upper class gives it enormous corporate power and direct influence over the economic lives of the majority of South Africans.”

With the evolution of democracy, a sizeable Black middle class has emerged, as well as a very wealthy minority of Black elite who are benefiting from the current socio-economic and political transformation in our country. The Black elites are joining the ranks of tycoons of the previously privileged white community. These are the groups that are beginning to enjoy the benefits of freedom, and a better life. These are the people who are fortunate enough, to benefit from privatisation, affirmative action, Black Economic Empowerment and preferred procurement. Juxtaposed to that, one hears testimonies of land invasion, increased unemployment, hunger, homelessness and disasters befalling the poor. The poor, in contrast to the small elite and the comfortable middle class, continue to live in townships and informal settlements. In those overcrowded surroundings they live under harsh and inhumane conditions with inferior infrastructure and essential services. According to the WCC article titled, *Anticipation*, No. 19, p. 27, November 1974: “Poverty is consolidated in the class nature which our social structures take, to ensure the siphoning process of wealth created by the poor and the working masses to the privileged few at the top”(cited by De Santa Ana 1979:28). Meanwhile, the minority, the more

privileged community, lives a comfortable life. Their lives, then, become an envy of the poor, but remaining unattainable for the underprivileged.

### **2.2.6 Poverty and Education**

In reflecting on poverty and class one has to realize that there is a link between poverty and education. Many who land the more rewarding positions in society, whether they are political, economical or social are those who are skilled and qualified. According to the UNDP Report (1998:9),

“There is a very strong correlation between the level of education and standard of living: the poverty rate among people with no education is 69%, compared with 54% among those with primary education, 24 % among those with secondary education, and 3% among those with tertiary education.”

This is the reason the government has been pushing the policy of free education to ensure that the poor are not marginalized at school level. But more still needs to be done for those who wish to further their education at a tertiary level. Tertiary education is not affordable for the majority of the youth who have completed high school especially those who come from a disadvantaged background. “The sheer extent of the backlogs in apartheid education demands an investment far greater than existing levels of budgetary allocation”(UNDP Report 2003:24). It seems some discrepancies created by that legacy would need an injection of resources greater than what has been spent since 1994. However, there are dissenting opinions that purport, education is not necessarily a ladder out of poverty. They argue that having education is laudable but it is not a guarantee to escape from the miseries of being poor. According to a Special Report on the Widening Poverty Gap, November 2003:

“Many black South Africans are now better educated, but this has not necessarily translated into better jobs. While studies have shown that the better educated an individual, the better off they are, in South Africa it is not only those without skills and education who struggle to find employment.”

Some of the poor and unemployed people are very skilled and well educated; yet, they struggle to make a living because they are unemployed. Race and gender, are critical

factors influencing employment, overriding an individual's skills profile. It seems there are still those pockets of subtle discrimination that have survived in our democracy. A Special Report on the Widening Poverty Gap, November 2003 states,

“A recent survey by the Human Science Research Council of South Africa found that while university graduates have a distinctive advantage in the country's competitive labour market, some historical hurdles remain. ‘Africans, women and those who studied at historically black universities still have the greatest difficulty finding employment.’ It conducted a survey of 2,672 university graduates who obtained their first degree between 1990 and 1998. The study revealed differences in racial lines. ‘About 70 % of white graduates found employment immediately, compared with 43 % Africans, 42,2 Coloureds, and 47% Asians. A higher proportion of graduates from historically black universities (65.4 %) experienced periods of unemployment compared to graduates from historically white universities (34. 65 %).”

This above-mentioned report gives facts about the disparities on the incidents of unemployment amongst the graduates from various racial groups in terms of their qualifications obtained from various academic institutions in South Africa. Whites graduates easily accessed the job-market more than their African, Coloured and Indian counterparts. It seemed that there was a perception that the quality of education offered at historically white tertiary institutions was better than the one offered at historical black tertiary institutions. We hope this issue will be resolved with the current merger of the tertiary institutions.

### **2.2.7 Poverty and Unemployment**

This then brings us to the next link between poverty and unemployment. The more highly skilled a person is, the more he or she is expected to be employable. The outcome of good education is that it is supposed open opportunities for empowerment for all people. According to the UNDP Report (1998: 9),

“Poverty and unemployment are closely correlated: 55 % of people from poor households are unemployed, compared with 14% of those from the non-poor

households. Poor households are characterized by a lack of wage income, either as a result of unemployment or low wage income or low paying jobs, and typically rely on multiple sources of income to reduce the risk.”

The vast majority of poor people in our community, who are unemployed, lack essential vocational skills and entrepreneurial skills for them to be economically viable. There is a danger that if this social ill is not appropriately addressed, we will have an underclass in South Africa, the majority of whom will be Black people. Jones describes the Black underclass as follows:

“It is generally understood to refer to a growing number of Black persons who are uneducated, unskilled, unemployed and often unemployable, or employed in low paying jobs, living in unrelieved poverty, and immersed in a culture conditioned by such abject circumstances, with only limited chances or hope for upward mobility”(Jennings 1992:54).

Therefore, being in such an unfortunate situation means one has to live in inferior conditions. This poses a challenge to us to embrace the vision of eradicating poverty. We do not want to see inequality and injustice returning to our society and spoiling our democracy through classism.

### **2.2.8 City/Urban and Rural Poverty**

When we discuss national income distribution, we notice a skewed distribution within our society. Within this democratic nation, one finds striking contrasts of high, middle and low-income earners. One sees disparities within one nation in terms of region, population group, class, gender and status. There is a bias towards investments in urban economic hubs rather than rural and inner city areas. I quote the testimony of the poor in low-income areas as highlighted by Wilson and Ramphela: “The countryside is pushing you into the cities to survive, the cities are pushing you into the countryside to die”(Bruwer1996: 9). This is the reason for commuting and migration from the low-income areas to the high-income areas. Tomasi wrote: “In fact, migrations are an inescapable aspect of modern societies and a sign of that interdependence that marks the global economy and that is greatly accelerated by technological advances in



transportation and communications” (Mieth & Cahill 1993:4). Yet, within the same towns there is poverty that is deplorable. Shorter (1991:1) had this to say about African cities:

“Towns and cities are centres for generating wealth, but African socio-economic realities ensure that the wealth created by urbanization is far from evenly distributed. On the contrary, there are unmistakable signs of impoverishment and disorientation caused by urbanization, and particularly by the gigantic influx of urban migrants.”

These cities are market centres, which are surrounded by squatter camps that are images of poverty. They reflect those who have fallen out of the city’s prosperity. These are the ones who could not be absorbed in the wealth of the city. They have not been able to share in the spoils of that city. In fact, their living conditions are very different from the ambience of the city.

There is always a bias towards the development of cities or urban centres, at the expense of rural areas. There is better infrastructure, provision of essential services and availability of skilled professionals in urban areas; thus, people in rural areas are neglected. Again, in South Africa, we still have to consolidate our land reform programmes to correct the disparities created by *apartheid*. A large number of the poor are still in those previously neglected *Bantustans*, which were created to disenfranchise and subjugate Black people. In the global community there is a distinct bias towards industrial and technological development of cities, because it is where there is a hive of industrial and technological activity. Thus, rural areas are always lagging behind in industrial and technological development, especially in Africa. People are attracted to cities, which become centres of affluence. Poverty affects the rural population the most. “Most of the poor live in rural areas: while 50% of the population of South Africa is rural, the rural areas contain 72% of those members of the total population” (UNDP Report 1998:8). It is these very people who fall prey to the lure of the cities, who migrate from the rural areas in search of a better life in the city. Many of them unfortunately, ultimately join the ranks of the unemployed masses. Consequently, they are forced to live

within the sprawling informal settlements that surround every major city, settlements that are a health and social hazard.

The townships and squatter camps are the remnants of the *apartheid city*, created by the policies of segregation. People were meant to work in the cities but were not allowed to live and conduct business in them because they belonged to a despised race. Today many people are still unable to afford to live in the city. They see the glamour of the wealth that can only be enjoyed by a small elite and foreign tourists who have a strong buying power. They have become like Lazarus; who kept on eating from the scraps that fell from the rich man's table (see Luke 16:19 – 13).

### **2.2.9 Regions and Poverty**

Certain regions within South Africa have a lower or higher incidence of poverty than others. The cases of deprivation are found in all the seven provinces of our nation. According to the UNDP Report (1998:8),

“Poverty is distributed unevenly among the nine provinces. Provincial poverty rates are highest for the Eastern Cape (71%), Free State (63%), North West (62%), Northern Province (59%), Mpumalanga (57%), and the lowest for Gauteng (17%) and the Western Cape (28%). Poverty is the deepest in the Eastern Cape, Free State and Northern Province, which together make up 36% of the population but account for 51% of the total poverty gap.”

There is a tremendous disparity in income distribution within the various provinces in our country. The provinces contribute in different degrees to the GDP of our country. Gauteng contributes the most. People in economically and politically advanced provinces live in better conditions than their compatriots in other provinces that are lagging behind. This is reflected in the standard of education in various areas. “The larger and poorer provinces continue to be plagued by high dropout rates and high repeat and failure rates” (UNDP Report 2003: 25). Thus, the vulnerability of the poor is again evident in the challenges they face in the various regions of South Africa. Learners from provinces with a low GDP, experience more difficulties than those in well-managed provinces that have

a higher GDP, and offer the best living conditions. They have limited access to essential resources like electricity, Internet and libraries. These are essential educational resources for any individual who intends to play a significant role in our world today.

### **2.2.10 Poverty as a Systemic Problem**

It seems that poverty is a human phenomenon that will continue to plague humanity. One cannot imagine a single society without its poor. Even the most idealized democratic societies in the world are plagued by poverty. “They are found in all periods of history. Poverty is basically a systemic problem. In spite of development efforts over centuries, poverty is on the increase and it behoves us to investigate the process or the mechanism which makes this happen” (De Santa Ana 1979: 34). Our world has advancement in all sectors but it has also created conditions of deprivation for the majority who have to coexist with the affluent minority. Many poor people have become disillusioned when their new freedom from oppression does not deliver the promised relief from their conditions. Even politicians are surprised that despite their well-intended macro-economic, political and social interventions for poverty alleviation, impoverishment still persists. In South Africa the recommendations of the expert consultants on RDP (Reconstruction Development Program) and GEAR (Growth, Employment, and Redistribution Macroeconomic Strategy), have not had much impact. We do not deny that there have been some notable improvements in some poor communities in certain areas like gaining access to social grants, education and health services, to mention but a few examples. The pastoral letter of the American Catholic Bishops reminds us that, “Each economic decision and institution must be judged in the light of whether it protects or undermines the dignity of the human person”(Tsele 1997:84). In the light of this, the struggle against poverty will continue to be part of the new society in South Africa.

Even though poverty is a systemic problem, we have to gather courage to see how we as Christians can become allies with the poor in their struggle against poverty. It is not a simple task and we cannot assume naively that victory will be easy. Humanity has lived

with poverty for centuries. We must resist the temptation to become complacent, to accept the prevalence of poverty as normal. Tsele (1997:82) noted this ‘spiritual crisis:’

“The crime and shame of our civilization is that it fails to solve basic problems of hunger and human dignity. We seem to be resigned to any hope of ever solving the urgent problem of human misery and poverty, and the ever-increasing gap between poverty and affluence. Our civilization is marked by a fatalistic acceptance of poverty and misery as the inescapable reality for some, indeed as the unavoidable, albeit regrettable side-effect of its functioning.”

We must refuse to succumb to this fatalism that would negate our ministry, and impede our efforts to face the challenge of poverty. Instead, knowing the complexity of the task ahead of us as Christian witnesses, we must show ‘critical solidarity’ with the poor in their struggle against poverty. We must respect their struggle because it is for their own survival. According to Boff (1984:ix),

“The grandest struggle of the human being is the battle for a bit of bread to be gained by your own toil, for a little piece of ground you call your own, a humble roof, a minimum social participation to be won through education. To adopt the place of the poor is to make a discovery. Here we discover the strength of the poor, their resistance, and the dignity of their struggles. They are the needy amongst us, to be sure. But they are also the agents of their own life and subsistence, the generators of their own dignity and liberation.”

Despite the complexity of poverty the poor are still committed to their own vision of attaining freedom from the poverty that dehumanises them. They need to be encouraged to vigorously pursue their course of poverty eradication.

### **2.3 The Experience of the Poor**

The poverty that is our present preoccupation is a reality to real human beings. Poverty has an angle that is unique to the poor because it is their life that is at stake. It is the totality of their living experience, history and struggle. Theologians called this a view from ‘below.’ The poor have a voice through which they can articulate their perceptions, experiences and aspirations in terms of their desires. To them, poverty is not just raw

scientific facts extracted from a scientific survey. Poverty means the actual conditions that characterize their daily existence. Therefore, they have a right to define their social reality from their perspective. They have no other life beyond their present conditions of destitution. This familiar world defines and restricts their existence, opportunities, resources and power.

### **2.3.1 Basic needs**

Poverty implies being unable to provide for your own basic needs. Poor people cannot afford to pay for their daily necessities. They have to face, each day, with the reality of being incapable of meeting their own basic needs. “Poverty for them means being hungry and malnourished; drinking unsanitary water; having no access to basic health care such as immunizations against childhood diseases; living in crowded, unsafe, inadequate shelter, having no shoes or shirt to wear; being illiterate” (Thompson 2000:31). The poor face hunger, are scantily dressed, and some live in squatter camps because they cannot afford to buy food, decent clothes nor can they build better houses. Decent shelter, in a context of rapid urbanization, continues to be an elusive dream for many of our people. “Based on the analysis of the 1996 and 2001 censuses, despite a 7 percent increase in the proportion of households living in formal housing, 36 percent of households (4.1 million households) were living in informal, traditional, backyard and other dwellings in 2001”(cited in UNDP Report 2003:34). The consequence of poverty is that people cannot live a life suitable for dignified human beings. The marginalized should not live a dog’s life, although in our unjust world dogs are better cared for than the destitute. Nyerere once said, “Life is the most basic human right; if justice means anything at all it must protect life. This should be the constant underlying purpose of all social, economic and political activities of government at all levels”(Guma & Milton 1997:81). All attempts must be made to ensure that all of God’s people have a decent life. They should live a life fit for human beings, with access to basic necessities. Poverty should not be accepted as a norm. No one should be living below the bread line. The poor should be freed from the shackles of destitution.

### **2.3.2 Vulnerability**

Being deprived means living a life without security, a life of precarious vulnerability. Poor people are vulnerable to a number of harmful and potentially devastating threats, which they may not have the resources or power to avert. Amongst other threats are fire (for example, shack fires, which destroy homes and possessions); floods (because poorer people often end up erecting their shelters in flood-prone areas); job loss (due to retrenchments); crime (theft or burglary and bodily harm); poor agricultural conditions (for example, those who rely in part on food production for sustenance); illness and death in the family (often there are no adequate resources for medical care). It is clear that being poor robs one of the ability to deal with any potential disasters, whether they are natural or caused by humans. The poor are exposed to many disasters that might happen in their community. Poverty on the other hand, means being subjected to a life of insecurity. “The poor are anxious and fearful, constantly struggling to survive”(Thompson 2000:31). Their life is uncertain because they do not have the means to sustain themselves even though they have access to basic resources out of the poverty alleviation initiatives of the government and private sector. Some poor people living in low cost houses cannot afford to be consistent in adhering to their obligation to make regular repayments towards household electricity and water consumption, and housing loans. “The repossession rate (of houses) remains at about 12 per cent and banks often redline poor areas because they see them as risky”(UNDP Report 2003:36). This implies further marginalization with few opportunities for potential capital injection for further human development in poor areas. Since, the poor lack buying power, they are not a profitable investment market, not even attractive to highflying entrepreneurs in a market driven society like ours.

### **2.3.3 Crime and violence**

Some poverty stricken communities are also characterized by violence and crime. Most poor people are decent, peace-loving people, but their areas harbour shady characters that use these communities to hide their mischief. An increasing number of unemployed

youth become potential agents for criminal syndicates and gangsters. Thompson (2000:58–59) highlights the devastating nature of poverty as he writes:

“Poverty is in itself a violence against human dignity, and it sometimes leads the poor to violently respond to their desperate situations.... Poverty can set a spiral of violence.... The overwhelming majority of the people on earth live in poverty, unable to meet their basic needs and fulfil their God-given potential. This reality is a tremendous obstacle to the dream of creating a just and peaceful world order. It is even more of a scandal because it need not be. The poverty of many exists in sharp contrast with the affluence of the few.”

In such a situation, women and children are the common casualties of that crime and violence. Most poor communities deal with high incidents of women and child abuse. Crime and violence have become the defining characteristic of marginalized communities. Aliber (2001:24) says,

“Crime and violence contribute to the experience of poverty at two levels. On the one level, the exposure to crime and violence directly detracts from the quality of life of its victims and those fearful of being victimized. On another level, the high incidence of crime and violence, which forms a salient feature of everyday life in South Africa, is symptomatic of a profound social malaise, in which the cycle of poverty and of violence are indistinguishable.”

It seems that violence and crime are the unwelcome guests in poor communities. Sometimes, this problem is compounded by high incidence of unemployment, overcrowding, and poor provision of municipal services.

Impoverishment also contributes to the erosion of the moral fibre of society. It creates scenarios of desperation where the quest for survival makes people to be less committed, to upholding the commonly shared social values that encourage moral responsibility. “Poverty was seen as unquestionably a serious threat to moral regeneration. Not because poor people as such are immoral, but because the greed of those who become rich at the expense of the poor and the emotional effects of continuous unemployment create the kind of conditions that can lead to crime”(Challenge Magazine, July 2002). This is the reason why, even when we still have high incidents of white-collar crime, that many of

the offenders who are incarcerated, are members of communities that face destitution. They are prosecuted for theft, housebreaking, mugging, smash and grab, car hijacking. Some of these crimes have fatal consequences and they erode our attempts to create a more caring community. As Nolan observed,

“The stumbling block is the growing tendency towards self-serving individualism. We have a rich tradition of *uBuntu*, of working together as families, as communities, as organizations. Today it seems to be everyone for himself or herself. There are rivalries, suspicions, backstabbing, backbiting, power struggles, careerism and greed. This is the kind of selfish individualism that stands in the way of God’s work in our country at this stage”(Challenge Magazine, April/May 2004:19).

Survivors of these nasty criminal activities are left emotionally and psychologically traumatized. Some have to battle the fears that continue to haunt them daily, infringing on their freedom to enjoy a peaceful life. Furthermore, “many small children are obliged to accompany their mothers to prison when they (mothers) are convicted of crime, and this experience may leave lifelong mental and moral scars”(Shorter 1991:115). The innocent who are supposed to be protected from these hardships are not spared, since, our society is still dysfunctional. We are still reconstructing the fabric of our society in many areas, and that includes our moral fibre.

#### **2.3.4 Substance Abuse**

We know that substance abuse is a serious social problem that entangles both the haves and have-nots in society. The increased occurrence of substance abuse further complicates systemic poverty. It traps those who have fallen prey to it in a vicious circle of poverty. These ‘stimulants’ become a crutch to escape from current difficulties. Drug abuse is one of the prevalent and easily identifiable vices that coexist with poverty. “Alcohol has always been the refuge of the desperate and the destitute, and there is constant demand for it”(Shorter 1991:50). Substances that are highly abused are the ones that are readily available and affordable like alcohol, glue or benzene and marijuana



commonly known as dagga. These are devastating snares for the poor. According to the Drug Master Plan report:

“President Nelson Mandela, specifically singled out alcohol and drug abuse among the social pathologies that needed to be combated. He referred to alcohol and other drug abuse as a major cause of crime, poverty, reduced productivity, unemployment, dysfunctional family life, political instability, the escalation of chronic illnesses, such as AIDS and TB, injury, premature birth” (1998 cited in ISPN Website, 2004).

The harsh conditions of poverty seem to create trigger factors for substance abuse. It is suffering that exacerbates the desperation of people to the point where it taxes their coping systems. People, due to difficulties compounded by poverty, lose their sense of meaning. Having lost their self-respect, they become despondent, and fall prey to substance abuse.

It is known that substance abuse can ultimately cause its users lives to spiral out of control into self-destructive behaviour. In our own country, some people have been using their social grants to feed these self-defeating habits. In our struggle to fight poverty we have to deal with these social vices that are part of the dependency culture of those whose images have been dented by poverty. Substance abuse also creates other social problems like increasing incidents of crime, violence, and anti-social behaviour when people are ‘high.’ Drug abuse aggravates domestic violence, and disturbs normal family life. This happens because drugs alter people’s behaviour and attitudes, once they have exceeded the safe limit in their consumption. We also have to note the effect of alcohol abuse by mothers during pregnancy on their unborn child. “Fetal Alcohol Syndrome”(ISPN Website 2004) causes children who have certain physical and psychological defects. Drugs harm addicts physically, emotionally, and psychologically. Poverty alleviation becomes extremely complicated if it is coupled with substance abuse.

### 2.3.5 Social Exclusion

Being poor implies being denied access to all the avenues of empowerment necessary for one to maintain a good quality of life. The poor are facing many socio-political and economic hindrances in their quest for emancipation from pauperisation. Some of the impeding factors are structural and should be changed to promote the total advancement of the poor in society. According to the United Nations Development Programme Report (1998:5-6),

“Poverty may also involve social exclusion in either economic dimension (exclusion from the labour market opportunities to earn income) or a purely social dimension (exclusion from decision-making, social services, and access to community and family support).”

In South Africa, it means being unable to participate in the first economy where the actual economic power is vested. Even participation in the second economy continues to elude the poor, since; they have no money or skill to invest in small and medium enterprises. Cotton asserts that,

“The monopolies over well-paying jobs and career ladders in primary labour markets held by whites and their total and exclusive control of capital markets result in Blacks being underemployed, underpaid and undercapitalised” (Jennings 1992:20).

In a mature democratic society we all aspire to be productive and patriotic citizens, who can make a meaningful contribution towards the good of our country. But, it seems being poor marginalizes a person to such an extent that his or her chances of participating meaningfully in the development of his or her society are slight. There are stakeholders in society who are of the view that some of the political and economic policies pursued by the present government inadvertently perpetuate poverty. The UNDP Human Development Report (2003: 6) asserts, “However, the current strategy and policies for achieving growth are objectively anti-poor, on the one hand, the gap between economic growth and employment growth is widening and, on the other, given their capabilities, the poor are not able to integrate into the process of economic expansion.”

We need to address this social dislocation that is felt by the poor in their own country. This is in essence, is a political issue. “The problem of poverty and human suffering caused by unemployment and economic dislocation are primarily political phenomena, rather than processes that reflect individual or group inadequacy” (Jennings 1992:4). Thus, we have to look at ways of creating social policies that will significantly reduce the social exclusion faced by the poor. They want to be active members of society, not social burdens that cannot fend for themselves, and they want to add value to their own communities. Boff (1984:84 –85) said,

“When we go to the root of all these problems of oppression and injustice, we find that what has gone wrong is the overall system of societal disorganization. In other words, we find the ‘sin of the world,’ the collective sin of humanity. But societal organization is dependent upon politics (or policy). Politics, policy, is present everywhere. It envelops our whole life... If we hope to have a better society.... We are going to have to struggle. We are going to have to add some effort if we hope to change society’s distorted organization.... The change will come from bottom up.”

Change will require the mobilization of a politicised community consciousness among the poor, so that they might lobby for their own interests. There are, fortunately, public policies like affirmative action and Black economic empowerment, designed to deal with social exclusion in the economic sector.

### **2.3.6 Unemployment**

Many of the poor are jobless, with very few prospects of permanent employment. The world of the poor is characterized by the realities of unemployment. Being poor means not having a job to go to, just watching your day go by without being involved in any productive activity that generates income. The Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA) executive director Graham said,

“In general the figures are pointing to continued high levels of inequality between the wealthy and the poor. The data does suggest that there’s de-racialization

among the wealthy. But poverty levels certainly have not improved and when we do our research, which asks people what they think should be the main public issues, jobs comes up as the key issue”(IRINnews.org 2004).

Job creation is a major concern to the poor. Unemployment means they do not have a steady income that would make it possible for them to plan their future in terms of their aspirations. “Unemployment is a significant contributor to poverty....” (UNDP Report 1998:23). Sometimes you find healthy individuals in the community suffering hardship because they are unemployed. Joblessness continues to impoverish many of our people, regardless of their colour, creed and gender. The UNDP Report (1998:23) enumerates six basic categories of the unemployed poor, namely:

- a. Poorly educated rural unemployed (28%)
- b. Poorly educated urban unemployed (13%)
- c. Young unemployed with no labour market experience (36%)
- d. Long-term unemployed with no labour market experience (6%)
- e. Those with labour market experience and some education (15 %), and
- f. Highly educated unemployed poor (1%).

In terms of the abovementioned data, the unemployment levels tend to be the highest amongst the poorly educated rural citizens and youth with no work experience. It is clear that unemployment affects all members of the population in different degrees. “Unemployment rates tend to be the highest amongst Africans, in rural areas, among the women and youth, and those with no previous experience”(UNDP Report 1998:23). It is important that we should focus on eliminating all the factors that are compounding joblessness amongst the Africans.

Recent reports, although some of them are controversial, highlight the fact that unemployment is currently increasing at a disturbing rate. It is estimated that “thirty to forty-two percent of the labour force is caught in a vicious circle of unemployment” (UNDP Report 2003:20). Many share the view that meaningful employment of people is one of the critical contributory factors of sustainable poverty eradication strategies. For this reason the current high levels of joblessness would need to be reduced. “However, access to jobs that are appropriately remunerated and provide decent work is not only an

important means of improving living standards; it is also a means of exercising skills, creativity, making productive contributions to society, and enjoying self-respect, dignity and empowerment”(UNDP Report 2003:10). We need to create jobs in our country, for our people, which would affirm their humanity instead of degrading them. Sometimes the so-called job-creation programs are an insult to the poor because of the appalling conditions in which they are expected to work, conditions that even violate the labour laws.

#### **2.4 The Dehumanising Power of Poverty**

Poverty in our community cannot be envisioned as a desirable condition in which the poor should live as people of God. There is no way we can, today justify any attempt to romanticize the kind of life, of deprivation and suffering. The selective devastation of poverty, affecting only some of our citizens, makes it unethical. Poverty dehumanises people. “If to ‘dehumanise’ is to deprive of human character or attributes, then the evidence of dehumanisation can be found in the quantifiable facts concerning surplus or uprooted people(s), especially where they are already socially and economically marginalized”(Rumscheidt 1998:5). Deprivation dents self-esteem and the dignity of the poor. It makes them live a life that is degrading, therefore, robbing them of their full humanity. Living in poverty has devastating effects, since it distorts people’s identity and perception of ‘self’, as valuable citizens and God’s people, especially when they experience a quality of life that is far below that of the more privileged citizens, in the same country. This kind of meagre existence does not leave people with a sense of ‘pride,’ rather it makes them feel and think they are second-class citizens. They experience life as if they were living under a curse.

Poverty is more than just a material condition. It is true that the first recognizable indicators of poverty may be physical or material. But the phenomenon of poverty is multifaceted. Poverty as we have already indicated, damages people’s humanity. “The poor of today are those who have lost or are fast losing much of what they have, their pride, their identity and their dignity”(De Santa Ana 1979: xv). In our world today people

are valued on the basis of the size of their material endowments. They are not judged on their image as the people of God. In this era of globalisation, poverty means economic inferiority. Boerma (1979:19) says, “Because a person was poor, he became different, i.e. of lesser value”. Materially it reduces them to desperate basket cases of charity. Their destiny seems to hinge on the probability of benevolence from others, who are more advantaged than they are. Psychologically and spiritually it knocks their humanity as it traps people into dependency. The poor in society are despised and are treated as lesser beings. “He no longer counts. Poverty is like a disease. It stigmatises and humiliates” (Boerma1979: 76). Human dignity and pride are embedded in our self-reliance, in our ability to fend for ourselves, without becoming a burden to our fellows. Being poor, means being given inferior treatment, due to one’s inability to support oneself. Even in places of worship, the poor are treated shabbily, unlike the more affluent people. They are not given appropriate recognition that they are entitled to as followers of Christ, probably because they don’t dress appropriately, like the more affluent citizens (see. James 2:1 –6).

In fact, the poor are often reduced to faceless people. When some social analysts, researchers, politicians, theologians and other social activists talk about the poor, they do not necessarily perceive them as real people who have their own interests, opinions, aspirations and feelings. Tony Beck, the author of *The Experience of Poverty*, shows how “the development elite has not only reduced the world’s poor to a statistic but has defined that statistic”(cited by Rumscheidt 1998:26). The poor should not be regarded as sheer numbers and mere data that can be processed on our PCs, and graphs as we compile our scientific analyses, when in essence they are human beings just like us, who have dreams that they hope to achieve for their families and themselves. Samuel (1996:146) says in expressing his disapproval of such an insensitive attitude towards the poor,

“Development today has become a market commodity. Everyone worth his or her name is involved directly in the business of ‘development.’ The marginalized are a product on whom research is done, institutions are being built, publications thrive, banks survive and governments come to power. In fact most of them do

not care for the marginalized, and, on the contrary, most often secretly hope that they will always be with them.”

These are people who have real feelings, and identities and are citizens of their country although they might be forced to lead a life of third class citizens. They are people who have a culture and faith that should be respected, even when to some; their life is just a shabby existence. We need to remind ourselves that the poor are human beings who are alive and who experience life in their communities. They are real people who have families, who seek to shape their future, and to have security for themselves and their children.

The poor are vulnerable to exploitation, therefore they are exposed to injustice and oppression in society. The poor are the potential victims of those who, driven by self-interest and greed, misuse their power. They become victims of unfair labour practices, political abuse, and systematic exclusion from any significant participation in the socio-economic reengineering of society. “If it is the wealthy and the influential who make the rules and who run the economic and political institutions of society, no matter how well-meaning they may be, the poor cannot expect the rules and the institutions to adequately respond to their needs. Those who make the rules get the goods”(McGinnis 1979:14). Due to their poverty, they are likely to be undermined, intimidated, harassed and silenced by those who are more powerful than them. Poverty has a disempowering effect on its victims. Thus, many of them bear these injustices silently, with little protest. One may misjudge their silence as apathy. “Poverty is a culture of silence and to speak out is the first step out of acceptance and defeat. Speaking out means to start formulating and organizing your mind in the direction of a solution”(Bruwer 1996:67). It is not easy for the poor to resist the exploitation that has besieged them. They have always been disadvantaged by impoverishment. History bears testimony to this because it takes time for revolutions to ferment. “As well as being poor, the poor man is trapped, oppressed and being exploited; because he is poor.... Being poor becomes synonymous with being oppressed” (Boerma 1979: 20). Since those who are exploiting the poor are powerful and well established in society, it becomes difficult to confront them. Unlike their persecutors, the poor are disadvantaged, and have limited options. This brings us to the

conclusion that deprivation may be a bane to the poor but a boom to the exploiters of the poor. Although it might be difficult for some to accept this, there are those whose present socio-economic, political and spiritual progress was made possible due to advantages presented to them by the prevailing poverty. It has provided them with cheap labour, naïve customers and so on.

For many of the poor, poverty means powerlessness. It means one being unable to use one's human rights advantageously to improve one's welfare. The poor do not enjoy their human rights completely because they are preoccupied with a struggle for survival like where to get the next meal and proper shelter. Although these rights are enshrined in the nations constitution they are occasionally undermined. Beck writes, " The constructs of poverty tend to view the poor as passive objects of state planning" (Rumscheidt 1998:26). They continue to be subjected to the paternalistic attitudes of those who insist on helping them in their poverty, without involving them. They assume to be their voice even when they have not been nominated to speak for them. Meanwhile the poor continue to be ignored when they have views and grievances that they have not expressed. Powerlessness implies, the imposition of the reality of the powerful on the powerless, and that is not their reality. It means that even when they exercise their right to speak, no one listens. The poor need to reaffirm their confidence in facing the challenges of poverty, challenges that can be so overwhelming because they are so complex. The President of the Christian Children wrote an appropriate prayer that provides us with insight in the devastating influence of poverty on the poor and those involved in poverty alleviation:

“Merciful Lord, Hunger seems so massive,  
So intimidating, that we feel helpless.  
Because there is so much we cannot do,  
Please save us from concluding that,  
Therefore we can do nothing.  
Help us, like children learning to walk,  
To take one small step to assist the hungry.  
Then show us how to take another step ... and another.  
Free us from the captivity of seeing only what cannot be done,



And enable us to see what we can do.  
Then give us the courage and the love to do it,  
Lord, not as an unwanted burden,  
But as an opportunity to celebrate life more fully  
And reflect your love more completely.  
We ask it in the name of your Son,  
Jesus Christ, who came to save us from sin and death;  
Yes, and to save us also for a life devoted to deeds of love.  
Amen”(Sider 1997: 20).

The poor should never succumb to the threatening pressures of persistent poverty, although its prevalence may be daunting, and they may be tempted to feel so weak that they may think their efforts and those of their partners are just in vain. They have nothing to lose if they continue with their fight against poverty, since poverty has already marginalized them.

Poverty damages the psyche of the poor significantly. The situation of poverty scars the minds of the poor, undermining their humanity. It limits the potential of the poor in using their intellectual capacity for their advantage. “Underdevelopment, or poverty, is a state of mind”(Bruwer 1996:27). An environment that is characterized by impoverishment often has a negative influence on the shaping of the minds of those who live in it without exposure to a more conducive environment. They become subjected to conditions that are not even considered fitting for animals, in our eco-sensitive world. Being disadvantaged results in their freedoms, dignity and the right to self-determination being violated. Chambers rightly observes that, “lack of independence, self-respect and humiliating subservience causes greater pain than high interest rates and debt” (Christian 1999:139). It causes people to adapt their lives mentally to the conditions of squalor and to accept them as an inescapable reality. Thus poor people’s mindset becomes ensnared in the life-world of poverty. Therefore, they ultimately offer little resistance to being subjected to the adverse circumstances of poverty. They become powerless in the context of their pauperisation. “Years of poverty leave a negative imprint on the minds of the poor. This is more than the stunting of aspirations and awareness. The ability of the poor to reflect

critically and to analyse their situations has also been retarded”(Christian 1999:140). Poverty will systematically subjugate people until they become so downtrodden that they will offer little or no protest against their disempowerment. Consequently, other so-called champions of the needy, in a condescending and paternalistic manner, claim to be the voice of the poor. Freire advocates that, “Each win back his right to say his own word, to name the world...Years of intergenerational poverty seriously cramps the ability of the poor to even name their reality”(Christian 1999:140). It is the poor who must articulate their own aspirations and vision of their lives. They are the ones who feel the heat of poverty and know what kind of a better life they aspire to. The poor have a right to transform their world according to their thoughts, philosophies, culture and faith, which they must express without being restricted. These must engage our development and theological paradigms, as we become Christian witnesses amongst the poor. We must respect their intelligence and their ability to shape their community life positively, in line with their thinking. It is unjust for any outsider, in the name of development and evangelism, to continue to impose their perspective on the poor.

Being poor subjects the disadvantaged to a life of limited options. Many lack the appropriate education, and employment or entrepreneurial skills they need to become successful. They are hamstrung in their efforts to participate effectively in any significant political, economic, social and spiritual transformation that conforms to their aspirations. They cannot enter into meaningful debates and engage in forums that ultimately result in societal reengineering. Poverty has a dehumanising effect since it traps people in a vicious circle of deprivation. Global economic growth is creating societies that are increasingly becoming too sophisticated and complex for the poor to participate in, as they currently are. They need to reach a certain level of social awareness, of political and economic literacy, to participate meaningfully in them. De Santa Ana (1979:xv) said; “The economic systems that prevails in the Third World countries creates poverty and locks people in a state of deteriorating poverty.” In our country, certain economic fundamentals have been proclaimed, and have been told by the experts that they are great, but poverty and unemployment have remained as a scourge. Unless the gap is closed the poor will continue to be systematically sidelined politically, economically, socially and

spiritually. Therefore, without meaningful participation multigenerational poverty will become an inevitable outcome.

Persistent poverty creates hopelessness amongst the poor. The deprivation it makes the atmosphere to be characteristically deplorable and gloomy. Those conditions of squalor are painful and humiliating for any normal human being who has to live under them. According to Aliber (2001:3),

“The literature confirms that many poor people feel resigned to poverty – that is, to being chronically poor – and also that many of the day-to-day experiences that contribute to the perception of being poor are attributable to the economic or social environment, over which the poor has little or no control.”

The conditions of poverty instil a sense of desperation, a struggle for survival amongst the poor. They cannot manage the many socio-economic, political and spiritual forces that are haunting them as the poor. This may in time dash their hopes, unless there is a significant intervention that would help them to alleviate their poverty. When you are accustomed to daily suffering your hope dims with every passing day, unless there is a convincing sign that things are taking a turn for the better. Hopelessness is an undesirable state for the poor since it undermines their ability to put up a vigorous resistance against the antagonistic forces that perpetuate their impoverishment. We read in the Scriptures that, “hope deferred makes the heart sick, but when a desire comes, it is a tree of life” (Prov. 13:12). Hope is life giving, since it instils the faith to be optimistic and the courage to fight for your aspirations. Meanwhile hopelessness sows the seeds of discouragement and resignation that would destabilize the poor in their struggle against poverty. Once an attitude of hopelessness has been reinforced, it tends to keep people down. It extinguishes the expectation of a better future that they might otherwise seek for themselves and their children. This attitude is detrimental because it can cause the poor to neglect their potential as individuals and as a group to improve their living conditions. The disadvantaged also need to win the psychological struggle against disillusionment. It would have fatal consequences if they succumbed to despondency.

Poverty perpetuates alienation. It stratifies society in categories of the rich and the poor, educated and uneducated, employed and unemployed, homeless and homeowners, privileged and the underprivileged. It disturbs social harmony by creating a society that is characterized by exploitation, envy, greed, suspicion, tension and violence. The poor inevitably are the most unwelcome people in our metropolitan cities since they are likely to spoil the beauty of the city. They are accused of turning posh suburbs and towns into slums with their low-class standard of living. They cause the devaluation of properties in which many privileged members of the community have invested their life savings. In fact, they have become aliens and intruders in the country of their birth, just because they cannot afford better housing. Therefore they become victims of discrimination for being poor in an environment of affluence. They become subjected to all kinds of inhumane treatment. Thus, poor people have to resist all the negative agents that seem to compound their suffering. They have to wage a struggle against discrimination. Tension between the rich and the poor increases further when the deprived refuse to be oppressed. When the oppressed begin to question and resist inequality, tension can escalate, especially if the oppressors insist on maintaining the status quo. “The poor societies are in ferment. Many among them are becoming aware of their potential and the strength of organized mass struggle. They are realizing that there is no power (other than God), which is greater than people’s power. They are affirming the historical subjectivity of the people in social transformation”(De Santa Ana 1979: xx). This awareness has caused communities of the poor throughout the country to mobilize themselves into groups such as the homeless, landless, unemployed and marginalized students, in order to promote their own interests. Some have even expelled politicians who have ignored their concerns, from their constituencies because they refuse to renew the political mandate of those who do not deliver on issues of importance to the poor.

## **2.5 Poverty, Illness and Death**

Poverty has a death dealing effect on those who are poor. It subjects them to death through hunger, exposure to disease, unhygienic living conditions, violence and crime. Poverty means to be forgotten when it comes to your needs, interest, rights and freedom.

These are only significant as long as they serve to advance the interests of the powerfully rich. You become a non-person who exists to maintain the system of the wealthy and the rulers of this society, a structure founded on disparity. Gutierrez (1988:xxix) refers to the poor as, “those who are ‘nonpersons’- that is, those who are not considered to be human beings with full rights, beginning with the right to life and to freedom in various spheres.” The well being of the destitute has ceased to be important in our unjust world today. Their welfare is ignored and their grievances are not prioritised or viewed seriously. De Santa Ana (1979:xix) says,

“It must be admitted that there are governments, intergovernmental bodies and voluntary agencies, including churches, with the support of well-meaning people from the ranks of the rich and powerful, who have genuinely tried to do their best for the poor and the oppressed. But often they tend to look on the poor as objects of their charity and good efforts, the passive recipients of their goodwill...What they [the poor] are fighting for is recognition of themselves as people having potential to change their own situation and society as a whole. A people who are fighting against marginalization in society do not want to be marginalized in the efforts made for their own well-being.”

They should not be treated as non-entities who are just pitied in their miseries, but ignored when solutions to assist them are explored. People are already humiliated by poverty; therefore they must not be treated as if they were incompetent to speak for themselves.

Poverty means being subjected to the death-dealing blows of preventable disease. Being poor also means being subjected to poor health. The poor continue to be infected and affected by disease that could have been avoided. “Human health cannot be an afterthought to Christians who wish to extend the kingdom of God. The God who made us in the beginning, took view that the human being was ‘very good.’ We are a pleasing creation to God. Anything that reduces this ‘goodness’ has to be overcome”(Stuart 1996: 83). Yet nowadays we see the opposite, many of the poor make it into the statistics of the epidemics and pandemics. They do not experience life as ‘goodness’ but as pain and suffering through sickness. In South Africa many of those who have contracted HIV/Aids

are poor. They are the ones who are dying prematurely, who have limited access to anti-retroviral drugs, relevant medication, or suitable nutrition and whose children turn into orphans in great numbers. “HIV/Aids is eroding Africa’s achievements in its development. Two thirds of the world’s HIV/Aids pandemic is in Africa”(Belshaw et al 2001. 11). A significant number of the two thirds of HIV/Aids sufferers are in Southern Africa, and South Africa leads the world with the largest number of the infected.

This HIV/AIDS infection compounds poverty. HIV/AIDS is not a respecter of class, race, creed or gender. We reject the widespread misconception that; “Aids is a problem of the poor and the uneducated; the rich and middle class people, who have access to information, education and good medical facilities, this will be spared the ravages of the epidemic”(Saayman & Kriel 1992:11). Anyone, regardless of his or her background, could be infected and affected by HIV/AIDS. It makes no difference how respectable they might be or how they might be despised in society. HIV/AIDS is a disease that does not discriminate, although the risk to exposure may vary in society. Nicolson (1995:13) says,

“The figures show that Black people are the most at risk... Where people are already in poor health, malnourished or have had their resistance lowered by malaria or venereal disease, they are more at risk of contracting AIDS. It is therefore not surprising that AIDS grows most rapidly amongst the African and Coloured communities in South Africa since they are also communities which include the very poor.”

The disadvantaged are the ones who are more exposed to the devastation of this virus. Once people have been infected by this epidemic, the negative impact on their lives is tremendous. UNDP Human Development Report (2003:7) states that,

“Many studies have clearly demonstrated that HIV /AIDS contributes to the rise of poverty, and that poverty reduces the ability of the poor living with HIV/AIDS to cope with the disease. Moreover, AIDS generates new poverty as people lose employment and housing tenure. Household incomes fall due to loss of wage earners and rising spending, particularly on medical care and funerals.”

It creates secondary health problems, since those who are infected become more vulnerable to other opportunistic infections. Consequently, it also generates other social problems that drain the limited resources of those affected and infected by it.

The rapid growth of this sexually transmitted disease in our country is linked to the negative legacy of *apartheid*. It was a factor that disrupted the family unit of many oppressed people. “In South Africa, for example, the social devastation caused by migrant labour and apartheid laws, which prevented families from settling as families near their places of work, has been a major cause of sexual behavioural patterns which form the basis of the epidemic among black South Africans”(Saayman & Kriel 1992:24). This disease is destroying the social fabric of communities, further complicating their problems. It leads to joblessness and increases the number of orphans, widows and widowers, disrupting family life. Families struggle to cope with caring for their infected members. Unaffordable treatment is one of many other problems they encounter. “The gap between the rich and the poor is likely to grow, since the latter will be the most affected by AIDS”(Nicolson1995: 14). Yes, unless we succeed in preventing the spread of this scourge, the prevalence of HIV/AIDS is likely to multiply the misfortunes of the poor socially, economically, politically and spiritually. It seems that for them, “if it does not rain, it pours”(African saying).

## **2.6 Hope for the Poor**

Being poor means being exposed to continual emotional stress and fatigue. The impoverished are anxious about mundane matters: where to get the next meal, fear of eviction due to illegal occupation or failure to pay rent to the landlord, transportation of water, and labouring hard for a meagre wage. These conditions deprive them of peace and quiet, a gift that so many take for granted. Yet God desires that people should live in peace. Peace, which is necessary for sanity, continues to elude the destitute. Living in abject conditions robs them of their wholeness. These harsh conditions will have an impact on the Church’s efforts to spread the gospel, and God’s peace in these weary communities. “Evangelisation is to be undertaken from below...from the depth of human

suffering... with a view to the transformation of a world of fears and tears into a new order of peace and justice, laughter and joy” (Costas 1989:xiii). Poor people are also aspiring to moments when they would be able to genuinely rejoice, because they have been freed from the fetters of poverty. They hope to see the day when they will be able to smile, because they have been relieved from the hardships of poverty. We need to understand that poverty is depressing. Just the sight and smell of squalor are horrid. Imagine how obnoxious it must be to those who live their lives in such a dismal environment. It is in such places that they have their homes, *spaza* shops, makeshift playgrounds and entertainment centres. To them this has become the atmosphere in which they, ordinary people, continue to live daily.

Some of the poor we know, have, despite adversity, not allowed their lives to spiral into pessimism. They still live with a sense of hope, notwithstanding abject poverty, humiliation and suffering. The poor have continued to draw strength from their faith and their spirituality to face their adversities. Fackre says about them, remembering their tribulation:

“To live in the Spirit is to experience joy when all around seem so sad, to hope even where there seems to be so little to be hoped for... That is what the message of the cross is all about: life through death and hope beyond it... Where there is hope there is certainty of love, because there is God – the Alpha and the Omega, the great One from whom no one, nor anything, can separate us” Rom. 8:31ff (Costas 1989:xii).

They still continue to survive even when their living conditions are scandalous and below the level of human dignity. When one observes their situation, one is left wondering at the resilience of the human spirit. They do not succumb to despair because of their hope. “That hope as an evangelical antidote to despair cannot be practiced triumphantly but requires an ecclesial sense of vulnerability, formed by the truth of the cross as an ecclesial marking”(Brueggemann 2001:6). It is hope that for some comes from the strength of knowing that they are members of a faith community. They have brothers and sisters in Christ who stand in solidarity with them, sharing the challenges of the struggle



against poverty with them. In that community they find support and assurance in times of need.

This is not the kind of hope that will maintain the status quo of suffering, inequality and oppression. Rather, it is a hope that encourages the poor to intensify their fight against marginalization. The danger exists, however, that hope may lead to apathy. This is how Botman (2001:75-76) describes this hope:

“The category of hope has itself often led to quietism, passivity, and paralysis. The gift of God becomes something that one should wait for. One is challenged to be patient and willing to endure suffering until it comes to pass. In such situations, hope functions as a narcotic of the people. We therefore have to ask whether there is a relationship between hope and action... We are not merely called to act in anticipatory hope. Our mission in the twenty-first century is to confess hope in action following God’s actions in our times... We are called to confess hope in action.”

Hope should not be allowed to emasculate the poor in their struggle against poverty. They must not just become ‘submissive’ victims when deprivation is giving them a death-dealing blow. Hope should steer their just wrath against subjugation. We salute the poor for their courage to combat poverty. “Poverty in Africa presents enormous challenges. The quest for dignity depends on how successfully Africa’s people manage to struggle out of the dehumanising poverty that afflicts the majority of them”(Belshaw, Calderisi & Sugden 2001: 26). The struggle against penury should restore the humanity of those that have been marred by it. Hope means drawing strength from God’s accompanying presence, and trusting that in the struggle against poverty God’s justice will ultimately prevail. It is the conviction that the poor are not meant to be perpetual casualties of deprivation.

When one looks at the reality of poverty in South Africa, however, one might be tempted to be cynical. It is evident that poverty eradication is a daunting task for all the stakeholders within our nation. We know that the disparity that is present in our society cannot be redressed overnight. The levels of impoverishment are phenomenal and ever

increasing. Botman (2001:77 –78) suggests, “The world needs prophetic imagination. Only prophetic imagination will be able to look for and see the new acts of God in this world, here and now.” We must always be able to see God engaged in shaping our future to have better possibilities than our present realities. We cannot resign ourselves to the morbid factors of poverty as an ultimate and unchangeable reality for the poor in Africa. We must not undermine our potential as Africans to attain fundamental transformation of our continent and individual countries in the context of the present and future challenges. Africa is fortunate to be rich with all the necessary resources in terms of land, water, vegetation, minerals, people, climate animals, culture and spirituality. We should be using these resources to our advantage to eliminate poverty. There are a lot of negative factors, both internal and external to Africa, which have created this widespread of destitution. Nevertheless, this does not legitimise the view that poverty in Africa cannot be alleviated, since Africa has the potential to provide a decent life for the majority of its people. Ortega (2001:119-120) proposes:

“We also have to proclaim that God can create new social possibilities beyond ‘the shrunken horizons of defeat and submissive docility.... The movement is emotional, liturgical and imaginative: it requires forming a vision of the future free of the fearful dreams of entrenched power.... We have to fashion a vision of the future with new ways of talking and acting to express the new social possibilities of community transformation in terms of the neediest. We have to listen to the call God has made for us to re-enter into the pain of the world and the possibility of renewal and salvation.”

We have to develop that consciousness in the face of many negative forces, and assume that poverty is not the eternal destiny of our country and continent. It is would be a travesty of our evangelical tenets to assume that the bad news of impoverishment cannot be redressed by our just God.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

We have provided a panoramic view of the reality of poverty in South Africa, with some reference into the historical factors that have contributed to the making of our nation, and

the extent of poverty. In trying to understand impoverishment in Africa, we have cited some statistics; some of that data provided by scientific research is controversial, however, because some of the findings and conclusions of the researchers are disputed by policy-makers and government agencies. But, controversy does not cancel the fact that the extent of poverty in our community is extremely high, even before we attempt to analyse the negatives in our society. Whether we are researchers, civic leaders, professionals, theologians, politicians, entrepreneurs or just ordinary people, we cannot deny the occurrence of poverty in our community. We may have conflicting opinions in our analysis of this deprivation but the truth is that we continue to see disturbing levels of poverty in our country. It would not be helpful to minimize the problem, when it is such a serious socio-economic, political and spiritual issue.

Poverty in South Africa is the general context in which we, as Christians have to be engaged in Christ's ministry and fulfil the Lord's mandate of salvation. Padilla suggests:

“We begin... by analysing our situation, listening to the questions raised within it... Lack of a good understanding of the real issues involved in living in a particular situation will be reflected in inadequate or misdirected questions, and this will hinder our understanding of the relevance of the biblical message to the situation”(cited by Costas 1989:8).

The pertinent question is how do we fulfil that mandate in the face of poverty and how do we minister to the poor? The prevalence of poverty in our community is so damaging that we cannot ignore it if we are to be faithful to our calling as witnesses for Christ. Grasping the realities of destitution can help us to shape our perception of our society, as well as our approach and ministry to our people. This insight can be very significant in transforming us to be compassionate ministers of the gospel amongst the poor, and enabling us to join them in their struggle as they deal with issues that emanate from their world. The socio-historical context of poverty has implications for evangelisation. As Tsele (1997: 85) stated, “The salvific measure and moral content of our faith should be judged by the human victims it seeks to salvage from poverty, suffering, sin and death.” Our witness is amongst people whose lives have been devalued by years of marginalization. Through our ministry amongst the disadvantaged we must contribute

towards them being emancipated from the ravages of deprivation. They must ultimately reach a state of blessedness where they may experience life in its wholeness: in dignity, peace, health, justice, unity, liberty and reconciliation with God. I share the perception of ‘mission as transformation’. Our missionary activities must result in an improvement in personal lives and societal issues. Conditions that are not consistent with the demands of the gospel should be transformed to become commendable to God.

## CHAPTER 3

### A BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON POVERTY

In this chapter I explore the biblical and theological foundations of the Church's witness amongst the poor. Reading through the Scriptures one discovers certain foundational principles that are imperative in defining the Christian's mission, ministry and message. This is an attempt to consolidate my theological position as I review the Christian witness and its call for social engagement in a historical context of deprivation. Maguire writes,

“The life and the words of Jesus and the teachings of his Church call us to serve those in need and work actively for social and economic justice. As community of believers, we know that our faith is tested by the quality of justice amongst us, that we can best measure our life together by how the poor and vulnerable are treated”(Thompson 2000:1).

The witness of Christians must also be informed and shaped by a sound and critical reflection of the Scriptures so that we can be in position to serve society with the gospel.

#### 3.1. God and the Poor

##### 3.1.1 The Phenomenon of Poverty

The Scriptures recognize that poverty will continue to be an experience that will accompany humanity in its development, as it has been through all the stages of our human evolution. It is an issue that we will always have to deal with. We read in Deuteronomy 15:11: “For the poor will never cease from the land; therefore I command you, saying, ‘You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and needy, in your land’”(cf. John 12:8). “The oft-quoted statement of Jesus, *The poor you will always have with you...* [This] should never be understood as an expression of resigned despair or as a word of indifference toward the poor. As the Father is kind and merciful to the ungrateful and selfish, so should the sons of the Father act” (Lk 6:35- 36) (Pilgrim 1981:171). Poverty is a giant that we as human beings have had to engage through all the

epochs of our history. And in the future, when we advance on all fronts, whether it be in the arena of technology, human sciences, business science and natural sciences we, will still have to deal with poverty, using all the innovations emerging from those fields. We do not fully know the extent and nature of poverty, but it will always be there. God does not shy away from deprivation as if it did not occur. The Scriptures do not endorse an escapist mentality that just withdraws into the euphoric denial of poverty, when it is clearly visible in our society. Poverty has been a multigenerational human challenge. We can trace it into the origins of our societies.

Poverty is an ever-present challenge. It still is a reality that humans cannot simply wish away. All the evidences of poverty are visible in our society. Dussel writes, “Every system, every totality, produces its poor. Every freedom, every revolution, creates new poor. Every morality, i.e. every prevailing social order as a system of practices, as a totality, proves unable or unwilling, to allow for the other as the other” (Walton 1994:147). Deprivation will continue to develop concurrently with all socio-economic-political ideologies, systems and structures. Human existence has never been immune from poverty. Pilgrim (1981:24 – 25) says,

“Doubtless the most familiar sections of the Old Testament on the theme of the poor are the prophetic warnings and judgments addressed to the wealthy and the powerful during the periods of Israel’s monarchy. It was especially during this time of the monarchy in both the northern and the southern kingdoms that greater social disparities developed, bringing with them increasing oppression and exploitation. Out of this social and political period of crisis in Israel emerged the most unique religious phenomenon in the world’s history, the prophetic movement. In the name of God of Israel, who called them...to be his spokesmen, the prophets directed their words against the social injustices of the people and the rulers and became staunch defenders of the poor and powerless.”

Yet, even in our times we still wrestle with the same practices that the early prophets condemned. The prevalence of poverty permeates through sophisticated and advanced societies to the very simple and developing nations. Sometimes the tables are turned; once accomplished and materially rich individuals, companies, regions and nations have

joined the ranks of the poor. Former so-called superpowers are vanquished. We have also seen the once poor progress to the ranks of the 'haves', the affluent and the prosperous. Poverty is a human and earthly phenomenon that will continue to be a challenge to us:

- Globally
- Nationally
- Regionally
- Locally
- In the family.

In the Bible one can perceive a sense of pragmatism. It teaches a sober approach when investigating the issue of deprivation. In my analysis of poverty I have emphasized that it is a multigenerational challenge that is part of our human existence. It goes beyond grand poverty eradication plans like the Millennium plans, Agenda 21, NEPAD, just to mention a few. Our predecessors and their ancestors were confronted by this challenge. We also, in our time, have joined the fight against poverty. We must continue the prophetic movement against marginalization. "The citing of evidence against the people is long and all too familiar – ... fraudulent trade (Amos 8:4-5) ... theft of land (Mic.2: 1 -2), violence against the poor (Ezek 16:48), wasteful affluence amid poverty (Amos 4:1, 6:4f)..." (Pilgrim 1981:25). Poverty eradication has been a long struggle that is recorded in Biblical history. The prophets challenged those who committed misdeeds that contributed to the suffering of the innocent. We can add to the list, to include violations of the labour law, consumer rights and a litany of other violations. We are continuing the struggle in an imperfect world, populated by flawed individuals and societies. Dussel says, "But in every human situation there are the poor, the oppressed, who constitute the correlative of sin and domination of sin. These here and now poor are concrete persons, objectively determinable in the real worlds of the Aztecs, Incas, Chinese, Bantus, capitalists, socialists" (Walton 1994:147). This is the reason that even as South Africans we are facing the challenge of poverty. We are no exception. We are probably dealing with poverty that has mutated into different forms to those in antiquity. It is with this insight that we have to pursue our evangelistic endeavours. We have to preach the Gospel in a human situation in which poverty is pervasive. Therefore, our witness will take place in this social and historical context of destitution.

### 3.1.2 The Phenomenon of Wealth

God does not necessarily demonise wealth in the Scriptures. Some of the saints in the Bible are quite affluent. It does not appear as if this was morally unacceptable before God. “There is a continuous tradition running throughout the Old Testament that regards possessions as a sign of God’s blessings” (Pilgrim 1981:19). Wealth was considered to be a gift of God’s grace. Scripture says, “And you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day”(Deut.8: 18). The Israelites, after their deliverance from slavery in Egypt, were empowered by God. The God of their covenant, who delivered them from oppression, promised them wealth. By doing this, God was fulfilling a promise, He had made to their ancestors. “This is true already in the patriarchal narratives of Genesis, which describe, often in detail, the considerable wealth of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, or Joseph in Egypt (Gen 13:2; 26:13; 30:43; 40:41)” (Pilgrim 1981:19). There is no sign when reading the Scriptures that God was disturbed by their wealth. Rather, we see these people being affirmed as the icons of faith and obedience to God. They become respected people who continue to inspire the faith of the faithful. “This positive view of possession is also apparent in the latter Wisdom traditions. Although there is a sharp criticism of the rich as well, as we shall see, wealth is generally accepted as a self-evident blessing of life and given due praise... The final editor of Job attributes the double restoration of Job’s fortune at the end of his long period of testing to the hand of God (Job 42:10)” (Pilgrim 1981:20). This tradition has contributed towards a perspective that upholds God as the generous provider of abundance.

Side by side with this positive view of material comfort, there is a focus on justice and sharing. God expects those who are wealthy to be just and generous. Through sharing, wealth can be put to worthy uses in society. “Their proper use occurs within the context of agape-love, where caring for the poor, sharing with those in need, and doing good even to one’s enemies receive the highest priority”(Pilgrim 1981:146). God promises to act



against those who have a prosperity propped up by inequality and oppression. Rather, the rich are challenged to be generous in supporting the poor. Pilgrim (1981:120) says,

“Conversely, there are some passages in the Old Testament which imply that poverty is a punishment from God. We see this in the legal traditions, where poverty is one of the threats used against the violators of the Law (Deut 28:15 – 24; Lev. 14 – 26). Likewise the prophets can threaten evildoers with loss of their treasured luxuries and a life of ‘sackcloth’ instead of their ‘rich robe’ (Is 3:24). The oppressed, too, threaten their persecutors with poverty.”

We can draw an inference from the Scriptures that the rich who exploit the poor will be ultimately condemned to poverty when God’s justice is meted out in the course of history. According to Bosch (1991:99) in his exposition of the Gospel of Luke,

“The rich are primarily those who are greedy, who exploit the poor, who are making money that they do not even allow themselves the time to accept the invitation to a banquet (Lk 14:18f), who do not notice the Lazarus at their gate (16:20), who conduct a hedonistic lifestyle but are nonetheless (or, rather, because of this) choked by cares about those riches (8:14).”

They will not remain untouchable in the power that they misuse against the weak. History bears witness of this, since many oppressive regimes, groups, families and individuals have been vanquished. Some have even been dethroned even peacefully by the course of justice. Bosch (1991:99) says,

“The rich are thus also the arrogant and the powerful who abuse power. They are, supremely, the impious who are bent only on the things of this world and therefore are ‘not rich towards God’ (Lk 12:21) or ‘paupers in the sight of God’ (NEB). In essence this means that, through their avarice, haughtiness, exploitation of the poor, and godlessness, they have willfully and consciously placed themselves outside of the range of God’s grace.”

Even though the Bible seems to entertain a positive view of affluence, the New Testament also contains many warnings about the dangers of wealth. One of them is unbridled greed, which makes people, even when they are wealthy already seek to acquire even more. They become obsessed with an uncontrolled desire for personal enrichment; and refuse to give others a chance to have their needs and aspirations

satisfied. Possessions are harmful when they become a controlling force in your life and sidetrack you from the purposes of God.

### **3.1.3 God's Concern for the Poor**

God takes poverty seriously, and has a greatest concern for the poor. The Prophets articulated God's concern for those who are disadvantaged. The poor have a special place in God's heart. There is no part of their suffering, wherever it occurs, that escapes God's attention and scrutiny. The poor, therefore, are not alone in their struggle, but God is with them.

#### **God Identifies With The Poor**

God is a God of the poor. God chooses to identify with them in their repulsive existence. We all know that the conditions of poverty are so abhorrent that many would not like to relate with the poverty-stricken. Yet, God opts to be known as the God of the underdogs, the downtrodden, who are experiencing oppression and hardship. God, who is the focus of Christianity worldwide, whether it is in the 'North' or the 'South' is not ashamed to be associated with the poor. The Psalmist describes God thus: "A father of the fatherless, defender of the widows, is God in His Holy habitation" (Ps 68:2). God is intimately connected to those who are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse by the powerful. Disadvantaged widows are chosen to become members of God's family. God's presence is also felt in situations of poverty. God identifies with the poor, God has chosen to be amongst the poor. This means that God is present in the social and historical context of poverty. Therefore, to be deprived does not imply to be forsaken by God.

God identifies with the poor because He loves the poor. This does not, however, imply that the poor monopolize the love of God. Scripture says, "The Lord is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His work" (Ps 145:9). God does not love the poor at the expense of the affluent. But God affirms His love for the poor even when people treat them scandalously. God took special care of Israel when they were oppressed and needy

(Ps 68:9 -10). God loves those whose lives are threatened by poverty. This love is not a static love that does not do anything. “God’s love”, says Forsyth “is love in holy action, in forgiveness, in redemption. It is God’s movement towards his creatures for the purpose of communion” (Costas 1989:73). God’s love is expressed through God’s deeds of grace in pardoning those who are sinners, who do not deserve his graciousness. The poor are also summoned to receive God’s forgiveness because they are also sinners who need God’s pardon. The same love that sanctifies through God’s grace that has been abundantly provided through Christ redeems them from all forces of darkness. It is this love that redeems them from poverty, from the deprivation that is wrongly imposed on them, and from the injustice that violates their human rights. As Fung has noted,

“A person is not only a sinner, a person is also the sinned against.... Men and women are not only wilful violators of God’s law, they are also the violated.

This is not in a behaviouristic sense, but in a theological sense, in terms of sin, the domination of sin, and of our struggle against sin ... to the point of shedding our blood (Heb.12: 4).... [Humankind] is lost, lost not only in the sins [of its] own heart but also in the sinning grasp of the principalities and powers of the world, demonic forces which cast a bondage over human lives and human institutions and infiltrate their very textures” (cited by Costas 1989:22).

The poor are sinners, but have also been wronged by others in society. Their marginalization is an abomination against God. Even as we witness amongst them, we need to recognize that they are sinners but they also have been wronged by a society that has created their impoverishment. Thus, in our ministry, we will have to address the issues of their having been disadvantaged.

### **God’s Preferential Option For The Poor**

Gods reveals himself as the deliverer of the poor. The Psalmist says, “All my bones shall say, Lord, who is like you, delivering the poor from him who is too strong for him, yes, the poor and the needy from him who plunders him”(Psalm. 35:10). God takes part in the struggles of the poor to end their misery. God sides with the disadvantaged when they are oppressed. “The point is rather that the poor are the first, though not the only ones, on

which God's attention focuses and that, therefore, the church has no choice but to demonstrate solidarity with the poor"(Bosch 1991:436). God is the one who authenticates their struggle against poverty and orchestrates their freedom. "He raises the poor out of the dust, and lifts the needy out of the ash heap, that He may seat him with princes, with the princes of His people" (Ps. 113: 7-8). God is actively engaged in taking the poor out of the indecent conditions of squalor. According to the Kairos Document:

"Throughout the Bible God appears as the liberator of the oppressed: 'For the plundered poor, for the needy who groan, now I will act, *Yahweh*' (Ps 12:5). God is not neutral. He does not attempt to reconcile Moses and Pharaoh, to reconcile the Hebrew and slaves with their Egyptian oppressors, or reconcile the Jewish people with any of their later oppressors... Oppression is a crime and it cannot be compromised with, it must be done away with... 'God, who does what is right, is always on the side of the oppressed'"(Ps. 103:6)(Logan 1988:33 – 34).

Poverty is socially shameful; no one will welcome it into his or her life. It is rejected and despised like trash. God works in the life of the desperate to give them a good life amongst the most accomplished of his people. God helps them to join the company of others who belong to Him and that He has already affirmed and blessed. When God redeems the poor and the needy, He radically alters their poverty for a far better life. God desires to uplift the poor to a higher level of life where they can no longer be touched by their former poverty.

The poor are constantly exposed to oppression, but God is their defender. In terms of the Scriptures God is described as God who condemns the marginalization the poor. God is therefore, the God of all just courses in our world. According to Boff (1984:59),

"God is not only the supreme guarantor of a just order, as we are accustomed to think. His principal activity is the defence of the rights of the powerless, the persecuted, and the poor. God does not side with the mighty, then, who have the law at their disposition and utilize it to their own advantage. God sides with those violated in their dignity and their justice."

God is the guardian of human rights. In fact, any transgression against the rights of the poor is like a direct attack against God. "The needs and rights of human beings have been

violated and one of the results is poverty. This is not what the Lord wills. That is certain” (Pilgrim 1981:21). God defends the poor when they are taken down. The Scriptures record, “He who mocks the poor reproaches his Maker; he who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished” (Prov.17: 5). God protects the poor because they are human beings that God created in His image. The abject conditions of poverty do not cause Him to be ashamed of them. Though their lack is undesirable, it does not make them lesser human beings before God. Poverty in our world is a cause for mockery. To be poor in our world means to be humiliated. It means to be disrespected as a human being, to be despised even by people who do not know your background or anything about your plight. Poor people are always subject to unkind, discriminatory and abusive attitudes and actions. They are regarded as a nuisance and eyesore in decent neighbourhoods. The very people we despise because of their ‘uncultured’ appearance, and behaviour, however, will be protected by God when we ill-treat them. It is sin to despise your neighbour (Prov 14:21). When we offend the poor, we offend God. All acts of callousness against the poor constitute callousness against God. When we show prejudice against the disadvantaged we indirectly discriminate against their God. But, if we treat them compassionately, God would respond kindly to us. We read that, “He who has pity on the poor lends to the Lord, and He will pay back what he has given” (Prov.19:17). When we are generous to the marginalized, God will be indebted to us.

God as the deliverer and protector of the powerless outlaws any thought and act of discrimination against the poor or any other person. Since, poverty makes the poor easy targets for victimization, God bars anyone from treating them unjustly. “Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor, let none of you plan evil in his heart against his brother” (Zech. 7:10). It is an unethical practice to exploit others simply because they are vulnerable. To be poor entails more than just living without the basic necessities; it means constant exposure to unfair treatment in society. In Job’s writings we learn that poor people do aspire to a better life (see. Job 15:16). They do not enjoy being trapped in a vicious circle of poverty. They are optimistic and want to progress out of the gutters. But unjust socio-political and economic conditions keep them down. It is discrimination that causes some to resign themselves to the oppressive conditions of

poverty. They submissively accept scarcity as a way of life. They struggle to live a normal life under abnormal conditions. In the bygone era of *apartheid* in South Africa those among the oppressed who opposed injustice, were viewed as troublemakers disturbing the social order. Consequently, many of the oppressed adapted themselves to oppression, due to their fear of the oppressor. They became quiet and passive. Some even developed theological positions to justify their silence. This does not necessarily imply that initially they were hopeless people. They collaborated with the unjust system hoping to gain favour and a better life for their communities. God rejects injustice, especially when practiced by a community that themselves were once treated as underdogs in the past. Israel of antiquity, like South Africans, have a painful legacy of oppression (Deut.24: 18). They are therefore expected to show extreme sensitivity towards the poor, and wrath against any subversion of justice against any member of their community. “With these words, Yahweh affirms his promise to come to the aid of the poor who cry out for relief and to punish evildoers” (Pilgrim 1981:23). Unfortunately, some people suffer from a convenient amnesia; they forget where they come from, and that they were once repressed. In the comfort of their hard-won freedom, they slip into the wicked practices of the past oppressors.

#### **3.1.4 Jesus Identifying with the Poor**

Jesus lived in poverty. Christ never experienced a sheltered life. Poverty was a reality that Jesus had to face in his time on earth. It was an experience that became part of his background. According to Padilla (1985:171 –172),

“The picture of Jesus that emerges out of the Gospels is that of a person who knew economic poverty throughout his entire life. His birth took place without the normal comforts; in a feeding trough of animals (Lk 2:7)...Quite early in his life Jesus was a refugee (Matt 2:14). He grew up in Galilee, an underdeveloped region of Palestine (Matt 2:22 – 23), in the home of a carpenter, and this placed him in a position of disadvantage in the eyes of many of his contemporaries (see Jn. 1:46). During his ministry, he had no home he could call his own (Lk 9:58); he

depended on the generosity of a group of women for the provision of his needs (Lk 8:2).”

From the cradle to the grave, he experienced the suffering associated with the poor. He was raised in poverty and he lived in poverty throughout his adulthood. “The first fact of Jesus’ presence among the poor is that it was the presence of a poor Man among the poor”(Escobar & Driver 1978:47). He lived in the same conditions of poverty as the poor ordinary folks of his world. “Jesus’ poverty is a hard historical fact unanimously portrayed in all four Gospels” (Padilla 1985:172). The poverty that Jesus faced was a concrete human experience. “The assumption of our battered humanity (our flesh) by the eternal Son forges a bond of solidarity with him in our anguish” (Boff 1984:108). Christ did not have a metaphysical body that could not be touched by the hardships of poverty. Rather, he had the same physical body that all human beings have, a body that was affected by the death – dealing blows of poverty, just like the rest of the poor (Phil.2: 6 – 8). Christ’s body was flesh and blood, just like ours.

God experienced poverty in the person of Christ. God was subjected to the same pain, suffering and oppression that the poor know so well. God became poor for our sake. “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich”(2 Cor. 8:9). God in Christ was subjected to poverty in order to overcome it on behalf of humanity. Boff says,

“The Praxis of Jesus and his disciples was thus one of service and suffering and subversion. It was characterized by truthfulness, inclusiveness, and non-violence. It was a historical community infused with eschatological joy and hope, celebrating in table fellowship the presence of God in the presence of Jesus. That person, rejected and broken, remains for the church the figure of human wholeness” (Walton 1994:233).

Christ went through pain, suffering and death for the sake of his people. God through Christ, entered human history, characterized by destitution. God did not include poverty into the passion of Christ to romanticize it, but rather to destroy its legitimacy. Orlando Costas declares,

“In Jesus Christ, God became part of history, identifying with its most humble expression and suffering its deepest pain.... In him and through him God assumes the identity of the poor, and becomes known as a ‘human and sensitive God,’ the ‘God with a sun scorched face’ who ‘sweats’ in the street” (Costas 1989:27).

The conditions of poverty are not the ideal and ultimate life God envisages for his children. Poverty contradicts the very life that God wants to make possible for His people through Christ. There is, however, nothing wrong when someone chooses a life of voluntary poverty as service to God and his or her community. “It is clear that Jesus did at times demand literal poverty as a condition of discipleship... The renunciation of all we have is genuine to the extent that it is concretely expressed, as it was expressed in the case of Jesus and his disciples” (Padilla 1985:180) (cf. Lk 14: 26 – 32; Mk 10:20). This is a different kind of poverty to the one the poor are facing, which looks like an inescapable reality imposed on them by unjust socio-historical factors. The poor have no other options in life but poverty.

### **3.2 The Message of Salvation**

#### **3.2.1 The Concept of Salvation In The Old Testament Perspective**

We start with the perspective that espouses God as the source of human salvation. Throughout the Old Testament God is depicted as the ‘Saviour of His people.’ “Firstly salvation is the work of God. God is always seen as the author of salvation. The people are rescued by God (Hos. 7:7), who alone can save the flock (Ezek. 34:22), for there is none other who can do it (Isa.43: 1). ...Humble, trusting faith is the way to receive God’s salvation” (Sider 1993:85). It is God who initiates all movement towards the deliverance of those who are in distress. Israel as the people of God had a strong conviction that God was their Saviour. They counted on God to save them in times of need, whether in times of famine, leadership crisis and even war. They put their hope in the Lord who would be their deliverer. The concept of salvation in the Old Testament is God-centred. People can only receive salvation as a gift from God. It is granted to God’s people out of the



goodness of the love of God for His people. People have to respond, to accept the gift of God's salvation in their lives. Nicholls and Wood (1996:7 – 8) stated,

“While the good news begins with personal salvation it does not end there. It is about the new and transformed communities of people, living in peace with God and in harmony among themselves. Thus the primary goal of sharing good news is to create households of faith and kingdom communities in which Christ reigns. Community helps to sustain every effort to overcome poverty and oppression.”

The experience of personal salvation must ultimately end in some form of societal change. People must never again be subjected to any form of injustice and suffering.

Secondly, salvation occurs in the concreteness of our societal reality. It is the salvation of a people or person in the real social environment. The experience of salvation should not necessarily result in people downplaying their social reality as if it is beyond God's redemption. “There is a constant tendency in the church to trivialize the nature of salvation, as if it meant no more than a self-reformation, or the forgiveness of sins, or a personal passport to paradise, or a private mystical experience without social or moral consequences”(Stott 1999:38). People who need God's salvation have a socio-historical background that is unique to them. Their so-called ‘spiritual’ and ‘individualized’ experience of salvation has social implications even though it might be tempting to deny them. “... Salvation happens in history and is social, corporate, and communal. Exodus 14:30 is typical: ‘That day the Lord saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians.’.... For Israel, God's single most important act of salvation was a concrete historical event that liberated the whole community” (Sider 1993:86 –87). Salvation as presented in the Old Testament, has both a horizontal and a vertical dimension to it. God's people, Israel, could receive atonement for their sins and also be liberated from oppression with a promise to be relocated to a land where they would be free to worship and serve God. “Biblical faith is, above all, faith in a God who gives self-revelation through historical events, a God who saves in history” (Gutierrez 1988:88). When the Children of Israel were in bondage in Egypt, God delivered them. God freed them from slavery and oppression. “The liberation of Israel is a political action. It is the breaking away from a situation of despoliation and misery and the beginning of the construction of a just and

comradely society. It is the suppression of disorder and the creation of a new order” (Gutierrez 1988:88). In their struggle against oppression, Israel put their trust in Jehovah. God sent Moses who led their struggle until they attained their freedom and departed from Egypt. “Likewise, to struggle against misery and exploitation and to build a just society is already to be part of the saving action, which is moving in its complete fulfilment” (Gutierrez 1988:91). We cannot negate the importance of justice in God’s salvific actions for His people. God as a just God wants His people to be a just community (Isa.30: 18, 61:8).

God’s salvation arises from his covenantal promises to his people. God makes promises that He intends to fulfil. These promises unfold in God’s saving acts that lead people to a life of blessedness in accordance with God’s purpose for them. Their life has meaning, since they live anticipating the fulfilment of those promises. God announced through Jeremiah that He watches over his word to perform it (Jer. 1:12). God has made many other promises that are eschatological in nature and are recorded in the Bible. Gutierrez (1988:91 - 92) says,

“The Bible is the book of the Promise, the Promise made by God to human beings, the efficacious revelation of God’s love and self communication; simultaneously it reveals humankind to itself... The promise is revealed, appeals to humankind, and is fulfilled throughout history... Human history is in truth nothing but the history of the slow, uncertain, and surprising fulfilment of the Promise.”

God thus becomes part of human history, since those who believe in God are guided by God’s promises. These promises embrace all aspects of life, both the temporal and the spiritual realities. The promises shape our lives daily. The future towards which they are guided ultimately becomes the past, a past that has been influenced by God. “The action of Yahweh in history and at the end of history are inseparable” (Gutierrez 1988:95). The God of the covenant is the same yesterday, today and forever (Heb 13:8). God addresses us in the heat of our present situations as we call on him hopefully with our issues. He responds adequately to our present needs, yet also points us to a life that is unfolding with far greater prospects.

### 3.2.2 The Prophetic Nature of Witnessing

In the Old Testament texts, particularly in Deutero-Isaiah, one is introduced to the prophetic nature of witnessing. “The key text in Deutero-Isaiah’s theology of evangelisation is found in Isaiah 52:7:

How beautiful upon the mountains  
Are the feet of him, who brings good tidings,  
Who publishes peace, which brings good tidings of good,  
Who publishes salvation,  
Who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns.’

Isaiah 52:7 is, therefore, a foundational text for the New Testament, for the work of the New Testament Evangelist is patterned after Deutero-Isaiah’s description of the divine herald, who brings glad tidings of peace, proclaims salvation, and declares that God reigns”(Costas 1989:34).

At the time of Israel’s captivity in Babylon, the prophets proclaimed a message that was the good news of God’s peace, salvation and the kingdom of God. Those who brought such a prophetic message were to be welcomed as messengers of God. This message was given in the socio-historical context of oppression, and was intended for those in bondage. According to Costas (1989:35),

“By peace (*shalom*) is meant social well-being, productivity, creativity, and harmonious relations with the neighbour and the environment. This is made possible by the just ordering of life, which guarantees that the weak and the oppressed shall be lifted up and put alongside the strong and mighty. Similarly, salvation means liberation from captivity and restoration of that which was destroyed; it means straightening the crooked ways, leveling the uneven ground, making plain the rough places (Is. 40:4). In short, it means holistic reconciliation – with God, the neighbour, and the land.”

The prophetic manner of witnessing would set a precedent for the New Testament. It contains a lesson for evangelists not to shy away from dealing with socio-political issues, especially when witnessing amongst the poor who need to be empowered.

Sometimes, when we talk about a prophetic ministry, some people mistake it to mean a doom and gloom ministry, preaching condemnation and judgment. Although there is a place for that when there is no repentance, but obstinate opposition to the will of God, prophetic evangelisation is about sharing the good news with those who are hard pressed. “Evangelisation is thus a positive and not a negative talk, a joyful rather than a tearful announcement, a communication of hope instead of damnation”(Costas 1989:36). It is a witness that brings consolation to those who are suffering. Such a prophetic witness is expressed in both words and deeds. It does not proclaim peace and salvation without practical engagement in helping those who are disadvantaged. This is no mere spiritual ‘pep talk’ without redemptive action. Costas (1989:46) says,

“In a world threatened by death, where life is devalued by poverty, economic exploitation, socio-political oppression, racism, sexism, the arms race, and plain human selfishness, evangelisation cannot be limited to religious gestures and verbal formulas. The situation requires that evangelisation fulfil its fundamental intention – namely, to transmit the good news of *shalom*, to declare publicly God’s salvation and to affirm God’s righteous and liberating reign.”

In the context of poverty, we need a witness that addresses all the socio-historical issues created by impoverishment, one that does not gloss over the needs of the miserable. There must be a deliberate effort in our ministry, to engage in social action in manner that makes us to work for the freedom of the disadvantaged.

### **3.2.3 The Message of the Gospel**

The gospel enumerates the many ways in which God delivers his people from all bondage. God’s people are troubled by many problems, both personal and corporate. Some of the issues are spiritual and others socio-political or economic. God does not abandon people to their own wisdom to solve their own problems. God has been reaching out to humanity through history, unfolding his plan of redemption for humanity. “The gospel is the story of the sending of the only begotten Son of the Father to redeem the world. In this action we see reflected the foundation of God’s existence; holy love. God is

both ‘light’ and ‘love’” (1 John 1:5; 4:8, 16) (Costas 1989:73). Jesus’ coming to the world was part of God’s response to our needs in this world. “The Gospels present Jesus as the Messiah who brings the fulfilment of the Old Testament hope”(Padilla 1985:73). His message, ministry, death and resurrection manifested God’s plan for salvation for humankind. Shorter (1994:3) stated,

“Jesus did not bequeath a set of teachings to his followers, a message that was called Christianity. Jesus himself was the Good News. His teachings are centred – almost scandalously – on himself... It is a living and transforming encounter with the risen Christ, a union with him distinguished by all the characteristics of a relationship of mutual love and trust.”

The gospel is about Christ who comes to be closer to us, to call us into a life-giving relationship with him. God, through the person of Christ, ends the alienation between Himself and us. Christ, the Son of God, not an angel or any other agent, is the one who mediates that communion. According to Shorter (1994:3),

“In the Gospels we do not only find words attributed to Jesus. He proclaims who and what he is through the reported actions of his life. Moreover, there is no hiatus or discontinuity between the earthly Jesus and the Christ of the post-resurrection. The passion and the death of Jesus are a recapitulation of his life and the apostles know that the presence of the risen Christ is rooted in an earthly life that really has been lived.”

Jesus himself authenticates his gospel since he is the good news. He is the good news of God that is our salvation. God’s saving word is represented in his person.

The Triune God fulfilled His wish for our redemption through Jesus Christ. God sent His only Son, Jesus, who was endowed with the Holy Spirit. We see the fullness of God’s nature being manifested in how He – as the Trinity – reaches out to humanity to save them. Costas (1989:75 –76) says,

“Indeed, Jesus’ identification with the world on behalf of the Father in his birth, baptism, and ministry; his suffering death as the Father’s atoning offering for sin and the Father’s true representative of the world who took upon himself the sin of the world; and his victorious resurrection, which confirmed the reconciliation of

the world and set in motion a new creation – all of these aspects of the mission of Christ were accomplished by the power of the Spirit.”

The Spirit empowered the Messiah to holistically minister to those who needed to be saved. The power enabled him to preach good news to the poor, to heal the broken hearted, to free the captives, to usher the jubilee, to confront and console those who mourn, to give dignity in the place of humiliation, to give joy for sadness, to bring praise in the place of depression, to rebuild the old ruins and decaying cities, to restore vibrant productivity, reconciliation with God, and restitution of the land (see. Isaiah. 61: 1- 7). The Holy Spirit is the member of the Trinity who is the link between the Father and the Son. The Father and the Son are one through the Spirit. This is the message that should permeate our society through our proclamation as witnesses of God. It must reverberate in our evangelisation.

### **3.2.4 A Call To Conversion**

The radical message of salvation contained in the gospel is a call to repentance. It brings an unequivocal challenge to repent in the context of our socio-historical realities. This was the call that the apostles made in their evangelisation of their society. “Then Peter said to them, repent and let everyone be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”(Acts 2:38). “The gospel issues an invitation to experience new life in the Holy Spirit through repentance and faith in Christ”(Costas 1989:112). The gospel summons us to repent. If we wish to live in a relationship with God and His word, we cannot conduct our lives as we used to before. A significant change needs to take place, a transformation that will completely re-orientate our lives. The word ‘repentance,’ has several meanings in the Bible. According to Sider (1993:103):

“The first is a Greek word, *epistrepho* literally means ‘to turn around’. Its Old Testament equivalent is the word *shub*. *Shub*’ has a very important theological meaning of Israel’s turning from sinful rebellion against Yahweh to total submission to God’s will expressed in the covenant. Similarly, *epistrepho* also has

a theological meaning and refers to turning from the ways of Satan to faith in and submission to Christ.”

Included in this call to repentance is a call to be baptized as a sign of the death of our old carnal life and our endowment with pardoning grace for our sins. Thus it becomes possible for God to usher us, the forgiven, into a new life of the Spirit. We begin to live our new life in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. The second Greek word is *metanoia*, which means, “to change one’s mind or purpose” (Vines 1985: 525). “Jesus’ call to *metanoia* demanded an ‘unconditional turning from all that is against God. It involves the whole walk of the [person] who is claimed by divine Lordship”(Sider 1997: 103). It means to direct your mind towards God’s purpose, so as to ensure that your life is in line with it. The last word that is used in the Bible is *metamelomai*. It means, “to regret something”(Sider 1993:103; c.f. Vines 1985:525). One should have remorse for one’s wrongdoing if one is to experience genuine repentance. All these words as used in the Bible refer to notable change. “They all refer to radical transformation of the thoughts and actions (initiated by divine grace) that happens when a person is drawn to faith in Jesus and submits to him as the unconditional Lord”(Sider 1993:103). These biblical concepts of repentance imply a fundamental, significant and positive change in one’s relationship with God, oneself and others.

It is clear that the call to salvation is a call to conversion, a drastic transformation of one’s entire life. This life becomes a journey of new beginnings, guided by the Spirit of God. This conversion is not human self-reformation or personal improvement. Costas (1989: 113) says,

“First, conversion means a turning away from sins (and self) to God (and God’s work). Second, this act involves a change of mind, which implies abandonment of an old worldview and the adoption of a new one. Third, conversion entails a new allegiance, a new trust, and a new life commitment. Fourth, conversion is but a beginning of a journey and carries implicitly the seeds of new turns. Fifth, conversion is surrounded by the redemptive love of God as revealed in Jesus Christ and witnessed to by the Holy Spirit.”

It is an all-embracing change into the likeness of Christ through the transforming power and the continued presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The rich are challenged to a life of total surrender to Christ. They are no longer to depend on the security of their wealth, prominence, political clout or their network of friends; but rather, to live a life of obedience and total dependency on God. They should be detached from their material endowments and be willing to share them in spreading God's goodwill. Meanwhile, the unjust are challenged to change their oppressive ways and become instruments of God's equity. All people are called to leave their crooked ways and follow Christ into a life that is fully pleasing to God, privately and publicly. "By that we mean that the message of the kingdom involves both repentance and the fruits of repentance; the word of forgiveness and the life of discipleship. The salvation present uniquely in Jesus or the preaching about him carries with it the ethical imperatives of discipleship and obedience"(Pilgrim 1981:166). The hearts and minds of the converted have been renewed to enable them to be credible witnesses of God in their speech and life. They have renounced a way of life that is not compatible with the purposes of God. Whatever matter they refuse to renounce when receiving the saving grace of God will become a hindrance to them in becoming the Disciples of Christ. Such a transformation is not just an instantaneous, one-time experience, but also a life-long process that continues throughout our faith passage.

This conversion has serious implications for the way we live our new life in our familiar social context. We have to begin to live our new life in obedience to the Word of the Lord. This Word places challenges on us that alter our relationships with others to be in line with the will of God. The change that has happened in our inner being must be translated into a God-pleasing public life. But, as we seek to obey God in our society, we experience opposition that would test our commitment to God's demands. "As Christians are coming face to face with the harsh realities of poverty, injustice, oppression, repression, and persecution, they are forced either to stand firm on their commitment and obey God's Word or deny their faith"(Costas 1989:126). Any compromise that would lead us to unfaithfulness to God is an unevangelical option. True discipleship, which is a sign of genuine faith, is an unwavering commitment to obeying God even when one is facing fierce challenges. "This is a faithful saying: For if we died with him, we shall also



live with Him. If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us. If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself”(2 Tim. 2:11 – 13). The only thing that does not change when we compromise our faith, is that God still remains faithful to us, as faithful as He would be if we were obedient to His will. God remains true to who He is and to His Word, irrespective of our response to Him and His Word.

### 3.3 The Kingdom of God

There are different interpretations of the concept of the kingdom of God. These are influenced by respective faiths, traditions and theological backgrounds. According to Ladd, “God’s kingdom ... is His universal rule, His sovereignty over all the earth” (Winter & Hawthorne 1983:53). To others God’s reign refers to the manner in which God exercises His authority as the Lord over our universe for his own glory (see. Ps145: 11). This term can be approached from a ‘this –worldly’ perspective which mainly relates to current issues, or from an ‘other worldly’ perspective which relates to the future. The issue is not choosing one interpretation exclusively and looking at your ultimate choice in a favourable light and negating the latter. I prefer an approach that allows for both perspectives. For the purpose of this study, I do not wish to explore the systematic theology of the interpretation of the reign of God. Yet, we have to have an appropriate understanding of the kingdom of God because it is one of the key teachings of the Christian faith. Verkuyl indicates that;

“The heart of the message of the Old and New Testament is that God, the Creator of the universe and all earthly life, is actively engaged in the reestablishment of His liberating dominion over the cosmos and all of humankind. In seeking out Israel, He sought all of us and our entire world, and in Jesus Christ He laid the foundation of the Kingdom. Jesus Christ, the Messiah ‘promised to the fathers,’ is the *auto basileia*: in Him the kingdom has both come and is coming. In the person, the words and deeds of Jesus, in his life, his death, and his resurrection, the kingdom of God has come, is present, and is coming in an absolutely unique way and with exceptional clarity. In his preaching Jesus divulges the riches, the

*thesaurus* of that Kingdom: reconciliation, the forgiveness of sins, the victory over demonic powers. Standing within the tradition of Mosaic Law, He expounds the core message of the *Thora* and the Prophets; He accomplishes the reconciliation of the world to God; He opens the way to the present and the future Kingdom which demands decisions in all aspects of life” (Van Engen, et al 1993: 72).

The message of the kingdom of God has its roots in God’s covenantal relationship with Israel, which is further developed in the New Testament in the life of Christ and the Church. We shall focus on the way the reign of God is revealed in the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Christ and how it shapes our Christian witness. Sider says, “The reign of God, thrust to the centre of history in the Christ-event, is the horizon within which God’s redemptive purpose is fulfilled. The reign of God (*basileia*) originates with God and expresses God’s saving will and purpose”(1993:9). In exploring this concept we wish to conceptualise our evangelisation stance.

### **3.3.1 The Nature of the Kingdom of God**

The gospel heralds the reign of God in our lives, in the community and the universe. It is a testimony about God who is Lord of the world, God, whose influence is not limited to the church but transcends into our world. According to Boff (1984:36),

“The Gospel, in turn, is nothing but the proclamation of the reign of God; the full and total liberation of all creation, cosmic and human, from all its iniquities, and the integral accomplishment of God’s design in the insertion of all things into his divine life. Concretely, then, the Reign of God translates into community life with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in a universal communion of brothers and sisters in solidarity with one another in the use of the ‘fruit of the earth and the work of human hands.’”

God in Christ reconciled all things that had been alienated from Him (see. Col.1:19 –20). It was God, restoring all disrupted relationships between Himself, people and the rest of creation. The kingdom of God is broader than our individualistic concern for salvation,

even when this concern has its place. The kingdom of God has to have this cosmic proportion since creation has been negatively impacted by sin. Padilla (1985:4-5) says,

“The most categorical affirmation of God’s will to save the world is made in the person and work of his Son Jesus Christ... The world is the object of God’s love (Jn 3:16)... Obviously God’s salvation in Christ Jesus is universal in scope... From the universality of the gospel is derived the universality of the evangelising mission of the church. The gospel’s claim on the world, initiated in Jesus Christ, is continued through his followers. As the Father sent him, so he has sent them into the world”(Jn. 17:18).

It is critical that we comprehend this all-embracing dimension of the gospel as it relates to the extent of our mission as Christians. “The lack of appreciation of the broader dimensions of the gospel will lead inevitably to a misunderstanding of the mission of the church”(Padilla 1985:1). Our mission is a mission to the world. This perspective is even more relevant to us currently, since we live in a global society.

The kingdom of God addresses the personal and public aspects of human life, both spiritual and secular. We should guard against the tendency to separate the mundane aspect of life from our faith. Such tendencies cause us to view life in terms of narrow and detachable categories, in which we divide the spiritual from the secular. When we compartmentalize our lives into such unrelated sections, it causes these ‘entities’ to be separated and contradictory. Arias explain that, “The issue is a holistic gospel for a holistic mission”(Snyder 2001: 62). Real life cannot be divided into separable categories of the spiritual and the secular, personal and public, evangelism and social action. Boff (1988:2) says,

“The Reign of God cannot be privatised in any particular region of the human being, such as soul, or in some spiritual goods, or in the church. The Reign of God is all-embracing, proclaiming the deliverance of every human and cosmic reality from all sin – from the sin of poverty, from the sin of starvation, from the sin of dehumanisation, from the sin of the spirit of vengeance, and from the sin of the rejection of God.”

The kingdom of God addresses the universality and particularity of issues of salvation concurrently, without incongruity. According to Newbigin (1995:66),

“The gospel that Jesus preached is the good news of God’s universal reign. It is directed to the whole human and cosmic reality. And yet it is also bound up with particular names of people and places belonging to particular cultures. It speaks the story of Israel, one people among all the peoples, and of the man whose Hebrew name was Joshua, one man among all the billions who have lived.”

The reign of God has cosmic dimensions, yet a specific people and individuals are still addressed by it, in a way that addresses their unique challenges. “God is over all and in all; not a sparrow falls to the ground without his will”(Newbigin 1995:67). God’s kingdom is not so all embracing, such a mega entity, that particularity becomes insignificant. People’s unique challenges do not dissipate into this huge kingdom that deals with global complexities. Jesus is the good shepherd who knows the sheep in this great flock by name (Jn. 10:3). But, even though we are known individually, we do not seek our salvation in isolation from God’s people, we are part of the flock of God.

The reign of God encapsulates the ‘now’ and ‘tomorrow’ aspects of human reality. God addresses us as human beings who are affected by both our present issues and our future challenges. In Christ, God has already dealt with some of the issues that trouble us in terms of his promises of salvation. But, what we have is the first significant instalment. The fullness is still to come in the glory of the *Parousia*. Sider (1999:56) says,

“In Jesus’ thinking, a fundamental break in history was occurring: ‘The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John [the Baptist]. Since that time, the good news of the kingdom is being preached’ (Luke 16:16). The messianic kingdom has begun... Jesus knew that the kingdom had not reached its culmination. The parables of growth demonstrate that the kingdom grows slowly from now.... Sin and evil continued to flourish so Jesus looked ahead to the close of the age when the kingdom would come in its fullness (e.g. Luke 21:27)... The kingdom had broken decisively into history in the person and the work of Jesus the Messiah. But it would come in its fullness only at the return of the Son of man...”(Matt. 24:30).

The reign of God has not been fully realized yet, but that does not mean it is irrelevant to our present situation. John Driver indicates, “The ministry of Jesus is only the beginning of the end. All that he did, points to the *Parousia*. This messianic presence of the future fills the church with hope and determines the mission of the messianic community”(Shenk 1993:95 –96). Due to its eschatological nature, the end is already revealed in the beginning. In the beginning, God reveals the mystery of what would be the consummation of this kingdom in terms of God’s plan of salvation for humanity and the entire creation.

The kingdom of God is a unique entity when compared with the systems and institutions of this world. God’s kingdom is not an advanced version of our societal systems, institutions and structures. God’s kingdom cannot be reduced to the limited and sin-infected structures of our world. This is how we are to understand Jesus’ assertion, “My Kingdom is not of this world”(John 18:36). “The meaning here is that the reign of God is not of the structure of this world of sin, but of the structure of God in the objective sense: it is God who will intervene (via the mediations he himself will select), and who will heal in its root the whole of reality, raising this world from old to new”(Boff 1984:128). God’s kingdom does not undermine our human systems but seeks to redeem and transform them into realities that will make people live life to the fullest. What we have to understand is that the kingdom of God is a mystery:

“The reign of God is a mystery we do not grasp fully. Although the whole of Jesus’ words and acts was a running commentary on God’s will and reign, at no point did he offer a ...definition. Instead, he spoke in parables and performed deeds that brought God’s saving power into the lives of people. Nonetheless, surprisingly few caught its larger meaning. Even the disciples who formed Jesus’ inner circle did not discern what it was about until after his resurrection and ascension (e.g., Lk 24:25 –27, 44 – 49; Acts 1:3). In the end, the kingdom could be apprehended only through the eyes of faith. It is neither subject to human control nor can it be manipulated for selfish ends”(Shenk 1999:10).

This kingdom will elude our understanding unless we earth our understanding on faith that relies on God’s revelation of this reign, especially in Christ. Furthermore, God is still

actively engaged in our world by His Spirit, and the Spirit keeps on disclosing the purpose of God, God's plan of redemption for the whole creation.

### **3.3.2 The Proclamation of the Kingdom**

Jesus preached the gospel of the kingdom (Matt. 9: 35). The paradigm of the reign of God was central to his ministry, and his deeds corresponded to what he was proclaiming. It was a message that announced the imminent reign of God in our world. "Jesus points to the kingdom as the purpose of his coming"(Sider 1993:51). Thus the church also preaches the gospel of the kingdom, and Christ is at the centre of its proclamation. Driver (1993:103) writes,

"The gospel of the kingdom is best proclaimed by the church when, in the power of the Spirit of the King, it preaches, teaches, and dedicates itself to authentic kingdom activity in the confident hope that God's universal salvific reign of righteousness and peace will be manifest within the church itself, among all humankind, and over all creation."

The good news that stands out of our Christian witness to the world, is the news of God's reign. The gospel of the Kingdom deals with issues covering our entire human life. Verkuyl said in his exposition of the gospel of the kingdom:

"The gospel of the Kingdom addresses itself to all immediate human needs, both physical and mental. It aims to right what is wrong on the earth. It enjoins engagement in the struggle for racial, social, cultural, economic and social justice. Kingdom-centred missiology frees us from the sham dilemmas responsible for much of historical and present evangelical divarication, delivers us from the theological zero-sum game involving false, unbiblical dichotomies between individual and corporate *shalom*, vertical and horizontal reconciliation, word proclamation and comprehensive approach, witness and service, micro- and macro-structural concerns, and so forth. The good news of the Kingdom has to do with all of these things"(Van Engen & Gilliland 1993:73 -74).

The good news of the kingdom is not a neutral and irrelevant notion. Rather, it is the message about God who encounters us in our societal realities, and seeks to transform our settings, and us because they should be in line with God's purpose.

### **The Gospel to the Poor**

Jesus was the messenger who brought good news to the poor. He brought a message of salvation to the impoverished (cf. Lk 7:22). He announced to them, the truth of God's care for them in their destitution. Christ came to make that truth a reality and not just cheap words. Jesus was compassionate to the desperate masses that were responding to his ministry (cf. Mark 8:1 – 10). Thompson (2000:181) says,

“The Hebrew word translated as ‘compassion’ is the plural word for womb. It connotes giving life, nourishing, caring, and tenderness, a warm and gentle embrace... For Jesus, then, God is like a mother who feels for and loves the children of her womb; as followers of Jesus, Christians must imitate God, being compassionate toward each other. Compassion is both a feeling, being moved by the suffering of others, and a way of being, a willingness to share that suffering and do something about it. In and through Jesus, God shares the suffering of humanity and transforms it into new life. Christians are to be compassionate as the Father is compassionate”(c.f. Lk. 6:36).

We cannot be witnesses who harden our hearts and ignore the hardships of people as we share our faith with them. We must not be cold preachers who do not have Jesus' heart and sense of solidarity with the marginalized. Jesus' compassion had a cataclysmic social effect that shook the religious practices of the day. “When compassion led Jesus to touch a leper, heal a woman with constant menstruation, feed the hungry, forgive sinners, and share a meal with tax collectors and prostitutes, it was moving him to challenge the dominant socio-political paradigm of his social world”(Thompson 2000:181). Jesus' compassion caused him to transcend all barriers that segregated the poor, sick and sinners. It is a transforming compassion that confronts social and religious structures that undermine human freedom. These systems are inappropriate because they create

stratified societies that are characterized by inequality. They ultimately prejudice those who are excluded from the benefits and resources of society.

### **Healing and Deliverance from the Forces of Darkness.**

The witness of Christ was accompanied by His acts of healing and banishing of demons from people's lives. Jesus was concerned about the wellness of people who responded to his ministry. He looked at their need for healing in a serious light. This is the reason that the multitudes who congregated around him were sick people (Mk 1:32 – 33). Pilgrim (1981:50) says,

“While sickness strikes everyone, it seems as though the most unfortunate persons are brought to Jesus, so that their sickness and poverty go hand in hand. The exceptions are duly noted by the evangelists, such as a centurion's servant or daughter of a ruler of the synagogue. Most of the sick are the suffering poor – the blind, lame, crippled, paralysed – and the lepers who along with beggars cry out for mercy to the son of David.”

Jesus served them in a society that ignored their needs. In certain instances the religious establishment disapproved of Jesus' ministry. They condemned Jesus' healing ministry that seemed to violate orthodox practices. But Jesus prioritised ordinary people's needs above the demands of conformity to orthodoxy. Jesus opted to heal them on the Sabbath day rather than sending them away troubled, to return on another day. The poor had always been forced to wait, neglected by the established religious and socio-political system of the era. Now the reign of God had dawned – and they were the favoured ones. Jesus also dealt with the demonic powers that disturbed people. Jesus liberated ordinary people from these unclean forces that bound them. “His exorcism of demons is a sign that prior to the eschatological destruction of Satan and his angels in the eternal fire (Matt 25:41) God has invaded Satan's realm as one who enters the strong man's house and binds him” (Matt 12:29; cf. Lk 11:21 – 22)(Padilla 1985:74). Christ came to put into effect the Lordship of God over sickness and evil powers that disturbed his people. Jesus engaged these demonic powers that contested the will of God, and terrorized his people, diminished their quality of life and hampered their liberation.



## **A Welcome to Social Outcasts**

The ministry of Christ embraced into God's fellowship those who had been excluded by discriminatory practices that existed in society. Jesus included those who were ostracized from society through all forms of religious and social norms. These people had probably been declared unholy as a result of moral indiscretions. Christ, however, invites them into the holy fellowship of God. Walton (1994:233) says: "Holiness took the form of wholeness, healing, and inclusiveness. In a discipleship of equals, women, slaves, and children found themselves in prominence. The outcasts and the marginalized found themselves in a new household of brother, sister, and mothers under the gracious parentage of God." Jesus received people who were highly despised in society. He even welcomed the bad people into his fellowship, the kind of people who could be called sinners, extortionists, tax collectors and collaborators with the oppressive systems (c.f. Mark 2:13 – 17). Some of them, especially the tax collectors, were treated with contempt in society. "It is generally assumed that the tax collectors were both wealthy and hated because they consistently cheated and overcharged and because they worked for the Roman oppressor and his puppets. Hence they were socially and religiously ostracized in Jewish society" (Pilgrim 1981:52). These people might have committed social sins. They included the so-called sinners, people such as prostitutes and thieves, who might have had a lifestyle that was contrary to the required morality. Christ did not invite them into his fellowship to condone their sinfulness. Rather, he welcomed them so as to lead them through conversion into the kingdom of God. He refused to be like the conventional religious leaders of the time that snobbishly condemned and excluded these sinners. Their piety was discriminatory and insensitive to those who were religious novices, rather it promoted their religious hierarchy and elitism. "For his critics, the fact that Jesus associated with them [sinners] was sufficient proof that his entire movement stood beyond the pale respectability and was contrary to the intent of God and the good of the community" (Pilgrim 1981:53). People were disqualified for their failure to be orthodox enough in terms of the demands of the established religious fraternity. They were damned for their iniquity, without necessarily being shown the way towards

righteousness. “Therefore we are again put to notice by Luke that the people to whom Jesus ministers are those living on the margin of society, socially, ethically, and religiously. To them the good news is proclaimed, a good news having something to do with the offer of a new status and worth before God and humanity”(Pilgrim 1981: 73). Christ restored those who had been excluded, to fellowship with God and the community of the faithful. Jesus affirmed their dignity as God’s people. “In their encounter with Jesus they met a friendship and acceptance and a new lease of life that led them to genuine repentance and discipleship” (Pilgrim 1981:54). In our witness, we must be inclusive. We must not myopically disqualify people from God’s grace because of our prejudice.

### **The Cross**

The Gospel of the Kingdom is about Christ sacrificing his life for humanity. Christ identified with the poor to the point of death in seeking to ameliorate their suffering. The crucifixion indicates the commitment of God to deal with a plethora of human issues. “Jesus’ death was not a tragic accident but the revelation of God. Indeed, it revealed the mystery of his life and ministry – namely, the provision of a redemptive service for many. Thus the cross became fixed to the identity of Jesus”(Costas 1989:88). We do not interpret Jesus’ death independently from His resurrection – which affirmed his ministry. Jesus had come to enable people to experience life at its best, through his ministry. In the Gospel according to John (10:10), Jesus says, “The thief does not come except to steal, kill and destroy: I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.” There is a tendency to regard the life that Christ was referring to as a purely spiritual and private course of life, without recognizing its other facets. But, we cannot live as if socio-political, economic, cultural and environmental issues were irrelevant. “Life should be understood not only as personal and spiritual – that is, as living in communion with God – but also as global and social, as living a reconciled existence with our neighbours and the whole of creation”(Costas 1989:98). As human beings we need to fully embrace all aspects of life. Jesus’ ministry addressed us as beings in totality on the cross. He was not just interested in the ‘soulish’ aspects of life, downplaying our

corporeal reality. Christ, as a suffering Servant crucified, saw people as whole beings who needed to be redeemed from everything that did not agree with the will of God (Is. 53:1-12).

The crucifixion was the culmination of the shame, contempt and rejection that Jesus faced in his quest to save humanity. For this reason, the cross became such a stumbling block and foolishness to many, that they failed to see its salvific significance (1 Cor.1:23). They saw a Saviour who died in humiliation, crucified together with criminals. Although he professed to be a holy man, he died as a convict. They regarded the story of this Saviour as a scandalous affair, which they could not reasonably embrace. Costas (1989: 99, 100) says,

“According to the New Testament, Jesus was handed over to Pilate as a messianic pretender. The Jerusalem leadership reasoned that the fact that he was crucified showed he was bluffing.... The shame of the crucified Messiah, felt so keenly by Paul, has continued across the years. The Christian message of the cross carries with it the scorn of rejection by the very community to whom it was first addressed.”

Through his suffering and shame on the cross, God in Christ fully identified with the poor, repressed and social outcasts, who still continue to be frequently disgraced in society. One can just marvel at the fact that God has chosen to reveal his redemptive plan through the scandalous event of the cross. Though this appears to be a very illogical way to save humanity, it was ingenious. “Thus the shame of the cross before the world is the very glory of God in the world, for it is through its message that God has chosen to save the world from its foolish and self-destructive ways”(Costas 1989: 105). It is through the image of weakness and meekness that God chooses to show his salvific power. God did not choose the trapping of power adopted by the military, political and economic superpowers of the time. The cross is a critical factor in our proclamation as witnesses of Christ. The good news of the kingdom is that of the Christ who was crucified for the world. “The proclamation of the cross is, therefore, the communication of liberating news – the message of life, of hope and love through faith in the one who suffered death and shame for all, that all might live, look to the future with hope, assured of God’s love,

which surpasses all odds. We live, accordingly, hoping and loving”(Costas 1989:xiv). The Christ of the cross also overcame death in his resurrection. Having overcome death, Christ has authority over the power of death. “Proclaiming the reign of God means also proclaiming the reign of Jesus, whom God has made the Universal Lord and Christ”(Shorter 1994:11). Christ then becomes the life-giver to those who receive his redemption. Death in its various manifestations does not have the final say. Jesus is Lord over death, thus limiting its power over God’s people. The final victory of life over death will be revealed in our resurrection at His *Parousia* (1 Cor.15: 12 –58).

### **The Power of the Kingdom**

The kingdom of God is manifested in Christ’s life, ministry, death and resurrection in the power of the Holy Spirit. Christ inaugurated God’s reign in our world because he was endowed with the Spirit of God. McClendon writes,

“As the mission of Jesus the messiah unfolds, the Holy Spirit is shown to be the leader: at the conception (Matt.1:18; Lk 1:35), Simeon’s revelation (Lk 2:25 – 35), Jesus’ baptism (Matt. 3:16 -; Mk 1:10; Lk 3:22) and temptation (Matt 4:1; Mk 1:12; Luke 4:1), inauguration of ministry (Lk 4:18), inspirer and guide of Jesus (Lk 10:21; 12:10; Jn 3:34), the one who enabled Jesus to bring his sacrifice (Heb 9:14), the power by which Jesus was resurrected from the dead (Rom 1:4; 1 Tim. 3:16), and the one who accompanies Jesus’ disciples in the continuing mission (Lk 24:49; Jn 20: 21 –23 ; Acts 13: 1 – 3)”(Shenk 1999:14).

The Holy Spirit was the central figure present in Jesus’ entire life. Jesus pursued a life of a consistent and intimate fellowship with God. “The Spirit of the Lord was upon Jesus to enable him to do the deeds of love and justice and speak a message of hope”(Goheen 2000:143; See. Lk.4:18). The good news and good deeds that characterized the life and ministry of Jesus, were the visible presence of the power of God upon his life. When Jesus’ detractors spitefully accused him of exorcising the powers of darkness using the chief of those wicked forces, Beelzebub or Satan (Mk. 3:22f), Jesus warned them sternly that their accusations were bordering on blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God empowered Christ to heal the sick and destroy the works of Satan in our world (Acts

10:38). This power does not bring Charismatic *glossalalia* only, but transforms its recipients into instruments of healing and social transformation, people who are able to reverse the tide of evil in our communities. “The task of discerning the work of the Spirit in history and participating in His work by forwarding and completing the general progress of human society defines the mission of the church”(Goheen 2000:188). Just as Jesus mandated his disciples, we read in Acts 1:8, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” The church that is the locus of the Spirit of God continues to be a witness of God. The Church has been given the grace to share in God’s Spirit, through whom it ministers. Verkuyl says, “The keys of the Kingdom have been given to the Church. It does not fulfil its mandate by relinquishing those keys but rather by using them to open up the avenues of approach to the Kingdom for all peoples and all the population groups at every level of human society”(Van Engen 1993:73). The Christian community must continue to mimic Christ in serving God by serving people in our society as they face their socio-historical issues.

### **3.3.3 The Kingdom of God is about the Revelation of Justice, Peace and Joy**

The reign of God brings justice, peace and joy. “The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom.14:17). It is not meaningless celebrations and excitement about our private relationship with God and the splendour of our religion. It is a call into a life that is founded on justice, peace and joy as a people of God. All these three kingdom values have serious implications for both our personal and social reality. God’s reign brings a just dispensation that leads to the improvement of the quality of life for all people. Thompson’s (2000:2) position on justice and the kingdom is that,

“A Christian perspective is grounded in the conviction that God is sovereign and that God’s rule is loving and just. In creating human beings in God’s image, God has bestowed upon each and every person an intrinsic dignity and an infinite value. This human dignity is nourished and developed in community. Humanity is God’s people – called to love and care for one another and for the Earth. As co-

creators with God, human beings are responsible for creating a just community conducive to the flowering of each person's potential."

In our witness we have a responsibility to herald the course of justice so that those who face inequality, and repression may be relieved. "The kingdom comes whenever Jesus overcomes the Evil One. This happens (or ought to happen) in its fullest measure in the church. But it also happens in society" (Bosch 1980:209). Thus, the church must incarnate God's justice and affect its community with its righteous fruits. "Therefore we should speak of the coming of the kingdom and presence of salvation when society enjoys growing freedom and justice" (Sider 1993:197). That justice should be saturating society from the church. It must infiltrate all aspects of societal life and order.

Peace and joy are the other good 'side effects' of the irruption of the kingdom of God. God envisioned our society to be peaceful. Thus the gospel lauds those who are activists of peace (Matt. 5:9). "This describes a harmony of right relationships between people and God, with each other and with the world's resources"(Samuel & Sugden 1999:365). The peace of God also promotes respect for our environment. We must work for peace as part of our mission as ministers of the reign of God. O'Brien and Shannon wrote: "Peace is both a gift of God and human work. It must be constructed on the basis of central human values: truth, justice, freedom, and love" (cited by Thompson 2000:1). God's people must do their share to create just relationships in their society. They have been enabled by God to be peacemakers. It is in the context of these just relationships that peace becomes a reality. Peace prevails where people are valued and treated with respect as God's priceless children in obedience to the Word of God. "*Shalom* is experienced in justice, compassion and mercy and need to be expressed in law, covenant and regulated commitment;" cf. Jer. 32:38-39 (Samuel & Sugden 1999:374). Furthermore, the dispensation of the kingdom of God, characterized by justice and peace, leads to rapturous joy in society. The scriptures encourage us to rejoice always in all circumstances whether bitter or memorable (Phil 4:4). This joy is a celebration of freedom, since unjust and repressive systems will ultimately be obliterated. It is a kind of bliss that grows from the assurance of God's promises of justice and his presence with us, even when our circumstances are discouraging. It is joy, sometimes in the midst of pain,

loss and rejection. It is the kind of joy that we continue to have in our continuing struggle to eliminate human repression. The Apostles Peter and John had this kind of joy, even in persecution. We read, “So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer the shame of his name”(Acts 5:41). They did not seem to have a sense of regret for their faith for which they suffered. Neither did they show a sign of bitterness against their persecutors. Their pain was real, but their attitude was joyous in the midst of suffering, because they knew that God’s agenda for justice would ultimately prevail even when opposition against it did not seem to be abating.

### **3.3.4 The Kingdom of God is the Goal of Evangelism**

When we witness, we seek to guide people to faith so that they may believe and confess that Jesus Christ is their Saviour. They must come to acknowledge Him as their Redeemer, the One who came to free them from sin and reconcile them with God and others. The church can only then be the servant of the kingdom of God, if it calls people to return to God. Castro said; “We are not to call people to recognize in Jesus Christ only their Saviour; they are invited to recognize in him the Saviour of the world, the liberator of all creation. The kingdom of God is in the horizon of the mission of the church”(Van Engen et al. 1993:133). The church should summon people to be reconciled to the Lord of the world, not of the church only. As Driver (1993:98) puts it, “The kingdom is God’s righteous rule in human history to which people are invited to respond in loyal commitment. God reigns in a radically new order. Those who responded to Jesus’ call were incorporated into the messianic community.” Furthermore, it creates a possibility of transforming their lives in line with the demands of the kingdom of God. This is what our evangelistic endeavour seeks to accomplish, to lead people to a place where they have a confession of faith in the Lordship of Christ in their lives. “To confess Christ is to believe in the kingdom of God, since Christ embodied it in his life, proclaimed it in his ministry, and made possible its anticipation in history through his death and resurrection. In the resurrection of Jesus, God his Father revealed the liberating rule of the kingdom and thus inaugurated a new order of life”(Costas 1989:82). The resurrection has created a new hope in which people who welcome the kingdom live in expectation that God’s new

order can irrupt into our present order to change our status quo. J.C. Hoekendijk “criticized the church-centred missionary framework and called for a focus on the world and its needs. Mission increasingly was equated with bringing in the Kingdom”(Van Engen & Gilliland 1993:156). Thus we approach our life in the world with a new perspective, that we cannot accept our socio-historical circumstances as a static phenomenon that cannot be changed, if they are not in line with God’s order. God’s Kingdom has come to renew our world and address all its needs according to God’s redemptive power and grace that is possible through Jesus Christ.

As messengers of the gospel, we challenge people in our society to receive the gift of God’s kingdom. People need to respond to the call of the reign of God that invites them into the joy of God’s salvation. They have a challenge to respond to God’s kingdom in childlike faith. In the light of this call they cannot remain neutral. Mark 10:15 quotes Jesus saying: “Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” According to Klaiber (1997:144),

“The simile ‘like a child’ is obviously related to the predicate of the sentence: ‘to receive, as a child receives a gift,’ i.e., to allow oneself to be given something, to stretch out one’s hands toward the gift with full expectation, to be able to rejoice over it without reservations. Only someone who turns towards the reign of God with such an openness and undivided relationship and receives it into his or her life will participate in the reign’s fulfilment.”

People choose to receive the reign of God according to their freedom of choice. Although we may reason with them in our articulation of this proclamation, yet we can neither manipulate nor coerce them into responding to this call of salvation. It is a gift that they must accept without undue pressure from anyone, despite the urgency and fervency of our evangelisation. Hegel calls this,

“A proclamation which calls us to the acceptance of salvation, to personal faith, and to concrete repentance with the urgency of the love of Christ, does not once more put the human agent to work, but it is a tool to enable God’s work on the human beings to reach its goal. It is one part of the way in which the God who



seeks us takes towards us; the voice of the one who calls the lost in order to find them”(Klaiber 1997:175).

The reign of God is God moving towards us with God’s gracious gift of salvation. In our dilemmas and struggles, when faced with this gift we have the option to accept or reject it; God gives us space, and the assurance that He will ultimately lead us out of our quagmire when we yield to Him. In the Scriptures, we learn that it is the goodness of God that leads us to repentance (Rom 2:4) Therefore we must not squander our opportunities to welcome the riches of God’s grace in our lives whilst we have a chance.

### **3.3.5 The Church and the Kingdom of God**

The Church is the creation and witness of the reign of God. The Church is not the Kingdom of God. Instead, the Church is the product of the Kingdom of God. Verkuyl says, “The good news of the Kingdom also has to do with the formation and the in-depth growth of the Body of Christ throughout the world and to the end of time... The Church constitutes the firstling, the early harvest of the Kingdom. Thus, though not limited to the Church, the Kingdom is unthinkable without the Church” (Van Engen et al 1993:73). Therefore, it must embrace a vision of the reign of God in its mission. “The church is not the Kingdom of God, but it is the concrete results of the Kingdom... The church must not be equated with the Kingdom, but it must not be separated from it” (Padilla 1985: 191 - 192). The church is a community formed by Jesus through the Spirit to further the purposes of God’s kingdom (Matt 16:18; Eph 4:4). Driver (1993:98) described it in this manner, “The kingdom of God and the church are closely related; however, they are not identical. The church preaches and teaches the gospel of the kingdom. It continues Jesus’ kingdom activity. It exercises kingdom authority” (Matt. 16:19). This is why the Lord’s Prayer encourages us to pray for the manifestation of the reign of God in our communities (Matt.6: 10). Our communities have not fully experienced life in its totality in terms of God’s will. Our societies are attacked by evil that manifests in the form of crime, violence, poverty, corruption, moral degeneration, and other chronic social problems – even when we acknowledge that there is relative peace, democracy, rule of law and social order. O’Brien and Shannon declared,

“If evil is structured into society, then its remedy must include social transformation, that is, changing the structures and institutions of society. Christian responsibility, then, must include both charity, personal acts of compassion in response to the individual suffering, and justice, social and political action aimed at transforming the root causes of evil and suffering. Christians should be found in soup kitchens, tutoring programs, and inner-city clinics, and on picket lines political campaigns, and congressional [parliamentary] lobbies” (Thompson 2000:192).

The church has a God-given mandate to contribute towards making society a model of the kingdom values of justice, peace, love and joy. Therefore the church must fulfil its mission in its entirety without neglecting any aspect of that mission.

The church is a community that should model kingdom life. The reign of God becomes evident through the life of the church, in how it deals with issues of diversity, human rights, justice, peace, and power (political, economic and social). “The church is the sign pointing men and women to the kingdom of God. The church is the first fruits, deposit, or foretaste of the kingdom. It is a community that already has a real enjoyment now of the salvation of God’s kingdom”(Goheen 2000:32). Christians are expected to be the light of society (Matt. 5:14 –16). The light of Christians shines through their deeds of righteousness in conformity to divine purposes. We are supposed to exemplify what we are teaching in terms of being a community of the kingdom of God. Driver (1993:98) directed challenging words to the church: “It must maintain its integrity as a community which lives under God’s rule.” In the Bible the church is warned against worldliness that can taint its integrity (James 4:4, 1 Jn 2:15). Christians in their witness must not allow themselves to be conformed to the bewitching patterns of this world (Rom. 12:1-2). Padilla (1985:30) states,

“When the church lets itself to be squeezed into the mould of the world, it loses the capacity to see and, even more, to denounce the social evils in its own situation. Like a colour-blind person who is able to distinguish certain colours but not others, the worldly church recognizes the personal vices traditionally

condemned within its ranks but is unable to see the evil features of its surrounding culture.”

Worldliness has a corrosive effect on the life of the church that erodes its prophetic thrust. It waters down its passion for its mission as an instrument of God’s salvific power in its community. As Kuitse (1993:118) said, “Mission is not merely activities, not only going, but also being.” As messengers of God’s kingdom, our lives must be compatible with kingdom values. Any form of pretence and hypocrisy will discredit our mission. Through the grace of God we must live an exemplary life because we are a book that is read by others (2 Cor 3:2). We are instruments of God’s redemptive love, and worldliness would hinder this evangelisation. Kuitse (1993:120) wrote,

“Love is the new reality to which faith leads. The encounter with God’s compassionate love embodied in the life of one person. This unconditional and unrestricted love guides the believer in his or her relations to fellow human beings and to God’s created order. This love is not and cannot be confined to the inner circle of the Christian community. Such a love would not reflect God’s love for the world. Mission is sharing faith with others; mission is acting in love toward the neighbour who is in need of help and support.”

God wants us to be a church that reaches out to its community in love and service, but that is also approachable when its community approaches it in times of need. The church must be a place of refuge for its society.

The manifestation of the power of the kingdom through the church creates tension. When the church embraces a kingdom life and prioritises kingdom values, it sometimes encounters opposition from those who are unsettled by it. “The parable of tares makes clear that the presence of the kingdom of God precipitates an encounter with the power of darkness (Luke 22:23)... This brings suffering... The kingdom is not a smooth, continuous movement of progress towards the realization of God’s purposes. History ‘between the times’ is characterized by conflict, struggle and suffering”(Goheen 2000: 142). The early church was persecuted tremendously for embracing the vision of the reign of God. It suffered at the hands of the established religious system, economic barons and political regimes. It is the church that countered persecution with faith and

endurance through the comforting presence of the Holy Spirit. They understood and accepted the trials of their ministry as God's instruments. I quote the Apostle Paul's response to such tribulations in encouraging the church in Corinth:

“We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed – always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.... For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Cor. 4:8 – 10, 17).

The early church did not romanticize its ministry, as if the church's engagement in mission had been an easy endeavour without hindrances. They paid a heavy price, as they were persecuted by those who opposed their witness. This opposition did not stop with verbal abuse and bigotry stemming from religious intolerance. The disciples were beaten, imprisoned, turned into refugees and even killed. They took courage from Jesus' words that they should selflessly take up their cross and follow him (Mk. 8:34). The call to be witnesses of the kingdom was a call into 'costly' obedience, as serving Christ often led to subjection and suffering.

The challenge to the church today is to emulate Christ, who heralded the kingdom of God. We need to embrace the message of his life and ministry, his teachings and actions and follow his example in our ministry. “Mission in Christ's way for the church would mean the presence of all the dimensions: the power of the Spirit, words, deeds, and a life that points to the kingdom, prayer, weakness and suffering, and contribution to the formation of a community that embodies the kingdom”(Goheen 2000:146 –147). The church needs to be endowed with the renewing power of the Holy Spirit that also sanctifies and equips it for effective witness in the world. Then it will be able to pursue its ministry and call people to repentance and assimilation into the community of disciples. Whoever embraces the vision of the kingdom should also embrace the struggle for justice and peace, to fight repression, enabled by the Spirit of God. Goheen (2000:183 – 184) said,

“The Spirit continues to be present in the community in power, producing a corporate life and deeds that bring about a missionary encounter... The Spirit is sovereign in mission; He initiates and controls all that happens. The church is the attentive servant called to listen to and follow the Spirit’s leading...So it is clear that the Spirit cannot be domesticated by the church for its own design.”

The church has been created to be a habitation of God in the Spirit (Eph. 2:22). It must continue to be aware of the presence of God within its community, so that it may continue to be an obedient servant of God’s kingdom through the power of the Spirit, fulfilling God’s purpose. The Holy Spirit has a mission to renew the Church continually so that it may remain effective and passionate and able to fulfil God’s purpose in the world, as it faces new challenges. The Church is the arena in which the Spirit of God is present, and through which it reaches society.

### **3.4 The Church and the Poor**

#### **3.4.1 The First Century Church and the Poor**

The church of the first century began to deal with poverty right away. It was a church that knew and understood suffering since it was born out of persecution. It never enjoyed the privilege of having a cosy relationship with the political powers of the time. The political powers of the era harassed and incarcerated members of the early church, and even murdered their leaders. As it began to expand beyond Jerusalem into the Greco-Roman world, it had to address the poverty that prevailed among the increasing numbers of the faithful. Many of the converts who were joining this church were destitute. The early church practiced some form of communalism, sharing their shelter (they hosted the homeless), wealth (from the sale of assets), food and clothing to meet the needs of those who belonged to their fellowship (Acts 2:42 – 47). “Poverty as an economic issue was not prominent in the early church, for it exercised generosity towards the needy”(Nicholls & Wood 1996:60). They were developing a community spirit to care for each other’s welfare as an expression of their faith and love as a Christian community. This was practiced to such extremes that people almost ceased to have private property. The early

church also supported widows. Those women had been disadvantaged by the death of a spouse in a patriarchal society. They had been dependent on their husbands who had taken care of all aspects of their lives including those of children. The church offered them some relief in their distress. We note that the first century church, as it expanded, had to deal with the challenges of diversity. It had to embrace the faithful from other nationalities when it had been predominantly a Hebrew church. We read in Acts 6:1 – 8 that the faithful, who had a Hellenist background, complained about their widows being neglected, when relief aid was distributed. Pilgrim (1981:155) noted that,

“Discrimination against the poor, favouritism of one group over another, the dominance of the wealthier members over the poorer, even the large gap between the rich and poor, none of these belong to the nature of Christian community. True, the church has always been far from perfect; yet this never negates the sinfulness of its imperfection, or the need to take action to remedy the wrongs. Perhaps, too, this text shows that the willingness to share ‘all things in common’ must have as its counterpart the concern for a structure that will insure the faithful and just administration of funds.”

Thus the apostles initiated a process in which capable leaders were selected to address these grievances and resolve the problem. Apparently, the church that was fighting poverty was itself carrying the scars of poverty. It was adversely affected by the racial polarization that was predominant in society, which resulted in some of the poor being overlooked in the distribution of food.

The apostle Paul encouraged the churches to take responsibility for the care of the poor amongst them. He can be credited with teaching members of the church to be productive so that they should not be a burden to anyone, also, to share with those who were deprived (Eph 4:28). The Church responded so well and absorbed this benevolent spirit to such an extent that Paul had to warn some of the followers to look out for fraudsters who might seek to exploit their generosity. Those who were able to be productive, but too lazy, were to be disciplined by not being given provision that they were not willing to work for. Paul also supported a decision to raise funds for the Church in Jerusalem in a time of distress due to famine (Acts 11:29 –30). According to Pilgrim (1982:156),

“Two principles emerged from this description. The first is that of giving relief according to their ability. That is, the aid is given in proportion to the wealth of the giver. Thus Luke recognizes the differences between both the wealth of the members and their ability to give.... The second principle found in this text is that of Christian solidarity in need. The whole church stands together in solidarity of Christian love for one another. One community of believers in one nation should come to the aid of the believers in other lands. We might here echo Paul’s words, ‘If one member suffers, all suffer together’ (1 Cor 12:26)....”

We see individuals within the church who were mentored by Paul responding generously to the needy. Prominent women like Dorcas initiated projects to assist the poor (Acts 9:36 – 43). She was renowned for her charitable works within her community. Her good deeds benefited mainly the poor and widows. This church exemplified true Christian solidarity in their support for the distressed. “The hope for the poor in the present for Luke lies in the fellowship of a new community, where justice, equality, and compassion are living realities” (Pilgrim 1981:162). They show us what true fellowship is, since they recommended sharing the necessities of life to affirm their mutual love, faith and hope.

The early church stressed the need for a practical faith that would respond appropriately to poverty. James warns us against the kind of faith that is impractical, insensitive and inept, the kind that responds to a poor person with mere verbal encouragement. It fails to respond to the real and pressing material needs. “The hungry man has no ears,” says an African Proverb. “One cannot expect someone who is starving, or numbed by pain, for example, to be convinced by verbal argument. One must first attend to his or her bodily needs before the argument can appear cogent” (Shorter 1994:7). Faith that does not even recognize its own inefficacy, when it fails to respond to the material needs of people must be blind indeed! (James 2:14 – 20). James insists that authentic faith responds to those social issues that make people desperate (James 1:27). Doing things that help the poor, should not be left to social workers or development agents. Our inspirational proclamation to the needy must be balanced with good practical activities to meet their needs. The Manila Manifesto says, “Good News and good works, are inseparable” (Sider 1999:173). Evangelism and social action go together. The witness of the Church must be

in word and deeds. The message that Christians are preaching should be a message that they are also practicing. The ministry to the poor is an inescapable responsibility of a witnessing church. As they witness amongst the poor, they have to assist the poor in dealing with the challenges of being hungry, homeless, unemployed, sick and naked. A witness that does not join faith to real life, that is unable to include in its discourse on God the manifold drama “of existence, ends by alienating its hearers, and becoming historically irrelevant. It has almost nothing to say, because it does not take seriously what is serious and important for life” (Boff 1991:76 – 77). In our witness, we must relate to the world of those who are disadvantaged and be able to share the good news in such a way that we can give hope to them in their situation. We should never allow ourselves to become callous or insensitive to people who are struggling.

### **3.4.2 The Church Serving the Poor**

The church is a community of the faithful who have been assigned the task of communicating the good news to their society. Like in South Africa, the majority of people in that society are the poor. Just as the Church is expected to serve all members of society, it must be sensitive to recognize that those who are impoverished are more disadvantaged than the rich in society. “Preaching the gospel to the poor is essential to the church’s faithfulness. It is a test of the church’s apostolic mark. It is a mark that, spiritually speaking, the church is genetically related to Jesus and is being conformed to his likeness”(Snyder 2002:27). The gospel cannot be disseminated into the communities without the participation of the Church. Therefore, in looking at the ministry of this community,

“Evangelisation is neither a mission that belongs to individual believers or the private property of the ecclesiastical institution represented by clerical elite. The gospel has been committed to a community, and demands a community. Without community there cannot be a living representation of the gospel. It is the community of believers that announces the kingdom of God as a reality, which proclaims a new order under the sovereign action of God, which revitalizes all authority, including that of other institutions. To be sure, evangelisation is



nourished and facilitated by individuals. It takes place practically through individuals. But it is a witness that cannot be offered without the ecclesiastical community. It is by and through local communities of faith that Christians can share with others what God has done and is doing in their lives” (Costas 1989: 135).

The faith community must strive to exemplify the life of the kingdom of God; otherwise it will just be like any other social group in society. If its community life contradicts its proclamation, its evangelism will be discredited. “This witness has no meaning, however, if it is not backed by a community whose love is translated into works of mercy, a community whose faith is manifested in a commitment to social justice and whose hope is reflected in the struggle for a just peace”(Costas 1989:135). The nature of our community life must be entrenched in the kingdom values of love, peace, and justice. We cannot profess to be a faith community, if we do not respond to the cry of those who are disadvantaged and repressed.

In its witness, the church must appropriately interpret the message of the Gospel for today’s people, the gospel in context. Part of that social reality is characterized by poverty, crime, unemployment and HIV/Aids occurrence in disturbing proportions. “Christianity must be a force that moves outward, and a Christian community is basically in existence ‘for others’. That is the whole meaning of a Christian community” (Donovan 2001:84). The church must respond in its witness to the bread and butter issues that affect its community. It must show care to the poor, unemployed, and survivors of HIV/Aids and crime in its interaction with them. “The commitment of God’s people to the covenant was manifested in their treatment of the widow, the orphan, and the stranger...Christians stand with the poor because God stands with the poor” (Thompson 2000:194). Our spirituality as a Church is going to be tested by our treatment of the deprived. The nature of our neighbourliness is a mark of our discipleship (1 John 4:20 –21). People will dismiss and doubt our witness if it remains apathetic to the struggle and suffering of others, if it sees the hardships of the poor, cry of the repressed, and the desperation of those who are marginalized and yet it does not become compassionate. “No approach to evangelisation may leave this perspective out of account, under the pain of actually losing

God and the Lord Jesus who appeared in the form of a suffering servant among the poor”(Boff 1991:78). We must imitate Christ in our acts of mercy that are aimed at benefiting the poor. Human suffering must be noticed. The way our Lord suffered too in order to redeem people from burdensome hardships, must touch us. “Christian love extends beyond the bounds of Christian community to embrace all people and above all the poor and the suffering”(Pilgrim 1981:171). We must not limit this love to our own faith community, for then we may alienate the poor, who are not members of our church with discriminatory attitudes of ‘us’ and ‘them.’ Even the impoverished outside our fellowship, must be invited to share in the provision that God has abundantly provided for Christians. Christians are just stewards of the Lord’s resources, which they must justly distribute to all those who are in need.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

In the same way that Christians were challenged by the questions of indigenisation and enculturation in their witness in South Africa, we are faced with the challenge of poverty. Thus it is necessary to assess our biblical and theological position on poverty, so that we may formulate a biblically and theologically sound response to the challenges of impoverishment, that characterize our missiological context. God’s overwhelming concern for the poor has implications for our evangelism and missions. We believe that our mandate to evangelize the world is a God-inspired mandate. Therefore our mission is God’s mission. Aagaard states, “Mission is thereby seen as a movement from God to the world; the church is viewed as an instrument for that mission. There is a church because there is a mission” (Bosch 1991: 390). We have already indicated that the God, who invites us to be involved in His mission, is a God who loves the poor. If the God, who identifies with the poor, assigns this task to us, we must show concern for the poor, and reflect on the nature of God’s care for them. To accept God’s mission means, “to participate in the movement of God’s love toward people, since God is a fountain of sending love”(Bosch 1991:390). God is sending the church into the world to be a transforming agent that tackles all the evils that hinder humans from enjoying life to the fullest. One of these difficulties is poverty that haunts the people who are precious before

God. Therefore, in our witness we have to pursue a ministry that also deals with social change in order to deal with the factors that have created impoverishment. God's kingdom is a kingdom that welcomes the poor and legitimises their struggle against exploitation and domination. Christ, as the incarnation of the gospel of salvation condemned the subjugation of the poor. He calls the poor into repentance and welcomes them into the fellowship of God's new community. But Jesus also heals them from disease, frees them from repressive satanic powers and feeds those who are hungry. Jesus gladly dines with the tax collectors and sinners, but invites them into a life of radical discipleship. Christ's ministry was characterized by a challenging proclamation and salvific action. Padilla (1985:197) also stated that,

“Evangelism and social responsibility are inseparable. The gospel is good news about the kingdom of God. Good works, on the other hand, are the signs of the Kingdom for which we were created in Christ Jesus. Both the word and deed are inextricably united in the mission of Jesus and his apostles, we must continue to hold both together in the mission of the church, in which Jesus' mission is prolonged until the end of the age.”

The writing is on the wall that as Christians we must have a witness that addresses the challenges of poverty. The early Christians set a trend when they became the church of the poor. We cannot silence our own conscience when we reflect on their witness, and how they served their generation without excluding the poor. The biblical and theological evidence of the Christian witness to the poor is compelling.

## CHAPTER 4

### A THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON KEY ASPECTS OF POVERTY ERADICATION IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

#### 4.1 From Relief, Development, Transformation to Sustainability.

The focus of this chapter is on the various major perspectives that have shaped our thinking in terms of how the Church should deal with poverty eradication in its witness. These viewpoints have been part of the mainstream thinking of those engaging in the global struggle against poverty. The universal church, as part of the global community, has also contributed to the development of these standpoints, over time. Therefore, as Christians, when we reflect on our mission in a context of poverty, are influenced by these positions. Theologians have gleaned insights from those trends in responding to their call as witnesses in this world. We do not engage in ministry in a closed world but in a vibrant world that is constantly changing, also in its thinking. These ongoing changes may be either good or bad, in terms of our value systems, ideologies, and structures that influence our thinking and customs. Our missiological concepts will also reflect certain influences that were dominant in the trends of a specific era. This does not necessarily mean we uncritically accept all the progress that has been made in our society. When facing the challenges of poverty in we can opt to just accept the status quo and live with poverty. Or we may choose to participate in the struggle to eliminate poverty, focussing on either relief, development, transformation, or sustainable development with the goal being empowerment. These are four of the predominant trends in poverty alleviation thinking in most of the disciplines that focus on improving the quality of life of people. Missiology has also been influenced by these trends when it reflects and acts on the human phenomenon of deprivation. I shall explore these four perspectives of poverty eradication within the framework of missions.

## **4. 2 The Aspect of Relief**

### **4.2.1 Definition of Relief**

Caring for the poor is seen as relief. Relief is a strategy that deals with the immediate and pressing needs of people in distress. It is any form of material and non-material assistance you offer to people in dealing with their immediate survival needs. According to Voorhies (1999:589) defines it as follows: “Relief aims to address the emergency needs for victims of war, famine, disasters and often prolonged injustice.” People sometimes experience misfortunes that deplete their resources temporarily so that they need assistance. These people previously succeeded in fending for themselves without external support. “Relief tends to be a stopgap measure filling a short-term need for human survival. There are times when this is absolutely necessary, and one should not shy away from meeting the needs this way”(Cheyne 1996:115). But in our country we see people who have been in chronic poverty for years. Christians who minister amongst the poor face a scenario where poverty is not a temporary setback. Absolute poverty creates situations where people are vulnerable and are exposed to serial disasters. Shacks may catch fire or be flooded, exposing their owners to health hazards such as harsh weather conditions. These people are already poor, but they continue to suffer seasonal disasters. The complexity of poverty and the uniqueness of its survivors cause us to approach relief differently. Sometimes relief is more than just a provisional act of mercy, and it lasts longer than a few days or months. A question, which is currently being debated sporadically throughout society, is whether social grants should be extended to all people who are facing chronic unemployment.

Relief is just a temporary aid to the poor; it is not a development initiative. Sometimes people confuse relief efforts like soup kitchens, temporary shelter, food parcels and clothing distributions with development initiatives. These are important acts of mercy that can make a serious contribution and provide immediate support in times of need. This is an area where the church, over the years, has been making a significant contribution. Voorhies (1999: 589) noted,

“Christian organizations have launched massive relief efforts, but these efforts only bring temporary help and must not be confused with development. Relief primarily focuses on what the outsider must do to help the victim, not what the people must do for themselves. Such relief efforts can be viewed as detrimental if prolonged, because they take away the incentive for local production and development.”

In an ideal world, we would expect relief programmes to be contingency mechanisms that offer people backup for a limited time when they have experienced calamity. We do not expect people to be in relief programs for an extended period of time as this might create a culture of dependency and entitlement. It is often said ‘when you give a fish, you feed them for a day, but when you teach them how to fish you feed them for a lifetime’. “Relief prevents starvation today. Development brings self-sufficiency. At least in principle-in an ideal world. But we live in the real world where many fishponds are owned and controlled by small groups of powerful, wealthy persons... If one is to fish for a lifetime, must have a share in the fishpond” (Sider 1993:138). The complexities of these social problems challenge your paradigms about relief initiatives. Prolonged injustice continues to marginalize people, turning them into clients of philanthropic ventures. Sometimes one looks at a number of unemployed men, standing at busy street corners, who tender their trade each morning, looking for a daily job. They might be fortunate to find a job for a day or week, or there might be nothing at all. These people do not wish to be dependent on any relief project but the unpredictability of job opportunities in their trade as they wake up daily makes their lives a precarious one. There is a need to transform our social, economic and political system that perpetuates their lack of productivity.

As Christians, relief is where we start when we meet people who are destitute. The Scriptures encourage us to respond generously in sharing with the poor until their immediate needs are satisfied (Deut. 15: 7 –8). We must show sensitivity when we assist them in their desperation in obedience to the Word of God. Relief is not just dispensing goods without showing compassion to the needy receiving them. “But not all forms of charity are equally compassionate. Taking our cue from the compassion that is the

character of God discovered in Jesus, we can identify compassionate charity as resident, committed, and creative”(Stone 1996:104). Our attitudes and actions in ministry amongst the poor must undoubtedly show that we care for them genuinely as human beings. Even when we assist the destitute to cope with the challenges of deprivation, we must not contribute to their dehumanisation. The Scripture says, “And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing”(1 Cor. 13:3). Christian generosity to the poor is not a noble witness to the poor if it is not embedded in love. “A paradigm case is that of the Good Samaritan. As usually interpreted, the parable suggests that Jesus was encouraging his disciples to meet the acute human need wherever they saw it” (Elliott 1987:12). This Samaritan man went out of his way; delayed his journey, endangered his life and sacrificed his ride on the donkey and paid for the medical cost of a wounded stranger. All this indicated genuine attitudes and deeds of love by a person who was even despised by the very community the wounded man belonged to. In the same way, Jesus expects us to genuinely love the poor among whom we do God’s ministry. Furthermore, we have to know that relief is not the end of our witness, but only the beginning. Engstrom says, “Christian relief is never complete in itself. It must, biblically, eventuate in a ministry of development on behalf of the peoples being assisted”(Elliston 1989:xiii). It means we must continue to have dialogue with the poor in our fellowship so that we can begin a journey with them, working together to find lasting solutions to their impoverishment. There are no certainties and guarantees about the final outcome of that journey together. You can only know the consequences as you travel that road together in solidarity. Even though relief must be followed by development, it must not be undermined. Christian aid is an essential service to the vulnerable because it saves their lives. Without it, many of the destitute will suffer and ultimately die of hunger, disease, and exposure to the harsh elements of nature. The poor rely on it for their immediate survival. It gives them hope when they find relief temporarily from their setbacks; it enables them to live another day to continue their struggle to fight poverty.

The concept of relief is based on the biblical principle of giving or charity. The Scriptures in many instances highlight the principle of giving. Paul even speaks about the

blessedness of giving being greater than that of receiving (Acts 20:35). The Scriptures encourage us to be generous, to help people who are desperate (Deut. 15:7). We must be prepared to do humanitarian deeds without compulsion, but enthusiastically. This is the kind of life that we believe is Christlike when we selflessly assist those who are suffering. Paul writes, “Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others” (Phil. 2:4). This should be a way of life for Christians, whose relationships should not be based on self-interest, but on mutual concern for one another. “Jesus modelled servanthood, self-sacrifice, and special concern for the poor and the neglected. And he also cared for people’s spiritual needs”(Sider 1999:33 –34). We should also emulate Christ in how we relate with others, especially those who are downtrodden. We must continue to encourage others in our community to be charitable to those who are disadvantaged, even when in our time those who have ulterior motives have misused charity. Stone (1996:104) says,

“But simply because charity can be distorted does not mean that it should be rejected altogether. Charity really can be an avenue toward the restoration of the image of God – both in the giver and the receiver of charity. Given the context in which we find ourselves today, where increasing numbers of people lack even the bare minimum for living life humanly – much less leading it with dignity – charity is an essential first step toward eliminating poverty and oppression.”

It would be improper to reject humanitarian acts geared for helping the poor even when we know the limitations of these acts. They also form part of the answer in response to the complex problems of poverty that are created by injustice in society. In spite of its inadequacy in addressing the underlying problems of poverty, relief has its place in the multi-pronged approach to poverty alleviation. Relief assist those who are desperate to continue surviving whilst the struggle to eradicate poverty continues. People who are hungry, sick, and homeless need relief immediately whilst strategies that would address their problems at a macro-level, are formulated.



#### 4.2.2 Critique of Relief

Relief can be used unscrupulously when we proselyte or steamroll people into our own faith. Our evangelisation must not violate poor people's rights in response to our witness. According to Voorhies (1999: 589 – 590), "Relief assistance must never be conditioned on one's beliefs or on having to hear the gospel. Relief must be given freely in love without condition, just as Jesus gave love freely without condition (Jn 13:34 - 35)." We must respect the desperate and guard against becoming insensitive to their needs, when we want to get them to accept our faith. Again, sometimes people lose perspective of the fact that relief helps people to cope temporarily with poverty whilst they seek long-term solutions. Wagner says, "Relief treats the symptoms. It comes after the fact"(Elliston 1989: 122). We give aid so that people can survive, can be kept alive, energetic and hopeful to confront the challenges of their impoverishment. We must use it as a strategic tool to buy time to explore lasting responses. As witnesses, if we lack the capacity to deal with macro issues that compound the situation of the poor, we must engage other stakeholders who are more empowered to help develop strategies that would make the poor self-reliant.

Furthermore, we must note that charity is not justice. However essential and appreciated charitable deeds that offer the poor a lifeline may be, they must not hamper us in our vision for the creation of a just society. We must still continue our struggle to ensure that we reverse the legacy that has turned people into charity cases. "The rich Christians, the rich churches, rich nations, were prepared to give charitably of their abundance; they were not prepared to look critically at the economic and political structures which kept the poor people poor, and which ensured that major beneficiaries of their charitable giving were the non-poor"(Elliott 1987:52). Those conditions that entrench the powerlessness and dependency of the impoverished must be remedied. We must not allow ourselves to fall into the trap of allowing any actions of benevolence to make us lax in the face of oppression. "At the beginning of this century the missionary diaconate was by and large regarded as an auxiliary service. It took the form of care for the poor, expressed in orphanages and hospitals and of relief after natural or man-made disasters.

The changing structure was hardly ever contemplated”(Bosch 1980:213). Relief initiatives should not just become secondary services that are negligible in priority in our witness. They should be part of our ministry, which should also seek to change the conditions that create the need for relief amongst the disadvantaged. The poor should not become perpetual beggars when they should be empowered in a just dispensation to be self-sufficient. Therefore all the social barriers that inhibit their capacity building must be uprooted. Scott identified as one of the reasons that there has been no concerted effort on the part of those in mercy ministry to pursue structural transformation in society. “Most evangelical ministries of mercy claim to be apolitical. This of course is an absurdity. We may not be consciously political, but in fact our relationships with governments – or, alternatively, our identification with the oppressed communities within a nation – are political stances” (Samuel & Sugden 1987:213). Christians cannot adequately address poverty, which is political, if they shy away from dealing with the political dimension of the prevalence of poverty in society. As a Christian witness in a context of deprivation, our ministry amongst the poor will have political connotations and consequences that it would be fruitless to deny.

In addition, relief can be limited by donor fatigue. People who are desperate to obtain relief aid depend on the compassion and the generosity of those who have to share with them in their impoverishment. Sometimes aid workers lose their sensitivity in helping the poor. Campolo says, “When we lose our compassion in the context of overexposure to the images of the suffering poor, we lose sensitivity to Christ himself” (World Vision 1996:29). Sometimes when we live with human suffering, we become so desensitised that we cannot have compassion anymore for those who are crushed by their circumstance. We become callous, and we accept poverty as a way of life and a normal part of our society. Again, relief may lopsidedly emphasize meeting the needs without ultimately focusing on tackling problems that are breeding those needs. In practice, the bias is towards solving immediate needs, which is admirable due to their urgency. “It is always easier to provide relief to people in need than it is to enable them to solve the problems which create the need. Good project planning shifts from helping people primarily in terms of giving them something, to enabling people by empowering them to do

something”(Cheyne 1996:115). We should look at ways and means to identify and work on uprooting the causal factors of deprivation. We must intensify our efforts to deal with the underlying sources of destitution. “If you are not helping to solve the problems creating the needs, you may be creating a new need”(Cheyne 1996:121). We may be compounding the problem of impoverishment by creating new expectations that inculcate the culture of entitlement.

Also, in implementing the relief strategy, there is a tendency to reduce human needs to a single variable. Relief agents tend to reduce human needs to either the physical or the spiritual. The inclination is to prioritise the material needs above the spiritual. Sometimes relief agents would only deal with the physical needs. “A humanistic response to human need can never substitute for the whole need of men and women because it is one dimensional. In the same way, if the only aspect of human need, which is met, is a relatively minor part of the whole human problem, i.e., the physical part, it may be correspondingly difficult to presume that one in any way ministered to the broader spiritual needs”(Cheyne 1996:29). We cannot exclusively concentrate on meeting the physical needs, and ignore other essential requirements like the spiritual needs of the poor. The physical and spiritual needs are intertwined since they are essential elements of human reality that should not be separated. We also have to show sensitivity in engaging the poor to define the needs appropriately. Naïve benevolence can offend people by offering them an inappropriate response to their problems. “Charity can be a cheap, painless, and even condescending substitute for liberating involvement with those who suffer”(Stone 1996:102). Some well-meaning witnesses have previously offered people food and clothing that were not suitable for the destitute. Sometimes they have been guilty of communicating with people in an improper way in terms of their context. Therefore, this unsuitable response became an obstacle to helping the disadvantaged and satisfying their needs.

Finally, in addressing the needs of the poor, we must not only focus on problems, but also seek new possibilities for empowerment. We must move, “beyond apparent needs to potential opportunities” (Cheyne 1996: 29). We must open our eyes to see and our ears to

hear in order for us to become aware of the vast possibilities that are present for the poor to improve their conditions even in situations of abject poverty. The marginalized world does not have to be a closed world in which the poor are irreversibly condemned to deprivation. It is a world in which there are prospects of a better life. The gospel teaches that all things are possible for those who believe (c.f. Mk 9:23). As witnesses of Christ, we ascribe to a faith that anticipates new possibilities and that may transform detestable conditions according to the promises of God. This faith is a gift of God's grace that enables us to have hope in adversity. Therefore human life should not be statically trapped in inequality, oppression and lack. It should be dynamic, and offer prospects for change into equality, freedom and prosperity for all. We are inspired by God's promise in our struggles for a just society, not by our romantic and conceited dreams.

### **4.3 Development**

#### **4.3.1 Definition of Development**

Caring for the poor has been described by many as development aid. I shall look at traditional as well as contemporary definitions of development, statements that have influenced the concept of missions as development. The theology of development has evolved through various debates, and I would like to explore the various meanings attributed to the word 'development':

In simplistic terms, "according to its etymology develop means 'to uncover, to unfold or unroll'...Development reveals the hidden reality and potential in all creation and especially in human beings. To ignore this potential is to deny or withhold enormous powers for good of all humanity and all creation"(Bruwer 1996:26).

Development is a process in which the untapped abilities of people and creation are stimulated, so that they may live up to the real power that is embedded in them. This means the challenges that are faced by humanity and creation can be overcome only if their latent creative energies are unleashed strategically to mould their social reality in terms of the vision that is driving them according to the revelation of the Word of God

upon their lives. All the solutions that we need in order to deal with our current challenges lie unrecognised within people and creation. This means that our society has the potential to deal with the poverty that is surrounding it. People just need to be encouraged to follow a path of development; to accelerate their advancement and realize their full potential, whether it be economic, political, spiritual, and social.. Coetzee says, “Toward maturity or full growth; the process of growth; spiritual formations. The word development therefore carries with it the connotation of a favourable change; moving from worse to better; evolving from simple to complex; advancing away from the inferior”(Coetzee & Graaff 1996:139). Development implies a straightforward movement from the basic to the sophisticated, from the backward to the improved state of affairs. It refers to people moving from a barren quality of life to a far better life in terms of education, housing, health, employment, and political and spiritual conditions. Development is a “change which improves the living standards of people and enables them to act in a way conducive to self improvement and the betterment of their living conditions in terms of their own priorities, aspirations and needs”(PRISA 2001). This change comes when we intervene in society, removing all the disruptive variables that stifle growth amongst people and creation, when we create an environment that is conducive to expanding the capacity of people and creation. Some of the situations that human beings live in are not appropriate for their meaningful development. These adverse conditions hinder their proper advancement towards realizing their full capabilities. Miller says, “Development is a process by which people gain greater control over themselves, their environment and their future, in order to realize their full potential of life that God has made possible” (Sider 1981:19). Therefore, there is a need to break the shackles of these disruptive factors among people and creation. The poor need to realize that they are free to grow and reach their maturity to the full extent of their God-given abilities.

#### **4.3.2 The Origin of Development Theory**

The theory of development emanates from the West. It was built on the experiences and the influences of European economic history that was nurtured by capitalism and the

industrial revolution. It is also a by-product of the Western Enlightenment (cf. Deist 1984:53). It is a Western idea that is a product of modernization. Modernization emphasizes increased industrialization, urbanization, and economic growth in societies. “Economic growth became the central theme of modernization theories and strategies of development in the 1950s and 1960s”(Ajulu 2001:149). The concept of development was strongly emphasized after the Second World War. The war had brought massive social, economic and political destruction over Europe. It even changed the political landscape of Europe in creating new states and powers. This implied that Europe had to be rebuilt from the ravages of the war. In short, they needed development. “Instrumental in this development – or rather reconstruction – was the massive aid programme from the US, the Marshall Aid [Plan]. This programme had the double purpose to get the world economy working and to contain communism”(Hettne 1990:46). In addition to it being a counter measure against communism, it provided the desperately needed resources for the rebuilding of Europe that had been devastated by the war. One should also realize that it was not tied to the subjugating demands that are presently part of the Foreign Aid packages offered to the countries of the South by the countries of the North.

The Second World War also had serious implication for the colonized world. The aftermath of the war created new superpowers. This meant the creation of new colonizers and the vehement move from the colonized to demand emancipation. “From the reconstruction of Europe there was a straight line to development in the new nations, known by many names: as backward, underdeveloped, emergent, poor, less developed, developing, etc. ‘Colonial economics’ became ‘development economics’”(Hettne 1990:46). The West as a developed entity came to see itself as a source and model of development for the underdeveloped or developing world. Development also became a Western propaganda tool to fight the expansion of communism amongst the poor countries that the West could no longer control as colonies. Communism was just another form of imperialism imposed on the so-called 'developing' world. The developing world became a battlefield for the clashing ideologies of the Western (led by the USA) and the Eastern (led by USSR) blocks that were intruders into their living space. Bragg (1989: 64) states, “Development was derived from the Cold War politics of the U.S.A. and

Europe. Helping the poor nations become viable would make them less susceptible to the [then] rising tide of communism, it was theorized, since poverty creates more revolutions than ideology.”

The end of the Second World War had created a world with two superpowers – the United States of America and the Soviet Union. The USA represented capitalism and Christianity whilst the Soviet Union became a symbol of communism and atheism. The West felt threatened by the Soviet Union, which had to be kept in check to prevent it from expanding as a force to dominate the whole world. Thus poor nations became a sphere where the struggle between the West and the East was intensified. Some of the current problems of Africa, like poverty, wars, and coups stem from that era. Some of the African governments that contributed to the looting of national resources and creating instability in Africa were puppet regimes propped up by either the West or the East. They governed without the sanction of their own people, serving themselves, their families and cronies, and offshore powers that legitimised their establishment.

#### **4.3.3 The Changing Concept of Development**

The traditional view of development equates development with economic and technological growth of the advanced and sophisticated societies of the North. It is not a biblical concept, even though it may be used in Christian circles. Bragg (1989: 64) points out in his observation that:

“The very concept of ‘development’ arose in a specific historical socio-cultural context, it is hard to separate the ideas of development from the source... The contemporary developmental movement is predicated on the Western scientific and technological revolution, asserting the ultimate goal is to increase production and economic growth which will raise standards and provide a better life for as many as possible.”

It was assumed that if underdeveloped communities could be introduced to ‘appropriate’ economic systems and technological insights they could be salvaged from the doldrums of poverty. “A common belief was that the newly emerging, less developed nations were

backward and underdeveloped, and hence needed an urgent flow of experience and resources, especially capital, from developed countries – and that lack was constraining development”(Ajulu 2001:149). They could be turned into economically and technologically advanced societies that would enjoy a higher quality of life if there was foreign investment by the developed world. If their poverty problems could be eradicated through the intervention of the expertise of the developed world, then they would be placed on a more predictable path of growth, like these more advanced societies of the North. “Countries in need of development are therefore often described as suffering from market limitations; shortage of savings capital; from a lack of working (overhead) capital; from high human reproductive figures leading to serious obstacles, from serious misdistribution of social benefits; from insufficient training or educational services; and from restricted political participation”(Coetzee & Graaff 1996:139). The kind of development that the West envisaged, was geared for economic growth, seeing Africa as a sort of junior partner to the more developed Western economies. But many structural barriers continued to hamper cooperation between the North and the South.

This concept of development views human progress as occurring in a straight line from being less developed to becoming more developed. It is more of an evolutionary process of change towards more advanced societies with less social problems. “The implication is that, as a result of the introduction of intervening variables like industrialization, new agriculture techniques, urbanization, large-scale education, rationality and the specialization of functions, the movement of a specific society from one end of the continuum (traditionalism) to the other (modernity) can be speeded up”(Coetzee & Graaff 1996: 139 – 140). The assumption is that people can always scientifically control all social factors, and transform them according to their visions of development. Thus social change is viewed as a product of a carefully planned process of manipulating certain societal factors to get desired outcomes. An example is transferring the technology that is used by developed Western economies to the less developed countries in the South. Bragg (1989: 64) says, “Modern medicine, farm equipment, fertilizers, hybrid seeds, irrigation, and so on were seen as the panacea for the ‘backward’ or underdeveloped Third World. With this transfer of technology, the economic gap would



be closed.” It was assumed that they would ultimately catch up in development with the developed countries of the North. It ignored the context of people of the South that was not identical with the situation in the North. “Because technology transferred is largely geared for Western cultures and seldom adapted to meet the indigenous needs, so the arguments run, it is not likely to appreciate the real needs of the population”(Ellingsen 1993:28). We need to come up with development models that take into cognisance the uniqueness of the situation of the poor. We cannot impose the tailor-made solutions of so-called experts on their situation, only because these solutions have proven to be successful somewhere else. The socio-political-historical and spiritual situation of the South is different from that of the North. It would also be arrogant to portray all the systems, technologies, and ideologies developed in the North as if they should be taken as a ‘Bible’ for the development of the societies of the South.

There has been a shift away from a technocratic and economic view of development to a more human orientated form of development. Coetzee declares, “A different definition of development, then, will include components that will allow for the personal growth of every individual... This is the basis of the human-centred development: a process that includes all aspects of life within the a community and in people’s relationships with other people”(Coetzee & Graaff 1996:141). Development has to address all aspects of human existence that makes life meaningful. It must not dehumanise people but should contribute positively and significantly towards their humanness. Missions that embrace development must note these concerns about factors that may limit evangelisation. Charles Elliott (1987:21) says,

“Suffice it to mention at this point that the Churches, perhaps inevitably, acquired from contemporary discussion a notion of development that was heavily economic, materialistic, technocratic and centralistic. Development was all identified with economic growth, and the assumption was that economic growth could be secured by manipulation of a few economic variables, such as savings, investment, and exports.”

These are the perils of an uncritical integration of the concept of development into missions. We know from experience that our well-planned interventions do not always

have the intended outcomes. We do not know the future, and it is difficult to predict results accurately. Some technocratic developmental forecasts have turned out to be flawed.

#### **4.3.4. Whose Development?**

As Christian witnesses we can be involved in community development initiatives that bring development from either above or below. Development from above is when we as development agents assume the total ownership and control of the development process. Communities just become recipients of development projects. They are nothing but beneficiaries of benevolence. They are not recognized as stakeholders in the development projects. They do not have control of the development process. What is demanded from them is an attitude of gratitude for the delivery of essential resources and services given for their welfare. This kind of development denies people's participation in the reconstruction of their lives and society. It is a kind of development practiced by many charitable agencies, donor countries and governments. Those condescending attitudes ignore the critical contribution of those in need towards their own development. Such attitudes perpetuate the powerlessness of communities in need.

We should instead look at the option of development from below. The development practitioners should be working very closely with communities that are benefiting from development initiatives. Those communities need to own that development process. They should be involved in its facilitation and control, since development will have an impact on their preferred lifestyles. Development has cultural implications, too, for the way of life of a specific people targeted by development initiatives. Coetzee says,

“Development can therefore be defined as directed change that brings about economic growth, increasing political involvement and social reconstruction. This process of change finds an important stimulus by linking up with the convictions of those involved. That is it takes place in terms of their definition of needs and within the boundaries of acceptability”(Coetzee & Graaff 1996:157).

It is not advisable to impose our own perception of development on communities that are served by us. Our experience of life and our perspective of reality are different from theirs. Thus we cannot determine all the questions and the answers to all their social problems. Social transformation is a complex issue even though some social problems may appear to be simple. But only when they are analysed in partnership with communities, will we begin to understand the real issues.

#### **4.3.5 The Vision of Development**

When its champions articulate their vision of development, it is often with eye-catching phrases and pungent sound bites. When you see and hear them communicate they appear very impressive. Below are some of these marketable words and phrases used to convey the objectives of Development:

- Seek to improve the quality of lives of people
- Address the basic needs of people
- Empower
- Educate
- Skills development
- Reform social structures
- Create employment
- Build social unity
- Good governance
- Culture of human rights
- Self reliance
- Self worth /realization
- Opportunities for participation
- Favourable change
- Spiritual realization / salvation/ blessedness.

The packaging of the vision of development is desirable, because all of us wish to live a decent life in a decent society. But the fundamental principles and assumptions behind

the imported Western concept of development are flawed. Some of those flaws will be highlighted in detail in my critique during this discourse.

#### **4.3.6 The Challenges for Development**

Development has never been problem free, its agents have faced lot of challenges in real life. On paper it is an easy ride to easy solutions to combat poverty. History, however, has painted many portraits of development initiatives that have been derailed. Any human enterprise is dynamic, and none can be programmed to flawlessly reach desired outcomes. Historical forces are shaping results, and we are to trust God to guide us in our witness as we struggle to overcome poverty. The following are some of the challenges faced by developers:

- Resistance to change
- Bad reputation/ history of lack of integrity of development agents.
- Poor communication or consultation of stakeholders
- Shortage of funding
- Insecurity – fear of loss of power base of stakeholders.
- Vandalism of property.
- Leadership – poor planning and coordination.
- Creating community ownership.
- Misguided social analysis/perception
- Partisanship

These are the real challenges that we cannot wish away. It is part of our struggle as Christians in our ministry in a situation of poverty. They are part of the context in which we are witnesses, a world of sin.

#### **4.3.7 A Critical Response to Development**

The Church cannot respond passively to the concepts and practice of development in our society it has to take a stand. According to De Beer (1998:16), “Development in itself is not negative. The negative connotations are as a result of the historical trends, the

exploitation of indigenous people by developers, and the fact that developers almost always got richer and the poor got poorer. This requires a new approach.” In the past some Western missionaries that were involved in community ministry were agents of Westernisation, Colonialism and Globalisation rather than of development that would produce social renewal. It was assumed that countries in the South were backward compared to those of the North that had made progress on all fronts. Thus it was believed that impoverishment of countries in the South could be obliterated if they were propelled on a path to development by advanced Western knowledge, technology, and systems. “It was not recognized that poverty was not just a result of ignorance, lack of skills, or moral and cultural factors, but rather it had to do with global structural relationships”(Bosch 1991:434). Therefore eradicating destitution will take more than just dealing with perceived backwardness, one has to deal with national and global structures that pauperise the South. Some development agents, probably without intending any malice, were not aware of this shortcoming within the development paradigm. They were trapped in their Western theological, economic, social, educational and political bias as they worked amongst the so-called underdeveloped communities. They were limited by their paternalistic culture that made them to readily associate the Western concept of development with societal renewal. According to Friedmann (1992) is the writer of a book entitled ‘Empowerment: the politics of alternative development.’ There is a need to explore the use of alternative terminology that is not tainted by any undesirable historical baggage. De Beer (1998:30) suggests using the term ‘transformation’ as an alternative, without negating development as a legitimate term and process. A suitable phrase might be ‘a process of transformational development’.

The objective of this transformational approach is to challenge the status quo that has created an environment that is conducive to the prevalent societal problems. Development in many instances has ignored the practice of injustice, oppression and exploitation of the vulnerable communities. Bosch (1991:434 - 435) observed that,

“Poverty would not be uprooted by technological know-how into poor the countries but by removing the root causes of injustice... The Third World peoples have to take their destiny in their own hands and liberate themselves through a

revolution. Development implied evolutionary continuity with the past; liberation implied a clean break, a new beginning.”

Furthermore, development must be freed from its bias towards economic growth, the tendency to reduce to the kind of economic growth that promotes a Western form of consumerism and market systems. “Development therefore is equated with a universal process of modernization where Western values, production systems, technology and consumption patterns have to be simulated by poor countries in an attempt to modernize the societies along capitalist lines”(De Beer 1998: 132). Thus some Christians, especially those influenced by liberation theology, prefer the paradigm of liberation to that of development. They think that development initiatives are not compatible with the aspirations of the poor. Instead, the paradigm of liberation encapsulates the vision of the disadvantaged appropriately against any form of oppression. “For those who read Friere and Gutierrez, ‘development’ became a term associated with modernization, reformism, gradualism, with the continuing domination of the US multinationals, US culture and US military might; with the insidious and irreversible effects of capitalism and class structures”(Elliott 1987:89). In terms of liberation theology the quest is for a radical and abrupt change, and this cannot be accommodated in the present Western concept of development. This is a kind of development that makes missions to extend Western neo-colonialism whilst poverty persists. According to Bosch (1980:213):

“During the Church and Society Conference - Geneva, 1966, in particular a definite alternative to the theology of development was advocated. The solution was to be found in revolution, not in evolution. The relationship between the West and the Third World was not one of development versus under-development, but one of dominance versus dependence, or, more specifically, oppressors versus oppressed.”

Poverty and its underlying problems will not be eliminated unless this relation of disparity is transformed into one of parity. This requires drastic measures that will overhaul societal systems such that they are orientated towards justice.

Some of the developmental approaches that have influenced social activists and missionaries are developments from above. They place the responsibility of development

on the hands of the clergy, technocrats, government bureaucrats and experts from development agencies. This is what Ajulu (2001:151) had to say about this issue:

“The technocratic model thus took the reins of the development process through bureaucratic control of the scientific experts or technicians involved... As such, much trust was placed in the technocrats’ ability to plan and implement projects and to apply virtues of the planning process by using systems and statistical analysis. With these tools, the technocrats were meant to foresee trends and problems of the future and hence remove such obstacles to progress as uncertainty and wasteful resource allocation. This they would supposedly accomplish by carefully forethought and timely action.”

Since it was observed that people probably lacked essential resources, skills and knowledge they were not significantly involved in development projects throughout the life cycle of the projects. Therefore they could not participate meaningfully in combating poverty in their situation. There is a kind of condescending attitude towards the poor. Myers (1999b: 579) says it is an attitude that, “The poor are passive recipients, incomplete human beings whom we make whole.” Some community development proposals indicate community participation, but on the ground there is no significant participation of the poor, other than to be mere beneficiaries. First, this is a paternalistic attitude that undermines people’s dignity as shapers of their own destiny. Therefore being deprived should not be so dehumanising that the poor should not be decision-makers about their plight. As Myers (1999b: 579) indicates, “Second, our attitude about ourselves can become messianic. We are tempted to believe that we are deliverers of the poor and that we make their lives complete.” We have to watch against this professional or evangelical arrogance that causes us to think that we are the ones who have solutions to all the problems of the poor. The poor have survived many years without the intervention of many of these development agents.

It is also a fallacy that implementation of Western development technology, knowledge and models to end underdevelopment in the South would not affect the values of the people. Sometimes we were made to believe that science has no cultural bias. “Thus in addition to importing Western technology, underdeveloped nations will also import the

social values of the West or socialist bloc associated with this technology. The result is that underdeveloped nations may compromise their unique social fabric and receive in its stead the maladies of pollution, consumerism, alcohol abuse, and the like”(Ellingsen 1993:28). In essence it meant the poor people in the South had to convert into the culture entrenched in the solutions they were adopting to deal with poverty. They were being uprooted from the very foundations of their identity as a people in the South. Gittins (1993:xiv) says,

“The Gospel must challenge culture, but it must not crush it; to crush culture is to maim its people... This means that a task of mission is an encounter: a respectful engagement and dialogue with people wherever they are. And if people are not where we are, we must go with the spirit of Jesus and seek them, not to make them like we are, but to offer them a glimpse of Jesus and to invite them to follow him.”

Importing Western models of development meant getting economic advancement in exchange for losing your human identity. Our mission is not a license for allowing our culture to manipulate the communities in which we are witnessing. “The neo-colonial dynamic created by the importing of technology leads to the same outcome as did the older version of colonialism” (Ellingsen 1993: 28). The poor become colonized in their minds to think like people in the North when they deal with the complexities of deprivation. Instead of looking for solutions within their own community they have to import systems for education, economics, politics and even theology at a price. Some of these solutions are acquired at a great expense and continue to pauperise poor nations. This creates an attitude of dependency on external forces to solve personal and national problems. But this may be changing: “In a very real sense, those providing the technology now are not the initiators of development, for a fundamental tenet of the new models is that developers must cultivate self-reliance and self-initiative on the part of the underdeveloped nation”(Ellingsen 1993:29). We must never import solutions to the poor that may retard their growth, self-determination and resourcefulness.

This concept of development was once trapped in naïve optimism. It painted a picture of development modelled on the path taken by Western Societies. It was the line of the least



resistance, and yet promised enviable progress. Agents had too much confidence in Western technology, knowledge, systems, institutions and cultures. They believed that they would work magically, also in an African context. Robinson and Mountjoy purport, “Optimism was still expressed in the possibility of finding shortcuts in the long historical process of development experienced by developed economies, and achieving desired results, especially improved results quickly”(Ajulu 2001:150). It would be improper to assume that poverty-stricken African countries could achieve the same development that the West accomplished, without going through the same historical processes of development. The development of the West was propped up by a history of slavery, colonialism and imperialism that resulted in the looting of Africa by the West. That terrible legacy has sown the seeds of the present instability, poverty and chaos in some parts of the African continent. Some of the problems persist because that legacy has disadvantaged Africans on the world stage. In reality there is no easy route to poverty eradication that is not just a journey in self-deception and disappointment. There is no innovative planning by the Church, governments and development agencies that can come up with instant solutions to our plight of deprivation.

Also, the standards set for a better quality of life brought by this development was based on Western norms that emphasize materialism. The standards whose foundation is based on imported values that are inappropriate for our African nation. Bragg (1989:64 – 65), in pointing out the shortcomings of development, said:

“Underlying this approach to development is an assumption that progress is basically materialistic. This assumption is one-dimensional and ignores the whole non-economic side of life; the human and cultural values in some cases that are much more advanced than those in the industrial north... It ignores traditional economic systems that have worked for millennia and which might be better than participating in the world of monetary systems.”

These Western norms are not compatible with the African way of life. What the West proposes is a life that is not sustainable because it is in conflict with nature. It is life of extravagance and self-interest with poor stewardship. It is the kind of success that creates the false hope that everybody amongst the poor will end up living in a decent Western

type house, electrified and with all the latest technological gadgets, with fancy food that clogs the arteries; and driving a trendy car.

Another flaw, is in the implementation of economic growth is that it ignores contextual realities. It was assumed that if economic fundamentals were in place, political and economic players could lead a society on a good path towards economic growth, just like in the Western countries. Agents reasoned that if appropriate socio-economic and political policies were implemented to create a climate for development, then economic revival would happen. These ideas in essence ignore the fact that those societies have previously been engineered to create their marginalization. Stiglitz says,

“Economic growth does not help the poor much in countries where distribution of wealth is highly unequal. The poor in these countries do not enjoy the benefits of boom times, but they do shoulder the costs of collapse. In societies of high inequality, growth allows the poor to keep their heads above the water. When it falls they sink”(Goldewijk & Fortman 1999:19).

Disparities that entrench deprivation will remain, unless there is a societal structural alteration of all the systems that legitimise inequality. Wealth will be generated, but it will still be unequally distributed. The poor will still be paid survival wages and they will be the first to be retrenched if there is an economic downswing. The lives of people will continue to be characterized by discrepancy and this would be scandalous. The majority of the poor will continue to live in squalor even when there is prosperity in the land and they have been giving inputs towards its realization. Meanwhile the minority of the wealthy will continue to amass wealth beyond their ability even to consume it. The poor do not always benefit from development initiatives, as the powerful seek to use developmental opportunities to further their own selfish interests. Furthermore, the Western concept of development creates an impression that the only human reality that is significant, is economic. Sine says,

“Modern development theories tend to talk about human personality, human activity, and human goals in largely economic terms – such as human resources, beneficiaries, and so on. Therefore, modern development activity tends to foster a

reductionistic view of the human personality and activity, often ignoring the areas of cultural, and relational development”(Samuel & Sugden 1987:7).

The experiences of human life are broader than just the economic aspect, even if it does significantly affect human life. Therefore finding better economic solutions is not guaranteed to be a panacea for all the societal problems that people face. Thus as Christian witnesses we must not reduce our gospel to only address economic issues. We should rather be holistic in dealing with all aspects of human reality.

#### **4.4 The Transformational Approach**

##### **4.4.1 Definition of Transformation**

Not being satisfied with the concepts of relief and development, scholars during the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, preferred to promote the idea of transformation. Transformation became the goal of Christian mission, as well. Bosch in his reflection in a paper ‘Toward Evangelism in Context,’ says,

“Transformation has been part of the Christian mission and influence in society right from the beginning... The early church was on the periphery of society. It found its adherents among slaves, women, and foreigners – people who had no special influence on the shape of society... So Christians did not expect to transform the social fabric of a powerful empire... Yet although the Christian influence in society in those early years of persecution was subtle and often unrecognised, it was to provide a true transformation in the next two millennia”(Samuel & Sugden 1987:180).

In our witness we should look at the gospel as a proclamation and mediation of redeeming deeds of transformation through the power of the Holy Spirit within society, groups and individuals. “Evangelisation involves persons and communities working for the transformation of their respective life situations. To participate in the transformation of one’s life situation implies, first and foremost, having experienced God’s grace, forgiveness, restitution, and liberation for service”(Costas 1989:30). The aim is to shape our deeds, so that they should be in line with the values of the kingdom of God.

I look at the various definitions of transformational development: First, I shall reflect on the meaning of transformation in a way that is closer to its Biblical roots. From that perspective transformation would be perceived as:

“The change of shape or form; *metamorphosis*: a continuous series of changes in the process of maturation; structural change: fundamental change (addressing the root or cause); recreation: complete change, recreation in the image of God... It is a more radical, fundamental process of change than mere development and renewal. It is about structural re-arrangement, *metamorphosis*, complete re-creation, i.e. transformation” (De Beer 1998:16).

Transformation implies a progressive form of change that alters the structure of entities or circumstances significantly from the original form. This change obviously brings radical improvement, yet without the connotation of any abrupt discontinuity. It is not just a quick fix approach to societal, group and personal renewal. One of the lessons that is drawn from Wheaton 83 is that:

“According to the biblical view of human life, transformation is the change from a condition of human existence contrary to God’s purposes to one in which people are able to enjoy the fullness of life in harmony with God (John 10:10; Col 3:8-15; Eph 4:13). This transformation can only take place through the obedience of individuals and communities to the Gospel, whose power changes lives of men and women by releasing them from guilt, power and consequence of sin, enabling them to respond with love to God and towards others (Rom 5:5) and making them new creatures in Christ” (2 Cor 5:17) (World Evangelical Fellowship – Wheaton Conference 83; Cheyne 1996:220).

In terms of this view of the transformation of human life, we must pursue an in-depth understanding of biblical values, since we seek to bring that life to be in line with God’s will, so that people may continue to live life as God envisaged it. We should not allow human life to just conform to the prevailing ideologies of our time in any abhorrent situation. Rather human life should be shaped according to the Christian ethics and principles that enhance the quality of life of humans who live in peace with each other, and the rest of creation, reconciled to God. We should assist human beings to be changed

in their humanity, so that they may avoid the wrong influences of sin and live in obedience to God's Word, fulfilling their calling in accordance with God's mandate for them.

Secondly, we understand that God is at the centre of transformation in our cosmos. God has a vested interest in the transformation of our lives and the world. Through the Scriptures God has provided some insights into how we can transform our societies. Therefore I echo Escobar's words that:

“Transformation is part of God's continuing action in history to restore all creation to himself and to its rightful purposes and relationships. Sin...has distorted God's original design and purpose for creation. This is visible in the way every dimension of life has been distorted from the original design of the Creator. Oppression and injustice, racism, alienation, and exploitation in the structures of communities and nations are the results of idolatry and disobedience from God... God had a purpose in creation and when man turn to Christ, a process begins in them by which they grow in the fulfilment of the original purpose of God” (Samuel & Sugden 1987: 39).

According to this perspective God is the source of socio-political, economic, and spiritual renewal in society. As the principal actor in history, God is engaged in reversing the damage caused to our social reality and human life by the Fall. God as the Creator did not abandon human beings after the Fall to pursue their self-destructive ways under the influence of the evil one without restraint. The Fall did not take God by surprise. God knew how to salvage His creation from the clutches of darkness. Evil, that manifests in the world as segregation, poverty, wars, oppression and marginalization may still be present after the Fall, but it will not determine our destiny. Satan might have turned human existence into a nightmare, but God has a plan through Christ to ultimately destroy the destructive power of evil that causes us to sin. The life, ministry, death and resurrection of Christ are God's plan to restore his creation to the state of bliss it had known before it was corrupted by sin. Jesus' coming marked the beginning of the end of the reign of evil in human society, which will culminate in the *Parousia*. The negative

forces of evil prevent creation from reaching its fullness, hindering its intended growth.

Mott points out that:

“The goal of transformation is that God’s purposes must be realized, as it is revealed in the Old Testament concept of *Shalom* – harmony, peace, health, well-being, prosperity, justice – and in the New Testament image of the Kingdom, which is both present and coming. Transformation seeks to repel the evil social structures that exist in the present cosmos and to institute the mission of the church, the values of the Kingdom of God over against the values of the ‘principalities and powers’ of this world” (Samuel & Sugden 1987:39).

All of creation exists for the glory of God, thus it finds its fullness in God’s purpose. It reaches its wholeness only when it continues to live in harmony with God’s purpose. We should not live our earthly lives with an agenda that result with us being alienated from God.

Thirdly, our focus is on God’s partnership with His people in the renewal of their world. God invites humanity into the mission of transforming their world according to his purpose and values. Bragg says,

“Transformation is a joint enterprise between God and humanity in history, not just a mechanistic or naturalistic process. It involves a transformation of the human condition, human relationships, and the whole societies. The so-called ‘developed’ modernized world needs transformation to free itself from a secular, materialistic condition marked by broken relationships, violence, economic subjugation, and the devastation of nature; and the ‘underdeveloped’ world needs transformation from the subhuman condition of poverty, premature death, hunger, exposure, oppression, disease and fear” (Samuel & Sugden 1987:39 – 40).

God invites human beings to participate in His cosmic enterprise, and to use their creativity in changing the world according to God’s mandate. Such a radical change is needed by both the societies of the North and of the South. Bragg states, “Whereas ‘development’ tends to be a term that the West applies to the Third World, transformation is equally applicable to both the ‘overdeveloped’ and the ‘underdeveloped’ worlds” (Samuel & Sugden 1996:40). Both the people of the North and of the South need

transformation because sin knows no boundaries. It is a fact that some of the problems of the South have been created by the historical sins of the North in its exploitative transactions with the South. Therefore, both should become joint participants with God in the activity of changing our world. It is a kind of change that cannot be predicted or manipulated according to the usual human models. It is transformation in which God works through his servants doing new things, opening up new possibilities. Transformation is a profound process, which Bruwer (1996:79 – 80) elucidates as follows:

“This is not development, a predictable growth from old roots, but a radical change, a transformation... Transformation is also a restoration or re-creation. It restores a growth disrupted by sin. Nevertheless, the growth is from one’s own roots, from a specific seed into a specific plant, or perhaps from a less than perfect person into a fulfilled and fruitful one... Christ’s transforming power can create in us a new way of thinking, a liberated mind.”

Our efforts should not just result in cosmetic change that does not disturb the prevalent undesirable state of affairs. Rather it calls for far-reaching changes to the previously adverse conditions and the creation of a new state of affairs. But in this transformational grid humans are not just puppets hanging on God’s providential string, just passively doing what they are told without any input of their own. God, who is the Creator, is a God of love who promotes human freedom in this world. God has called humanity to be co-creators with him. But as humans exercise this gift of freedom, they are not a law unto themselves. They are accountable to God in how they realize their freedom. God does not expect them to use their freedom destructively towards other people and the environment. Scripture says, “You, brothers [sisters], were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love” (Gal. 5:13). Human freedom is accompanied by human responsibility before God. It cannot be used to generate chaos, rob life, and destabilize relationships and societies as we see happening nowadays. This is not how God intended us to use our freedom. God’s children should learn to submit their self-serving tendencies to the rationale of love that makes them value others above themselves; and to be committed to acts that promote human rights, security, prosperity and peace.

Fourthly, there is a view that approaches transformation only from a socio-economic-political perspective. This view of transformation only targets these structural components of a society. They become the point of departure in bringing desirable change that would benefit people. According to Nkwiti,

“Development is transformation of social and economic relations through political actions and processes and by mobilizing and organizing community resources to effect a shift in the balance of power between the developed elite and the developing and the underdeveloping majority of society” (Davis 1993:39).

According to this view, transformation should be geared for curbing the disparities that exist due to unequal distribution of power. Transformation then seeks to eradicate the anomalies that were created in the past when one group dominated over another, to the latter’s disadvantage. The proponent focus is on the members of society whose lives are characterized by vast discrepancies in the accessibility and utilization of resources that are essential if they are to survive politically, socially and economically. The socio-economic-political perspective is a narrow view that excludes non-material aspects of human life that are also essential for human existence. Voorhies (1999:588) says of Christian transformational development:

“It is ‘development’ because it refers to the intentional process of facilitating change throughout the community or region. The idea of ‘transformation’ speaks of change in the whole person – material, social and spiritual as well as in the community – economic, social and political. It is ‘Christian’ transformation because there is a vision of people throughout the whole communities being changed to be like Christ, ‘being transformed into his likeness’” (2 Cor.3: 18).

We cannot put the different aspects of human life into unrelated compartments. Although we can analyse various aspects of human life independently to enhance our understanding, we ultimately have to integrate them. Human life is not divisible, or if you do divide it, it loses its integrity. Samuel says, “Transformation is to enable God’s vision of society to be actualised in all relationships, social, economic, and spiritual, so that God’s will may be reflected in human society and his love be experienced by all communities, especially the poor” (Samuel & Sugden 1999: Coverpage). Transformation



should not be a mission to change individual aspects of human reality that have been compartmentalized and detached from the wholeness of human life.

Finally, transformational development spares us from the perils of thinking personal and social change is a straightforward affair. Rather these are complex issues that do not change immediately. It is a time-consuming affair to seek to change people's perceptions, attitudes and actions, and their life-world. "I use transformational development to reflect my concern for seeking positive change in the whole of human life materially, socially and spiritually. The adjective of transformational is used to remind us that human progress is not inevitable; it takes hard work, and there is an adversary who works against our desire to enhance life"(Myers 1999a: 3). If our aim is to bring about fundamental change in people's lives and circumstances we cannot rush the results. If we are in a hurry we are going to get cosmetic changes that would not have lasting positive results. Sometimes when we work with donor funds in our ministry amongst the poor, our donors want to see progress. Meyers (1999a: 3) says,

"Transformational development is a lifelong journey. It never ends. There is always more before us. Everyone is on this journey: the poor, the non-poor, and the staff of the development agency... The goals of this journey of transformation are to recover our true identity as human beings created in the image of God and discover our true vocation as productive stewards, faithfully caring for the world and all the people in it."

The hit-and-run strategy does not work in the case of transformational development. When we serve the poor, we are called into a relationship as Christian witnesses, that is going to challenge both of us to change in our perceptions, attitudes, and actions. Our misconceptions about each other are going to be challenged. One hopes and prays that the change will be for the benefit of all, promoting harmony and prosperity.

#### **4.4.2 Why Transformation?**

Transformation is a biblical concept referring to socio-political, economic, and spiritual change and ecological management. Unlike other concepts of societal change and

people's development, it is closer to our theological foundations. It inspires us to embrace a ministry amongst the poor that seeks to challenge the status quo that creates poverty. It enables us to share the good news with the poor in a way that will encourage them to be reconciled with God and members of their community; and to assist them in dealing with empowerment issues so that they may be set free from impoverishment. Elliston says,

“Developing contextually an appropriate social transformation ministry is important for three key reasons. (1) To evangelize with no intentional concern for the social or physical situation will result in a truncated evangelism and disobedience to the command of the Lord to love our neighbours. (2) To do development without intentional concern for discipling the nations will likely lead to a disobedience to the Lord's command in the Great Commission. (3) And to disregard the context – social, physical, and spiritual – will lead to dysfunctions with both the evangelistic and cultural mandates” (In Gilliland 1989:199).

The concept of transformation development makes it possible for us to have a balanced approach in our Christian witness in a situation of deprivation. It enables us to fulfil our evangelisation mandate concurrently with our social responsibility. According to Costas (1989:30),

“The gospel is saving power - that is, the historical and transcendent energy of the kingdom of God, which is neither a theory nor a subjective ideal but rather God's efficacious and transforming action in the world and beyond it (cf. 1Cor.4: 20)... Christians live by the spell of the Spirit. They need to demonstrate the power of the Spirit's presence through a new lifestyle of freedom, service, justice and peace.”

In our mission to enlist the poor to be the Disciples of Christ, and in partnership with them, we also seek to transform their community to conform to kingdom values through the help of the Holy Spirit.

The goal of transformational development is *shalom*. In our quest for transformation development, we are inspired by the dream to realize God's peace in our societies, nations and world. Elliston in his exposition on transformation said,

“The goal for Christian social transformation differs sharply from any other goals. While Christians will see intermediate goals, such as improved economics, roads, water systems, social structures and justice deserving of their best efforts and support, they will also see the issue of reconciliation with God as having eternal significance. Three kinds of relational goals distinguish a Christian’s perspective: relations with God, relations with others, and relations with the environment” (In Gilliland 1989:204).

*Shalom* is about the restoration of relationships that have been distorted by sin in society. Sin has caused people to live in rebellion against God, to oppose God’s will and selfishly pursue their self-destructive agendas. The outcome is alienation from God and alienation from others. Human beings live in a cat-and-dog relationship with each other, characterized by enmity, oppression, domination, segregation, tension and injustice. Ultimately it leads to people recklessly promoting their enterprises in a manner that destroys the environment. Meaningful relationships are essential in facilitating real change in society. Elliston says,

“Right relations with others facilitate not only one’s growth but the development of others as well. Much attention is given in the Scriptures to the matter of relations with others. Good relationships are not to be maintained at any cost, that is, at the cost of integrity or one’s faith; but just, merciful, peaceful, and loving relationships are a key element in our own and others’ development... Development can never be fully understood without considering the relationships within the context” (In Gilliland 1989: 205).

Certain contexts create relationships that are based on fear, disrespect, inequality, suspicion, hate and exploitation. Yet as Christians we are supposed to encourage blissful relationships. Humans need to live in harmony with God, each other and their environment. We also need to grow in a way that is not destructive to our habitat. We are to be responsible in our use of natural resources, as it was God who entrusted the world to our care. Elliston says, “A steward is accountable for utilizing the resources appropriately to accomplish the objectives of the owner (Matt 25:14 –30; Lk 16:2; 19:11 – 27) for enlarging the resources of the owner and for any waste.” (In Gilliland 1989:209). God wants us to use these resources to maintain *shalom* in our society. We should not hoard

them self-indulgently, to serve our self-interests, because that will destroy community. In a world where competition and consumerism reign we see others as rivals in our scramble for these essential resources.

#### **4.4.3 Elements of Transformation**

There are many intertwined factors that form an integral part of any society, and that should be taken into account when we consider transformation. These cut across the human, spiritual, political, economic and social sectors of communities. “Transformation of one sector cannot be achieved without simultaneous changes in other sectors”. (Burkey 1993:48). We cannot afford to look at transformation in a lopsided way, limiting it to a single aspect when society is multidimensional. We have to look for links between all the sectors that characterize human life. “Transformation is an all embracing and wholesome idea, dealing with spiritual realities as well as the physical world. Transformation in the Biblical sense has indisputable spiritual roots, but it is also existential.... A life in transformation bridges the gap between a life in the Spirit and real life”(Bruwer 1996:79). Obviously when we seek to change aspects of our societal reality we look at it from a Christian perspective. “In taking account of the concrete forms of social reality, mission evangelism needs only to consider these basic elements that require transformation in the light of the gospel of salvation” (Nacpil 1999:19). The gospel informs our position when we deal with critical issues regarding social transformation. Our witness is grounded in the good news of Christ.

#### **Human Transformation**

Transformational development has a bias towards people. A desire to change the apparently desperate state of people and promote their welfare motivates transformation. It has a personal or human dimension to it. Voorhies (1999:590) indicates that some of its fundamental principles are, “To recognize the value of people. Respect and value people in the context of their local culture. Understand and respect local culture. Yet discern that while each person is intrinsically valuable, every culture has both positive and negative

aspects that may or may not be compatible with biblical teaching.” Ministry amongst the poor is not just to proclaim the gospel without taking into cognisance the background of the people. First, it must be approached from an attitude of genuine appreciation and affirmation of their humanity, no matter what the state of their existence is in terms of our living standards. Kia says, “People are more important than things; the person is more important than the activity” (Elliston 1989:91). Even when poverty might have denigrated them, they are valuable people before God. We must also respect their way of life, institutions and beliefs, no matter how backward we might consider them to be. God is concerned about changing the human condition that continues to exist contrary to His will. Our role is to contribute to the renewal of the individual’s life through the power of the gospel. Transformation is more than just meeting the basic needs of people and changing the social structures, and reordering society. “Transformation moves into and then beyond the immediate need to discover and minister to the underlying problems – spiritual, physical, or emotional which create the need”(Cheyne 1996:xxi). Without a significant human change in people, structural change is limited and not sustainable. All changes that happen must add value to people in their relationship to God, themselves and creation.

Any meaningful venture to deal with social issues has to address personal change in the players that are part of the issues. This vision of transformation, if it has to thrive, must be incarnated in people who have aligned their lives to match the envisaged transformation. “It takes transformed people to transform society... To be valid a transformational approach must be people-centred, rather than being program- or project-centred, and must recognize the importance of deliverance from every form of bondage that would inhibit or preclude the reconciliation of the whole of life”(Cheyne 1996:68,70). It is a fallacy that people who have been socialized in circumstances that perpetuated certain societal problems can be expected to just embrace the transformed situation. Sometimes those who were the beneficiaries of these social problems subtly subvert change to protect their self-interest. “Unless the motivation comes from within, efforts to promote change will not be sustainable by that individual. The individual remains under the power of others”. (Burkey 1993:35). People must be introduced to the

prospect of personal renewal in Christ in order for them to develop capacity for a more enduring transformation. Yet this change cannot just be imposed on them, least of all on the poor, who have been subjected to a life of degradation. They need to have their dented identity restored, so that they may truly know that they have been created in the image of God and that it was unjust for them to be forced to live in circumstances not befitting their status as God's children. "No transformation can be sustainable unless this distorted, disempowering sense of identity is replaced by the truth. Healing the marred identity of the poor is the beginning of transformation" (Myers 1999a: 115). People must recover their human dignity if it has been undermined. They must not have any sense of inferiority or a devaluing attitude. They must believe that they are valuable before God and that they have been richly endowed with divine blessing to be able to make a meaningful contribution in society for the good of all, according to their calling. "Building self-confidence and self-worth means breaking down walls of dependency that limit realization of people's aspirations and that bind them to prescriptions of others interests." (Davis 1993:40). Meanwhile those who are rich should abandon the attitude of superiority that makes them act in a manner that marginalizes the weak and makes them live in alienation from them. Rather, they should pursue relationships that entrench equality and abolish domination.

We must not subscribe to a purely idealistic and romantic view of development that excludes human aspects. People have both strengths and shortcomings that can either enhance or restrict the course of transformation in society. "Humanistic development plans often fail when those implementing them are self-limited by human greed, power politics, graft, or just plain lethargy. Real transformation calls for wholeness" (Cheyne 1996: xx). Sometimes great development initiatives crumble in communities, because of undesirable human habits, perceptions, attitudes, characters and traditions. What is required is a need for the transformation of these lives, as we push for social transformation, a need for people's lifestyles to be transformed so as to be aligned to God's purposes. "For transformation to take place there needs to be an inner incentive as well as an outside incentive. People cannot develop themselves without an incentive to

change” (Bruwer 1996:85). Thus, we have to approach human development in a way that shows the rewards of transformation. We should not focus on just social or economic; or political or spiritual rewards separately; but on a holistic view. In this regard Voorhies (1999:590) wants us to, “Realize that poverty includes both the physical, material, spiritual and social dimension. Involve the whole person – mind, body and spirit, in any development effort.” Transformation is about the personal development of individuals in communities so as to take responsibility for their lives. It is about restoring their identity as God’s children who should live their lives to the fullest. Voorhies (1999:590) urges us to, “Believe in the person’s capacity to contribute and determine his/her future. Help people meet their needs with dignity and self-respect. No matter how poor, every community and every individual has something to contribute.”

People must be challenged graciously to believe in their ability to solve their own problems even when they are given assistance. They should not be made to have self-doubt and a sense of inadequacy. They need to be motivated to leave the sidelines of human deprivation and sinfulness and to aspire to a life that is praiseworthy to God and society. This cannot be achieved instantaneously at a quick fix workshop. We should have a long-term view of genuine human development. Burkey (1993:35 ) indicates that, “It is a process by which an individual develops self-respect, and becomes more self-confident, self-reliant, cooperative and tolerant of others through becoming aware of his/her shortcomings as well as his/her potential for positive change. This takes place through working with others, acquiring new skills and knowledge, active participation in the economic, social and political development of their community.”

People are more than just recipients of charity, social grants, and development. They are ‘beings’ worthy of God’s love. They deserve the dignity afforded to them by God despite their desperate circumstances. Our transformational efforts must cherish the value of human life.

## **Spiritual Transformation**

Social transformation has spiritual implications. Transformation addresses all life that is within the cosmos, in its spirituality the way God created them. “It has spiritual overtones, but it makes a real difference to real people in real life. Like a plant growing from seed, a transforming life undergoes the inner, spiritual process of growth from one reality to another, but retaining the unquestionable links with both realities” (Bruwer 1996:79). You cannot adequately address transformation issues without addressing spiritual issues related to society. This spiritual transformation has both a personal and structural dimension to it. There is a spiritual change that has to be orchestrated both on the individual and societal front. “Spiritual transformation must begin in the individual but must spread to encompass the transformation of all society, indeed, of all creation”(Samuel & Sugden 1987:47). All people are intrinsically spiritual. It is a part of our human reality, an integral part of all the other aspects of our lives. It is imperative that we should reflect on aspects of human spirituality in our quest for societal transformation. Bacik (1986:5-6) describes it as follows:

“Spirituality is a rich and suggestive word which points to various aspects of lived experience. Traditionally, Christian spirituality has manifested a Trinitarian character. It has to do with responding to the call of our Creator to help humanize our culture, with putting on the mind of Christ in order to transform our world, with the promptings of the Holy Spirit in order to bring unity to our fragmented society. A genuine spirituality involves the imperative to improve these relationships and to make them more fruitful. We must learn to find God in and through all relationships, which constitute our lives.”

Christians know that at the core of our social problems there is a problem of sin, which creates spiritual complications. This has been the failure of people throughout history, their inability to follow the purposes and principles of God, in their development as societies. The force of sin has continued to spread evil in society. Societies have persisted in fostering attitudes, practices, systems and ideologies that have distorted meaningful human relationships. This has created a bitter legacy of poverty, inequality, segregation, conflict and hatred. Bragg says, “The power in society of sin, both individual and



institutional, is a basic deterrent to positive change. Many ‘development’ programs have failed because of human greed, power politics, graft or plain lethargy” (Samuel & Sugden 1987:46 - 47). It is imperative that we should address the individual and structural aspects of spiritual transformation that calls for genuine conversion amongst individuals and redemption of social structures. When individuals change positively in their natures, characters, minds, deeds/habits and relationships then they make social transformation possible. They can then participate constructively and cooperatively in the creation of a just, equitable, peaceful and prosperous society.

We must highlight the fact that God is the source of transformation necessary to snowball any social renewal. God’s Spirit precedes us in our mission within disadvantaged communities. I quote the concluding remarks of the Wheaton’ 83 Statement that states:

“Finally, we confess our utter dependence on God. We affirm that transformation is, in the final analysis, His work, ...work in which He engages us. To this end He has given us His Spirit, the Transformer par excellence, to enlighten us and be our Counsellor (John 16:7), to impart gifts to us (Rom. 12:1; 1 Cor. 12), to equip us to face and conquer the enemy (2 Cor.10: 3 –5; Gal. 5:22 –23). We are reminded that our unconfessed sins and lack of love for others grieve the Spirit (Eph. 4:30; Gal. 5:13 –14)” (Samuel & Sugden 1987:265).

Our mission is God’s mission; we have been enlisted to this mission by God to be God’s witnesses amongst the poor. God has also graciously empowered us with capabilities to fulfil our ministry. God is the one who orchestrates our witness amongst the disadvantaged. Voorhies (1999:590 – 591) says transformation requires that you “recognize that God is already at work in the community. Part of the external facilitator’s task is to discover what God is doing and support what may already be happening as a bridge to how God wants to use the external resources and revelation.” In entering any community struggling with poverty we must embrace God’s work that has been there prior to our entry into those communities. Even when we might not find an established faith community in the area, God is still at work in those circumstances. As Voorhies (1999:591) suggests, “Recognize churches as foundational for sustained and abundant transformation. To strengthen existing churches, or to plant new ones where none exists,

forms a powerful community of transformed lives empowered by God with hope and kingdom values.” The social evils that persist in society cannot only be eradicated by just legislation and equitable redistribution of resources to empower those who have been disenfranchised. The intricacy of the nature of social evils and problems calls for more than just an economic, political, educational, and social reconstruction plan. It requires the application of certain spiritual principles to invoke God’s intervention and blessing upon the transformation process. “We must recognize that only Christ can create the change necessary within individuals and through which participation in the transformation can be successful...”(Cheyne 1996:xxi). We must approach spiritual transformation as an integral part of social transformation to avoid dualistic tendencies that may cloud our faith.

### **Political Transformation**

Transformation is about creating a new political dispensation that will be characterized by freedom, justice, human rights, democracy and peace. It is clear that certain political systems experience perpetual conflict, poverty, suffering, subjugation and demonization of communities. The issue of unequal power relations is at the core of most of the social problems, whether it be within the family, community or nation. According to Samuel and Sugden (1987:41),

“Equity is essential to transformation because all people are God’s children, with the same needs and potential. As shown in the jubilee laws and the prophetic teaching, God has a special concern for the have-nots – the poor, the defenceless, the weak and the marginalized, the sick and the hungry... If social progress is to be equitable, the advantages must reach the most needy.”

Therefore it is important that we should also aspire to transform the undesirable political order that entrenches the misery of communities. Sometimes communities have great democratic institutions but inefficient bureaucratic structures that hamper any effort of providing essential social services for the welfare of the people. Complacent civil servants, through their intransigence, retard the transformation of marginalized communities. In certain instances the noble intentions of politicians for social change are

derailed by a public service that lacks the capacity to deliver on the adopted transformational agenda. Picard and Garrity say, “Where the public sector is limited in terms of organizational and human resource capacity, priorities must be set and problems addressed in order of importance in small chunks, and in some cases one at a time”(Fitzgerald et. al 1997:75). Some of the transformation bottlenecks have to be removed from our public systems to facilitate the political transformation of communities. It means we must create a dispensation characterized by:

- Creation of legitimate political structures
- Culture of good governance
- Credible participation and representation of communities in all political decision making structures
- Application of ethics to uproot a culture of corruption and mismanagement
- Appointment of competent/trained staff
- Transparency and accountability
- Efficient administrative systems and structures
- Proper service delivery, especially for the poor

Transformation is not complete until people are aware of their abilities, rights and responsibilities in determining their future according to their own aspirations. It is not just about electing political representatives who subscribe to their political, social and economic ideals, then to govern according to their mandate. Rather it is to continue to hold these elected representatives accountable for their political activities. These political leaders should work for a dispensation that will uproot any form of unjust relationships, domination and discrimination. People need to enjoy their God-given liberty in their community, living as responsible citizens. Thus in our witness we must work to create a just dispensation in our society. This should be part of our mission when we serve God in our communities. Looking at “missions as the quest for justice...” Bosch (1991:400) cautioned “although evangelism may never be equated with labour for justice, it may never be divorced from it.” The struggle to create a just order in our nation is part of our missionary mandate. We need to show diligence and commitment in making concrete contributions towards strengthening the culture and institutions that promote the values of justice in our nation until all unjust practices are removed.

## **Social transformation**

Transformation has social implications because it affects the life of a group or community in a specific context. Samuel (1996: 148) indicates that social transformation can be defined as, “actions in a given society whereby its life, as a community, or as families and individuals, is changed to establish a society that enshrines, ensures and enacts values of equality, justice, concern and stewardship of resources.” Every community has its own ideals, culture, aspirations, systems and preferences. Communities use those aspects to create their own social reality. “The transformational development story belongs to the community. It was the community story before we came and it will be the community story long after we leave. While our story has something to offer to the community’s story, we must never forget that, at the end of the day, this is not our story” (Myers 1999a: 112). Transformation affects the way a community will utilize its resources to achieve its goals and promote its interests. It is about how people in a community will harness their group power to change their world to be in line with their God-inspired dreams for themselves and their children. “It refers to investments and services carried out or provided by a community for mutual benefit of people of that community whether as a village, district or nation. These might include health services and facilities, education, water supplies, energy, transport and systems of communications” (Burkey 1993:37). Social change is brought about by group dynamism. It cannot just be imposed from outside a community. A significant group of people within the community must have a common desire for that transformation. “Change must be socially acceptable to a group as a whole”(Burkey 1993:48). People need to organize themselves in terms of their common interest, potentials, dreams, resources and structures to create a social order that they envisaged together. The motivation for transformation must emanate from within a community. They are the only ones who can adequately decide how they wish to shape their communities. Sometimes there is no social cohesion to make it possible for people to have a shared vision for the ultimate benefit of everyone in the community. Relationships might have been disrupted by inequality, oppression, intolerance and religious and political differences. “People need relationships. They need to know that they are special in the eyes of God and their

fellow man [and woman]” (Cheyne 1996:32). Therefore these disrupted relationships must be restored to be just, harmonious and empowering so that we may have a truly transformed society. The fight against poverty is winnable in an atmosphere characterized by reconciliation because then we can harness the contribution of all the stakeholders.

### **Economic Transformation**

Transformation also impacts on the economic front. It must enable people to participate actively in a productive activity. “Productive economic activity involves mobilization and management of some combination of all or most factors of production. These factors are land, raw materials, labour (skilled and unskilled), capital, energy, tools, machinery, plant, management and entrepreneurship”(Burkey 1993:36). People have to have an opportunity to be engaged meaningfully as economic players in a way that empowers their community. They must no longer view and experience economic activity as something that impoverishes their community while only a minority prospers. It is about an environment that promotes entrepreneurship, about communities pursuing viable business ventures, with people being able to use their talents to live profitable lives. “Entrepreneurship represents willingness and initiative needed to identify opportunities, invest capital and risk failure and success”(Burkey 1993:36). We must remove all hurdles that restrict economic transformation. Thus in our community we must ensure that these underlying issues are addressed:

- Skills training
- Access to capital
- Culture of productivity
- Economic growth
- Provision of appropriate infrastructure
- Legislation to redress imbalances/inequalities
- Stewardship
- Challenges of globalisation
- Business ethics
- Innovation.

It is imperative that economic prosperity must not become an elusive dream to the multitude who have only known poverty, despite their productivity. According to the Oxford Declaration on Christian Faith and Economic of January 1990, “economic power can be concentrated on the hands of a few people in a market economy. When that occurs political decisions tend to be made for economic reasons and the average member of society is politically and economically marginalized”(Samuel & Sugden 1999:341). Our conscience must not allow us as God’s people to dispassionately watch people live in subhuman conditions. In our society when people talk about economic growth they usually refer to the impact on the country’s GDP on macro enterprises and big conglomerates that compete on the global market. Voorhies (1999:588) says,

“Economic growth is often determined through increase in macro-economic measurements, such as higher per capita income and / or improvements in balance of trade. In the recent past the World Bank and IMF (International Monetary Fund) have led economic development programs by providing loans on the basis of nations agreeing to ‘structural adjustments.’ In general structural adjustment involves: a balancing of the budget against its tax base, lowering government expenditure, which usually means laying off government employees and selling government businesses, a liberalization of the currency and economic policies.”

These measures adversely affected the significant participation of the poor in the economy, because with the movement towards mergers and acquisition, privatisation and downsizing, jobs were lost and employment opportunities disappeared. We have to promote initiatives that will draw the poor into the economic sector and encourage them to start viable small and medium enterprises. Voorhies (1999: 588) says, “Simple efforts by ordinary people bring about marvelous changes in their own societies.” We must promote productive activity at grassroots level, involving people who might have been excluded from the mainstream economic sectors.

#### 4.4.4 Critique of Transformation

As Christians, we recognize that many societal institutions that are the drivers of economic, political and social transformation have their shortcomings. These societal institutions have in certain instances introduced novel policies and initiatives to bring about transformation. The various charters in SA for banking, mining and energy generation promote the principles of equity and black economic empowerment. Although these strategies are still at an early stage of implementation, cracks have begun to appear, as almost all the serious empowerment opportunities in those fields are snapped up by the same few black elite. The majority of the poor have not directly benefited from those empowerment deals. The institutions that are supposed to facilitate real transformation seem to pursue an agenda that does not necessarily improve the quality of life of the poor. Rather it is a kind of empowerment that creates a new minority class of wealthy Black people. It seems difficult for societal systems to imbibe kingdom values of justice, peace and freedom without the vigorous engagement of the church with them. Myers (1999b: 580) says,

“The world cannot and will not transform political, economic, and social power into something that is pro-life, pro-poor and pro-kingdom. Sustainable change will not come through community organizing, political processes or more education. Challenging the poverty-creating nature of power demands the transformational power of the gospel. It is personal and social sin. Only the good news – all of it – contains the hope that the poor will someday be able to build homes and live in them.”

A number of transformational strategies have been proposed but processes have been dogged by corruption, community infighting and self-interest, which have derailed some of the developmental initiatives. I think the church should increase its participation in initiatives of social development – as has been done in instances where the government has worked in partnership with Faith Based organizations to pay out children’s grants. This has led to some significant success in alleviating poverty.

#### **4.5. The Concept/Factor of Sustainability**

##### **4.5.1 Definition of Sustainable Development**

In modern thinking about poverty eradication, development and transformation, the issue of sustainability has come to the fore as one of the important factors. The most commonly used definition of sustainability is the one coined at the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987: “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Morris 2002:8; De Santa Ana 1998:65). People, as they enjoy prospects of a better life today, should not jeopardize the opportunities of those who will be their successors. The coming generations must be given a chance to inherit an unspoiled natural environment. They should not find themselves living on an uninhabitable planet, which they would continue to harm, like their forerunners. According to De Santa Ana (1998:5),

“Sustainability implies concern for the well-being of the future generations and their right to a fulfilled life. While each generation constructs its own life and alters the face of the earth, no generation should change the quality of the conditions of life on the planet so profoundly as to deprive future generations of possibilities to build and construct their life and alter the face of the earth in their own right.”

There is consensus that some human activities have had a detrimental effect on the environment, endangering their previously unspoiled habitat. The coming generations might be denied a chance of living in an immaculate environment. If the present environment continues to be exposed to such desecration, the quality of their lives will be compromised and their survival will be at stake. An ecological disaster is looming if human actions towards the environment continue unabated in their current destructive form. According to Dommen, “Priority to the poor according to this definition overrides intergenerational considerations”(De Santa Ana 1998:65). The habitat might be negatively impacted in such a way that the non-renewable resources would be damaged irreversibly, and coming generations would be dispossessed. This in turn might throw



global climatic conditions in disarray, resulting in a plethora of problems such as disease, and scarcity of essential resources in such great proportions as to create fierce competition, making us vulnerable to a host of unprecedented self-destructive behaviours. We must wake up. “The recognition that the ‘fate of the earth’ is our fate as well, that the piercing of the ozone layer pierces us too, does not even provoke self-interest, much less create a new, more communal consciousness”(King & Woodyard 1999:4). God, who commands us to be good stewards in our earthly enterprises, has declared that his commandments have multigenerational implications. Therefore all generations are expected to live in obedience and faithfulness according to God’s directives.

#### **4.5.2 The Key Aspects of Sustainability**

We must monitor our witness in the community lest our ministry activities spoil our good intention by creating a culture of dependency and entitlement within the communities. We should guard against helping people to their detriment instead of contributing towards their desired empowerment. Our mission is to afford desperate people the support they need with the goal of enabling them to ultimately stand on their own feet without our backing. Our mandate is not to create a society of beggars who will always receive handouts and help from outside without developing personal and community capacity to handle their own challenges. Below I cite some essential elements of the concept of sustainability.

##### **Creating Awareness**

Our sustainable development ministry begins with an effort to raise the level of people’s understanding of issues that are currently prevalent in their situation. This implies that we have to purposefully build their awareness of their environment. Despite human ingenuity that is evident in our advancement in technology, and our economic-political-social systems we have not fully woken to the devastating consequences of our actions for our ecological system and ourselves. Therefore it is imperative that our awareness of that reality should be heightened. It would be catastrophic if we allowed this current state of

affairs to persist. “That is a process of discussion, reflection, questioning, and analysis – being aware of their own world and how it works”(Burkey 1993:73). Through dialogue communities must be conscientized to understand the nature of their social problems and how their situation is linked to their relationship with the natural environment. We must not assume an intellectual and spiritual superiority that precludes dialogue with communities where we do community ministry. It is through dialogue that people can identify their needs and voice the solutions they seek. Freire says, “Conscientization means a stimulation of self-reflected critical awareness in people of their social reality and of their ability to transform that reality by their conscious collective action”(Burkey 1993:55). People need to understand all fundamental factors related to the spiritual, economic, political and social challenges that are present in their communities. They have to be aware that they can do something to change their plight. Freire says, “By looking into oneself and using what one hears, sees and experiences one begins to understand what is happening in one’s own life”(Burkey 1993:55). The poor need to define, analyse and consolidate issues that compound their struggle towards sustainable development.

Sustainable development is difficult to attain when people do not have an awareness of issues that characterize their situation and are not willing to collaborate to eliminate those problems. Sometimes people are so overwhelmed by the challenges of poverty that they do not recognize the available alternatives and opportunities for them to improve their fortunes. Even when they know they have rights they do not seem to use them to their advantage to realize their freedom from marginalization. Therefore they cannot rise to the challenge of participating meaningfully in creating a better life for themselves and others. Thus they continue to appear helpless and hopeless due to lack of awareness. This then seems to justify the intervention of consultants and other development experts who move from being just facilitators to being controllers of sustainable development amongst the poor. Wilson says,

“Sustainable development... requires, among other things, a massive educational effort so that the citizens are aware of the need to manage resources wisely... not only to fulfil their own needs today, but those of their children tomorrow, and of future generations. It is a concept which is in harmony with deep-seated African

cultural values concerning the continuity of the dead, the living and the yet unborn”(De Santa Ana 1998:63).

We need to live in this world knowing that the continued existence of future generations depends on our respect for the environment and that we should not use it selfishly. We must manage it responsibly to perpetuate their existence in a healthy natural environment, so that they will regard us, once we have passed on, with admiration, respect and gratitude to God.

### **Capacity Building**

Sustainable development is about building people’s capacity to face the challenges that they confront in their context. People have the potential to formulate their own solutions to current problems. Cook says, “In a community, development can only be sustainable if the people concerned have the capacity – the capacity and the will to use that capacity – to manage the development themselves”(Fitzgerald et. al 1997:290). As community ministers we must assist them to tap into their potential so that they can solve their social problems. “Capacity building means establishing clear understanding of needs and skills gap in people and then beginning a carefully designed and sensitive process of building up the capacity of these people to ensure that they become better equipped to deal with circumstances in their lives”(Davis 1993:40). It means enabling them to have the power, will and the resources to assume responsibility to resolve the issues of their development. The poor should not be allowed to feel as if they were hopeless, helpless and powerless victims who cannot contribute meaningfully to their progress out of poverty. This implies that we should work strategically with them to develop these areas:

- Conversion
- Empowerment
- Self-confidence and self-esteem
- Acquisition of knowledge and skills
- Vocational competence
- Self-reliance
- Self-realization

- Self- determination
- Leadership

People cannot be objects of charity forever. They have to gradually graduate to doing things for themselves. Sethi says, “All solidarity efforts must be aimed at strengthening their own capacity for independent action”(Burkey 1993:40). We must create an environment that is conducive for the poor to develop their potential. We must not stifle local development with our ministry activities. “People grow in responsibility as they are helped to accept responsibilities. People will never be ready to take over the job until they, along with their leaders, pass through the process of discovering what they are capable of doing”(Cheyne 1996:116). It is imperative that we facilitate capacity building amongst people since it motivates people to be involved constructively in shaping the course of their lives and community. Cooks says, “In principle there is no limit to the extent to which human capacity can be developed, but lack of capacity places limits on performance. Creating performance without building capacity is clearly not sustainable, but simply building capacity without motivating performance wastes that capacity”(Fitzgerald et. al 1997:276). People’s capacity must be built to promote their participation in the process of their development. We should not stimulate their potential for self-realization without giving them an opportunity to exercise their acquired knowledge, skill and confidence in their ability to deal with challenges in their situation. The disadvantaged who are benefiting from capacity building opportunities must also be encouraged to use their initiative and be involved in credible and meaningful nation-building initiatives.

### **Participation**

There should be a deliberate attempt on our part to involve people, to get them to use their own initiative and resources and to take responsibility for their own welfare. People are not necessarily so poor that they cannot be involved in making a contribution, that they cannot be part of the solution to their own hardships. Poverty does not mean that people cannot be creative, energetic and industrious. They need “enablement that makes them to be able to participate actively and confidently, being able to be innovative and

creative, being able to recognize and use opportunities, and being able to realize when mistakes have been made and how to correct them”(Davis 1993:40). The poor are not useless or good for nothing; they have the potential to be contributors to their own liberation. Poverty is not a justifiable reason for us to exclude them from being involved in all the processes of their emancipation. We must not use developmental strategies that suppress the self-determination of the deprived. They should be involved in the diagnosis and prognosis of their problems. “Participation is essentially learning by doing exercise – plans are made, action taken, results studied, lessons learned, and new plans and action take place”(Burkey 1993:57). It should not be a cosmetic exercise but a commitment to allow people to participate in all the phases of a project. Also we should avoid fronting in our witness, and engage credible members of poor communities. This kind of participation creates a sense of responsibility, and highlights the obligations, risks, and financial and spiritual implications of community projects. Kia says, “People grow in responsibility as they are helped to accept responsibility... The energy put into community action will be proportionate to the involvement of the community in the planning... Too much help leads to dependency; people should be helped in so far as it enables them to become more self-reliant” (Elliston 1989:91 – 92). Participation must be empowering if it has to be sustainable. There must be some skills transfer and mentoring in the participatory process of development. Participation is useless if it does not add value to the poor who are involved in it. Community participation boosts people’s pride and gives them a sense of ownership over the projects. Hiebert says, “Our goal in development is ultimately to help people discover ways in which they can help themselves” (Elliston 1989:92). When people lack pride and ownership of a project, sustainability becomes an illusion. They have to be assisted to develop confidence and the courage to deal with some of their community issues themselves. Lastly, “participation means a breaking of the monopoly of knowledge”(Coetzee & Graaff 1996:146). People’s levels of awareness and enlightenment must be enhanced so that they should not remain ignorant about issues at hand. They should also be introduced to the body of knowledge and experience that the intervening experts possess in order for them to develop their own solutions to their community challenges. Any essential knowledge necessary to change people’s lives and circumstances must not be a sacred

preserve accessible only to the privileged professional elite. Ordinary people must also have access to information in order for them to determine their own affairs.

### **Strengthening Institutions**

Certain community structures need to be reinforced in order for them to function to their fullest capacity. Sometimes we are called to be involved in structural reconstruction within communities. In some instances, the family unit and leadership structures might be dysfunctional. These institutions therefore have to be strengthened if we are to have sustainable development. We must assist with the introduction or revival of systems that would enable all community institutions to function efficiently and effectively. Some community problems are compounded by inappropriate and inadequate social systems, such as educational systems that prepare students for irrelevant careers, leaving them unemployable. Furthermore, local agencies must be able to sustain the improvements facilitated by outside or donor agencies within their communities. Cook says,

“Political capacity is defined by the strength of those institutions (such as free press, and a set of commonly accepted political values) that encapsulate the people’s will to govern themselves democratically, and by those institutions... which provide channels through which this will may be expressed. In South Africa today, the vigorous will to be democratic has created an informal capacity which has compensated for the lack of formal capacity”(Fitzgerald et.al 1997:277).

People need to use their potential, cultural resources, resident knowledge and experience and local structures to forge ways to their envisaged goals. This would mean that this entire strategic institutional base must be revitalized in order for them to be mobilized to be architects of their own destiny. A power base has to be created amongst those who are key stakeholders in sustainable development. King and Woodyard (1999:40 – 41) explain relational power as follows:

“Some speak of it as a ‘power with’ rather than a ‘power over.’ Relational power will not tolerate any diminishment of the other; indeed, its goal is to empower. And this is a vision of power that is observable in much of nature, both human

and the nonhuman. Human beings, in their interpersonal relationships, often strive for mutual and reciprocal empowerment... Within the broader reality of nature, symbiotic relationships provide dramatic support for the importance of mutuality and reciprocity. Such relationships do not use and abuse rather build and reinforce.”

Agents have to use this power to realize their community objectives that are for the good of all. This power should not be subverted in order to create monopolies, or to sideline and suppress any person or group.

### **Environmental Responsibility**

The problem of poverty is compounded by the unfettered growth of the world’s largest economies, the very economies that have contributed to the destruction of the environment, and the irresponsible use of natural resources that cannot be replaced if abused. Humans, in developing their entrepreneurial aspirations, have not been kind to the environment. “A world which once seemed open to almost infinite expansion of human population and economic activity now appears as a world of limits”(Cobb 1992:7). These actions in societies driven by profit, competition, and self-interest have created thriving enterprises that compromised the well-being of the environment. Due to unbridled expansion feeding on greed, we find pollution, depletion of natural resources, increases in toxic waste, and poor settlement solutions. The litany of our misdeeds towards the environment is shocking. Also the deification of science has resulted in many ecological problems that are faced by communities today. (Bragg 1989:58) says,

“The secularisation that has accompanied the scientific-industrial revolution has broken down the holistic, unified view of reality that permeates the more traditional societies, opening the way for the mastery of the physical that would have been unimaginable before, such as putting a man on the moon and other scientific achievements.”

Although science has enabled people to come with novel inventions that have improved human life, it has also brought problems. Humans have made science a sphere outside of God’s influence, no longer subjected to the ethics of God’s kingdom. Thus the

environment was exploited irresponsibly without restraint. We cannot continue these irresponsible actions that harm our habitat. “The finitude of our planet requires us to work toward a human society that accepts limits and seeks a decent life for all within them. Such a society should live in a balance with other species and primarily on the renewable resources of the planet” (Cobb 1992:7). Our world is vulnerable and may be damaged permanently by humans in their quest for progress. We have to recognize that some of the natural resources are not renewable. If they are exploited carelessly, they may be lost permanently. Those resources, which are irreplaceable, have been given to humanity and are necessary for its survival.

Environmental responsibility is part of our kingdom mandate as God’s servants. This is compatible to the biblical concept of stewardship. “The Bible asserts that God, the Creator, owns the earth and all the things in it and has entrusted to human beings the care and the preservation of the rest of creation. Such a stewardship role presupposes that the dynamics and capabilities of its execution is possessed by all human beings” (Ajulu 2001:27). We believe that God, who is the Creator of the entire world, is its owner and we as humans are entrusted with the proper management of this habitat. This is the responsibility of all human beings both rich and poor, learned and those who are not academically empowered. The call to save the earth should not be shrugged of as coming from a few ardent environmental activists. Humans need to exercise due diligence as they pursue their creative enterprises in political, economical, technological, scientific, social, and spiritual fields. Our growth and our search for a better quality of life must be approached in harmony with environmental conservation. Webb says, “The glory of the Creator is manifested in the regency of humankind over creation. Caretaking the rest of creation, or stewardship is the role given to humankind”(Ps 8) (Elliston 1989:54). The level of human responsibility towards the environment is a litmus test for our reverence for God, who is the Lord of all creation. God is honoured if we show accountability in our human activities in relation to the environment. De Santa Ana (1998:18) says,

“One of the convictions of faith that provides meaning for Christians is the awareness of the sacramental dimension of all creation. Creation speaks about the Creator (Ps 19:1 – 6; 104: 1 –30). This is not ‘natural revelation,’ but awareness



that, in mysterious ways, the imprint of God and his eternal love and plan are present in creation. Creation is not finished, and Christian communities expect and hope for the fulfilment of God's work, in which they have been graciously invited to collaborate (c.f. 2 Cor. 5:16 – 6:2)."

Therefore as Christians we have a challenge to look at better options of living that are compatible with good environmental management. If we respect God's creation, it becomes another window through which we can discern God and appreciate his mercy towards us. We have to show gratitude to God and be responsible partners with God in preserving our habitat, since God is still at work within creation to bring it to its ultimate fullness.

#### **4.5.3 A Critique of Sustainability**

The concept of sustainability is a good concept but it has limitations. Its aims are commendable because it focuses on human beings, poverty eradication, and removal of disparities between groups and nations, peace and effective environmental management. Its efficiency in society depends on people's ability to change their lifestyle, and on how we treat each other and the environment in our interactions. Sustainable development will be difficult to achieve in a world that is driven by consumerism, competition and profit, and that promotes bad economic, political, social and religious habits that destroy the habitat and disrupt blissful relationships. It is a challenge for people to mend their ways and imbibe a sustainable culture. "We recognize in ourselves also a profound resistance to change, so that our freedom is not a matter of simply choice between good and evil. Our self-centeredness distorts our use of freedom" (Cobb 1992:11). Sin is at work in people and in our world, causing our noble intentions to be torpedoed before they bear fruit. There have been campaigns promoting respect for the environment, but it's still being desecrated. People alone cannot change things in a manner that delivers sustainability – not without God. "Apart from the transformative power of grace, there would be no grounds for hope"(Cobb 1992:11). It is difficult to extricate people from the comfortable life that is sustained by behaviours that compromise the principles of

stewardship towards the environment. Our lives have been entrenched in customs that depend on knowledge, technology and equipment that do damage to the environment.

There is a tendency for people as they seek sustainable development to lose sight of justice. The activists of sustainable development are not always the vocal proponents of justice. Even when we are responsible in how we manage our planet, we must not forget those who are still marginalized. According to De Santa Ana (1998:6),

“Taking seriously the need for a ‘common future’ represents a particular challenge to the industrial nations, which not only consume a disproportionately high share of resources but also contribute to the destruction of the ecological equilibrium in the South. The quest for sustainability thus exposes a new form of exploitation of the South by the North. A new degree of sharing is required.”

It’s about us being more compassionate towards each other since all of us are God’s people. We have to show care in our manifold relationships, whether in business, education, politics, religion or any other social avenue within our society. We have an obligation to show respect towards each other in promoting shared prosperity, without marginalizing some, as we live in harmony with the rest of creation. It would be a tragedy to see us preserve the environment and pursue our green politics and theology with conviction and self-sacrifice yet neglect equity. “But the primary concern will be with building up communities that witness to the love of both the neighbour and the whole created world”(De Santa Ana 1998:21). When we are eco-sensitive, this must be accompanied by our being very vocal and active to challenge injustice, oppression and exploitation of women, the poor and expatriates. As activists of sustainable development, we must prioritise and value justice so that we may be at peace with our environment. Wilson says, “Much that has been written about sustainable development concerns the natural resource base. It is important to concentrate also on human resource sustainability”(De Santa Ana 1998:63). This should be our balanced approach to sustainable development; we must also highlight the element of empowering human development. It is not just about preserving pristine beaches for the exclusive use of rich tourists who have the power of their mighty currency. It is also about making these beaches accessible to the poor citizens of the land. The poor too have to have access to

such beautiful resources so that they may enjoy, preserve and be empowered. The destitute should no longer face societal systems, structures and groups that undermine their right to a life, that is fit for humans.

Globalisation creates challenges to sustainable development in communities. The fabric of human existence as rooted in a community is slowly being eroded by globalisation. People are being turned into global citizens in a global village. They get hooked into the impersonal network of global culture, and technology, the information highway [Internet], international trade and so on. “Human beings seek meaning and experience of belonging to associations. With whom they can develop face-to-face and not only ‘virtual’ relationships” (De Santa Ana 1998:13). They become citizens of this cyber dynasty without strong filial attachments, community or national loyalty. Community cannot be overshadowed by globalisation without serious consequences to human survival. De Santa Ana (1998:13 –14) states that,

“It is important to recognize the role that different communities play. Though not all persons participate in community life, those who do participate experience a strengthening of their personal identity. This kind of human relationship is more meaningful than that which characterizes life in mass society. In community life people share concerns, mutual support and solidarity. To be sure, human communities are never perfect, but they create a space where dialogue is possible and where life can be more human.”

Without respect for community life, sustainable development will remain an illusion. It would be difficult to rally around a vision of sustainability when we do not have social cohesion that would enable us as people to share our purpose of eradicating poverty. Globalisation promotes depersonalisation that endangers community life, and consequently, human life. In a community, people are cared for, outside the community they run the risk of dehumanisation.

The church must resist being swallowed up by the dominant culture of globalisation that drives sustainable development. It should never identify with this ideology. Globalisation has shown the interconnectedness of humanity worldwide in terms of

technology, economics, political systems and other social systems. Some countries have ‘multinationalized’ some of those institutions to create multinational hegemonies that marginalize weak nations, groups, continents and regions. Maggay (1998:112) says it creates “marginalization of producers of real goods.” You find large international corporations investing globally in poor countries due to the availability of cheap labour. They invest in those countries so that they may pay meagre wages (wages that would be totally unacceptable in the labour market of the North) and reap hefty profits. They have the audacity to subject the poor in the South to deplorable working conditions, due to their vulnerability. Thus they continue to pauperise those who produce the goods that create the wealth. Vischer (1998:50) wrote,

“At the same time, however, the emerging ‘unity of humankind’ presented a formidable challenge to the churches. The church is now called to manifest its true nature. The creed speaks of ‘one, holy, catholic and apostolic church.’.... Faced with new horizons, faced with the conflicts from the interactions of nations, and above all faced with the mounting impact of empires, the churches had to come together. They have to leave behind their imprisonment within national boundaries and make an exodus into a wider community.”

The church has to become what God has called it to be, the universal Body of Christ that is not limited by geographical, cultural, economic, ideological, social and religious frontiers. It must become a real kingdom community that is not restricted by superficial prejudicial human values but founded on kingdom values of peace, love and justice. In this kind of church, all the people of the world would find a home. Vischer (1998:50) says, “The church anticipates in its own midst the community which the nations are destined to achieve. Its witness thus focuses on pointing – through its existence and through its word – to the sources of true communion. It will denounce any deviations to the contribution of the sound development of human community.” The church must resist any efforts by those who seek to hijack the move towards global unity, to subject the poor through their monopoly of technology, knowledge, politics, economics, as well as their spiritual and social influence. Thus the church in its catholicity must continue to promote and protect the interests of the disadvantaged. Vischer (1998:51) states, “The churches sought to give a more humane face to the worldwide community.” As nations have

bilateral political, trade, educational, cultural, sports and social agreements they should not just be technical covenants that do not promote a culture of caring. They should promote a spirit of solidarity, love, equality and harmony. “The community of faith is one with God in doing justice”(King & Woodyard 1999:40). Such a community ultimately fosters genuine social integration, without the intent to exploit fellow human beings.

Sustainable development needs to shift its focus away from the economy. There is a tendency for agents to put more value on economic development. There should not be an overemphasis of economic development at the expense of other aspects of development. Wilson (1998:62) says,

“Making development sustainable means moving beyond a narrow, albeit important, concern with economic growth per se to considerations related to the quality of that growth. That is, ensuring that people’s needs are being met, that the resource base is conserved, that there is a sustainable population level, that environment and cross-sectoral concerns are integrated into decision-making processes, and that communities are empowered.”

Economic growth will not be appreciated by the destitute if it creates unemployment in the name of increasing efficiency and profit margins through retrenchments. Too many have been made redundant, homeless, hungry, and are begging to survive. Wilson (1998:65) adds that, “Once we focus on human resource sustainability, we are compelled to consider issues of marginalization, unemployment, and the whole impact of globalisation. From the perspective of those who find themselves at the painful end of globalisation, how can the process be shaped in such a way that the world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century becomes truly sustainable?” These are the primary issues that, if not addressed will make the vision of sustainable development unattainable. Economic growth must not disturb the social integration and harmony that must be enjoyed by families, groups and communities. Neither should it promote reckless economic transactions that lure people with promises of financial gain, but that result in the rampant exploitation of the environment. Instead, it must contribute to the wholeness of people. Maggay (1998:116) says, “With the ascendancy of the market, we need more than ever to bear witness that people do not live by bread alone. We must resist the marginalization of human values

which accompanies the apotheosis of the market as the final arbiter of how life is to be disciplined and organized.” Human life should mean more than just being engaged in economic enterprise, swallowed by its spiralling network of bewildering intricacies. People should not be led to think that if they could only master this economic web, they would have mastered life, or that the problems of deprivation could be solved by economic wizardry. Maggay (1998:116) states, “The market is not competent to address problems of poverty and equity. We cannot leave the plight of the poor to the operations of blind market forces.” The love of *Mammon* sometimes causes people to be insensitive to the needs of the poor. When people are under the spell of riches, they become prisoners of avarice. They stop being guided by the principles of justice and sharing. Rather they yield to the attraction of careerism, power, and graft. All things are done for self-gain, and not for a just cause.

#### **4.6 The Goal of Development as Empowerment**

It is a known fact that poverty alleviation and eradication is a very complex occupation. Thus in our endeavour to deal with poverty we look at it from different perspectives. But the ultimate goal of all our approaches should be the empowerment of people. In our time ‘empowerment’ is a highly politicised word that is easily misunderstood. Shiffman and Motley define empowerment as “the ability to make informed choices and to have social, political and economic capability of meaningfully contributing to the realization of these choices”(Davis 1993:40). Those who have been disadvantaged must be enabled to use their power to make qualitative decisions that can change the destiny of their own lives and communities in terms of the available opportunities and resources. They should not just be bystanders who let others make choices that affect the quality of their lives significantly, without their input. “Empowering the poor, people of colour, women, future generations, and nature means allowing them to play an effective role in deciding on appropriate patterns of current resource use”(King & Woodyard 1999:43). We should not pursue poverty alleviation strategies that disempower people to the extent that we run their lives for them. Empowerment has become a hackneyed word with many ambiguities. Oxfam views empowerment as follows: “To give people control over the

main influences that affect their lives and to have greater control, as well as to have access to resources”(Ajulu 2001:188). The poor need to be in charge of their own affairs and must have access to the means to turn their aspirations into reality. They must not become passive onlookers when others intervene to assist them in addressing their needs. According to Action Aid, empowerment is “enabling people to be heard; enabling them to exercise control over their own lives. In other words, enabling people to live in dignity; enabling them to be in control, to have their voices heard, and to exercise choice”(Ajulu 2001:188). Action Aid goes a step further than Oxfam to highlight the fact that the opinions of the poor must be valued. The dignity of the poor, and their right to make decisions that are in line with their dreams, should be respected. The rights of the poor should not be usurped by anyone claiming to act in their interest.

Our witness must not nurture a slave mentality amongst the disadvantaged. The poor should not persist in seeing themselves through the legacy of powerlessness. The poor should not be reduced to mere victims, disenfranchised, dispossessed and dominated by their oppressors. “Empowerment at every level requires a degree of ownership, a voice, and an ability to direct our life-projects with dignity” (Stone 1996:108). Through our transformational development interventions we must work with the poor in such a way that they ultimately become involved, as key stakeholders in the efforts to alleviate their poverty. They must become owners who control the entire process of their emancipation from destitution. Stone (1996:113) says,

“But liberating action will never take place until the oppressed are able to get a handle on the limit-situations they face. Then they can move to their own liberation. And make no mistake, the oppressed must themselves move toward liberation as subjects, not objects. No one can liberate another person. A minister, can, however, play a crucial role in the empowerment of others through consciousness raising.”

Empowerment vision helps us to act as facilitators who assist the poor to discover their role in their quest for freedom from deprivation. They should realize that they are not merely helpless victims. They can become active, creative and constructive participants in changing their bad fortune. Goulet describes the liberation of the poor as:

“A victory over privilege, stagnation and dependency. It involves freedom from the internalised psychic paralysis that results from internalising images of inferiority, from political and economic constraints, which block people’s creativity, and from servitude to nature and ignorance. The goal is ‘to transform hitherto passive human beings into active subjects creating their own history’. In terms of Goulet’s view, economic development cannot take place unless the poor are emancipated from their fears and restraints and liberated to the creative solving of their own problems through means appropriate to their own conditions” (Morgan, Wiegel & De Baufie 1989:157).

They could offer meaningful resistance against forces of oppression and strive to transform their present situation to be in line with their vision of a better life in justice, liberty and peace for all.

Empowerment in the Christian context is about restoring the value of human life. Poverty has significantly distorted the people’s worth. It dehumanises people to a mediocre level of human existence holistically. Miller (1989: 104) says,

“The development ethic affirms the sanctity of human life. A person, made in the image of God... Life is sacred and therefore it is to be preserved even in the weakest, most broken, vulnerable, or wretched human being. The measure of development potential in any society is found not in the way its members treat the greatest in that society, but in the way they treat the least.”

Being disadvantaged places one in rough circumstances that cause one to be undermined. It is in these horrendous socio-economic conditions that the poor are treated as non-beings. Their human rights continue to be violated by those who are more fortunate than them. Under such inhumane conditions people are socialized to accept dehumanisation and oppression as normal. According to Stone (1996:111),

“Thus, there is an internalised oppression, a consciousness or attitude that perpetuates or recycles oppression from within. This internalised oppression, as feminist theologian Sharon Welch describes it, ‘is being shaped by the values of the oppressor. It leads oppressed people to see themselves as they are seen by oppressor-as less intelligent, less moral, less valuable. It leads the oppressed



people to act like oppressors even in our work for social change, instituting our own hierarchies, using power over each other.”

People must be assisted to assimilate new values that entrench their freedom, dignity and life as authentic children of God, not third class citizens. They must break away from the manipulative propaganda ideologies of racism, sexism, classism and repression that legitimised their marginalization. We should ensure that the sanctity of human life is not just a paragraph in the constitution. It must be translated into a better quality of life, not only for the few, but also for all the citizens of the country. Miller (1989: 104) says, “A person bearing the image of God is the greatest resource for development, and as a rebel against God is also the prime hindrance to development.” When we affirm their worth, desperate people are encouraged to be optimistic in dealing with the challenges of poverty. It enables them to respond positively to the efforts to empower them. We also have to admit that even the poor often live a life of disobedience against the will of God. They are also prone to self-defeating behaviour that complicates their poverty, and their relationship with God and others is also flawed. Thus as Miller (1989: 105) puts it,

“The development ethic remembers that rebelliousness and acknowledges that the evil is real, personal, and abnormal. Alienation from the other person, from God, and one’s environment all result from this rebelliousness. Redemption and reconciliation for all three sets of relationships provide the good news of the Christian development ethic.”

The poor will never fruitfully benefit from any empowerment initiative if they are not properly reconciled to God, neighbour and their habitat.

Empowerment has an element of nation - building in it. Our country South Africa is recovering from a legacy of racial, political, cultural and religious separation and conflict. Therefore there is a strong national vision to heal the rifts that have been rife in our society. According to the Church and State and nation Building: A Conference Report, Hong Kong 1988, “Nation-building means the articulation and promotion of a just social order for the nation as a whole, in which human life, rights and dignities are respected” (Samuel & Sugden 1999:460). It is about the restoration of a community spirit that has been disturbed by unjust relations in that society. These relationships should be

normalized so that all people may live together harmoniously without having ‘a cat-and-a-dog’ relationship of animosity and belligerence. “Empowerment is collective action. It is a collective activity in that a group of people sharing a mutual interest, sentiment or concern, act together and in concert”(De Beer & Swanepoel 1998: 24). There cannot be any collective action in a divided society. These unjust relationships in society have evolved into sexism, classism, racism, and a plethora of other forms of discrimination and repression. This state of affairs is not conducive to societal harmony. Transformation that is empowering stresses that all people are equal, thus fostering social unity. As Escobar puts it, “It is not just a better life but a better way of living among men as whole persons” (Samuel & Sugden 1987:47). No form of empowerment should marginalize women, Blacks, minorities, expatriates or the poor. Their human rights must not be limited or violated. Those who have been domineering in their attitudes, thoughts and actions must mend their ways to live in harmony with their compatriots, without any sense of superiority. This can only be realized if they seek to create a nation that subscribes to the kingdom values of justice, peace, reconciliation and freedom. “It is fundamental that a change in the political power structure in South Africa needs to be infused by a value system which would ensure that the process of transformation and the creation of a new society is of real benefit to all those who live in it”(Wilson & Ramphela 1989:267). We must ensure that the values of democracy, human rights, reconciliation, freedom, justice, and unity in diversity filter through all the components of our society. They must influence all the meaningful relationships, structures and activities in our communities lest we relapse into a society in which the negativity of our apartheid history is stirred up again. Therefore, in our witness, we cannot neglect nation-building, although we should steer clear of the popular ideology of any dominant political, economic and social power in society. The Church and State and Nation Building Conference, Hong Kong 1988, resolved that,

“As Christians, we participate in nation building as an affirmation of the Lordship of Christ over the whole of life and our need to make a holistic obedient response to it. Since nation building means promoting the welfare of the people, physically, mentally, spiritually and socially, it must include evangelism as the sharing of the

gospel in its wholeness and applying it to every perceived need in the community”(Samuel & Sugden 1999:465).

We are not called to remain neutral when it comes to issues that affect people’s lives. We can work, in partnership with others, for a society characterized by peace, love, equity and freedom. We can join the struggle to redress disparities, at the same time fulfilling our evangelistic mandate as Christian witnesses in our community.

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

This chapter has been a reflection on relief, development, transformation and sustainability. It has explored various responses of Christians who have sought to deal with the issue of poverty in their witness. All these perspectives have their merits and demerits and can either enhance or limit our witness in the context of poverty. The bottom line is that the Christian witness in the context of poverty will include both evangelism and social action in ministry. *Firstly*, I have looked at relief as a means to promote human survival in times of distress, and how in the long run, it tends to create a culture of entitlement amongst the disadvantaged. “But even this welfare work needs a constant self-critique to make sure that it does not slide into philanthropy, for the dependency thus created, cripples the people being ‘helped’ so that they continue to seek hand outs rather than finding ways of helping themselves”(Wilson & Ramphela 1989:262). We acknowledge its shortcoming, that relief does not address the underlying cause of poverty that is endemic in unjust societal structures. These repressive structures were configured to perpetuate inequality in society. *Secondly*, I have explored the concept of development, highlighting its Western origins and history. This kind of developmentalism, due to its Western origin and a history that is full of inconsistencies, is contextually inappropriate, and politically and culturally incorrect for any further application outside its context. *Thirdly*, I have focused on the concept of transformation. It is clear now that the perspective of transformation is a more comprehensive and biblical approach to missions when compared with other approaches. “Transformation efforts do not aim to bring relief to people in the trap, but to free them from the trap so that they can gradually improve the situation themselves as free and self-reliant

individuals”(De Beer & Swanepoel 1998:25). These freed individuals are enabled to live in communion with others, respecting their humanity in obedience to God. *Lastly*, I pondered the concept of sustainability, which compares favourably with the concept of developmentalism. The latter promoted unbridled economic growth, endangered the habitat and compromised prospects of a better life for future generations. We have come to the sobering realization that our habitat is not everlasting, but vulnerable to destruction through exploitative and irresponsible human activity. But it is a fallacy to think we can sustain life without God, the Creator, the Giver and the Sustainer of that life in all its experiences. In our witness we seek to reconcile sinful humanity to Christ, Life-giver and Saviour, in order to have a sustainable existence. I also reflected on the concept of empowerment that has become a buzzword in our community. Whether it is through relief, development, transformation or sustainability that we seek to help the poor, empowerment of all people, especially the marginalized, should be our target. Albie Sachs points to the “idea of rights to empower people psychologically, to strengthen the sense of human dignity, self determination, and self-affirmation, and to instil in people a healthy scepticism about states and political parties. History has shown again and again that those who came to power may subsequently violate other’s rights, first of their oppressors, then of persons in their own ranks”(Goldewijk & Der Gaay 1999:52). The impoverished cannot continue to live a life of dependency, whilst they have the creative ability to shape their lives as meaningful participants in society, if only an injustice that sidelines them is removed. All forms of injustice, inequality, oppression and deprivation of the disadvantaged should be obliterated. The ultimate goal is to create a just, peaceful, and liberated community, a community in which people are reconciled to God, each other and the rest of creation. The Church should be a model of such a kingdom community.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE CHARISMATIC EVANGELICALS IN SOUTH AFRICA

In this chapter I will give a synopsis of the emergence of Charismatic renewal and also point to its roots in Pentecostalism and the broader Evangelical movement. According to Glasser, “The Charismatic Evangelicals whose groupings range from the traditional Pentecostals to newer mainline Charismatics.... Charismatics are burdened to bring renewal to all the churches whether within WCC, and whether Catholic or Protestant”(Anderson 1991:70). This renewal is about reviving the elements of the gifts of *charismata* that are enabled through the workings of the Spirit of God in the Church. These charismatic gifts, which were meant to equip the Church for its witness, had not been fully used by the Church in its ministry over decades. Therefore, the Charismatic Evangelicals sought to revive them for the benefit of the entire Church of God. According to Koenig (1978:11),

“Such Christians invariably feel that they have received unusual blessing from God through the Holy Spirit. These ordinarily include the ability to pray in unintelligible but profoundly meaningful tongues (*glossolalia*); the physical and emotional healings; the hearing of personally relevant prophecies and/or the call to speak prophetically to others. Most of all, however, these believers claim to have undergone a dramatic renewal or heightening of their faith which produces a ‘closer walk with the Lord’ than they had previously known.”

The Charismatic Evangelicals are part of the larger family of Evangelicals within Protestantism. According to Bosch (1980:30),

“The Evangelicals have, no less than six distinguishable groupings. The first and the largest is that of the so-called *New Evangelicals*, to which Billy Graham belongs and which attempts to unite all evangelical forces. Over against them we have the *Separatist Fundamentalists* which have joined hands with organizations such as Carl McIntire’s International Council of Christian Churches. A third group are the *Confessional Evangelicals*, to which Peter Beyerhaus belongs. A fourth category is to be found in the *Pentecostal and Charismatic movements*.

Fifthly, there are the so-called *Radical Evangelicals* who have emerged especially during the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelisation (1974) and among whom Latin Americans such as Samuel Escobar, Rene Padilla are prominent, but also various North American groups, especially the Mennonites. They emphasize, on biblical grounds, the necessity of political involvement. Lastly, there is the group Beyerhaus identifies as *Ecumenical Evangelicals*. They are people who, in spite of often fierce criticism, nevertheless adopt a positive attitude towards the ecumenical movement.”

Evangelicalism has developed over many decades to be part of the Christian community in South Africa. Out of that development of Evangelicalism the Charismatic Evangelicals emerged in South Africa as a Church that is also contributing to the faith commonly shared with other Christians within the nation. I seek to understand the Charismatic Evangelical response to the challenges of poverty in their context. I will briefly review the historical development, theology and missiology of the Charismatic Evangelicals when confronted with issues of poverty.

## **5.1 The Rise of Charismatic Evangelicals In South Africa and its Global Connections**

### **5.1.1 The Ecumenical Roots of the Charismatic Renewal Movement**

We can trace the early growth of Charismatic movement in our country as an ecumenical phenomenon, although today it does not necessarily and readily reflect this ecumenical characteristic amongst the current Charismatics. Currently the Charismatic Renewal Movement has almost become a Charismatic Evangelicals phenomenon rather than an ecumenical phenomenon. Yet, “the beginnings of the Charismatic Renewal Movement in South Africa during the late 1960’s to the mid 1970’s were seen as an ecumenical impetus between various denominations. The experience of the Spirit-baptism did enable Pentecostals to meet with Anglicans, Roman Catholics, Methodists, Baptists and Dutch Reformed Christians yet this does not fully account for the spread of this movement among mainly white South Africans” (Thompson 2004: 131). What is also intriguing

about this Charismatic movement is its origins as it has been highlighted, in that it had an ecumenical momentum that made it to spread significantly within the white community. It evolved according to the racial path set by the racial segregation scenario of South Africa. Therefore it became a movement at the time that did not seem to be challenging the oppressive regime of the day. Politically, they sat on the fence pushing the spiritual agenda of the Charismatic movement in a manner that did not engage them in the struggle against injustice.

This Charismatic Renewal Movement did not grow by default. It is certain interdenominational ministries and prominent church leaders who made a contribution in its upsurge into being an ecumenical phenomenon. Thompson (2004:131 – 132) writes,

“It was the efforts of inter-denominational organizations such as the Christian Fellowship International of South Africa and the distribution of their magazine, *New Vision* (alongside the circulation of the British *Renewal* and American *New Covenant* publications), the influence of the Roman Catholic inspired life seminars, the numerous Full Gospel Christian Businessmen’ Fellowship meetings, the revival meetings of itinerant healing evangelists, the popular religiosity of the youth orientated Invisible Church, church leadership and conventions and the two national Renewal Conferences in 1977 and 1980 which circulated the message of Spirit-baptism, prayer and speaking in tongues.”

These interdenominational organizations and leaders gave the Charismatic Renewal Movement impetus to grow as a recognizable Christian movement in South Africa. They almost used their platforms to authenticate this movement to be accepted as a Christian phenomenon within the Christian Community in South Africa. One can cite renowned leaders like Bill Burnett, Derek Crumpton, and Ed Roebert. “In December 1976 the prominent charismatic Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, Bill Burnett, gave his impression of the South African Renewal Movement as ‘God is pouring out His Holy Spirit upon His People who have grown weary of their powerlessness.’ He then went on to link the Charismatic Renewal movement and the post-Sowetan political context”(Thompson 2004:130 –132). His views affected some of the Christians’ attitude positively to have openness towards the Charismatic Renewal movement at a time when

the nation was almost aflame with student protest against the repressive apartheid regime. Thus, others began to see it as God's ordained movement to empower them with the power of the Spirit to break the shackles of racism and to work for a new society valuing peace and racial harmony. Yet, this did not imply he propagated active and radical involvement in politics. "The Charismatic spirituality upon which Crumpton's comments rested was the notion of 'spiritual warfare' developed in August 1976 statement entitled *A Call to Renewal in South Africa*.... The charismatic perception that 'The battle we are in is essentially a spiritual one and the need is for spiritual weapons' resonated at the South African Renewal conferences with an understanding of race relations...." (Thompson 2004: 133 -134). At this time their paradigm was that Christians, if they are to be true to their faith, must not resort to worldly principles to bring about reconciliation in society. Instead, they should use their spiritual tools such as prayer and proclamation of the gospel of peace, to contribute in resolving the societal problems that stemmed from racial disunity.

Although, the Charismatic Renewal Movement had an ecumenical thrust it had certain fundamental shortcomings that hindered its internal harmony. Signs of fragmentation within the movement began to rise within its ranks that began to compromise its ecumenical drive. Firstly, it was the emergence of religious elitism of those who embraced the Charismatic flair and the expression of their discomfort when they operate within the so-called traditional denominational churches especially in the late 1970's. Thompson (2004: 132) says, "Thereafter, the spirituality fostered a spiritual elitism and an inclination towards non-denominationalism amongst charismatic Christians. This resulted in opposition to charismatic Christianity from the mainline clergy reasserting a rationalistic Christian gospel and an orderly worship service." This implied the entire consensus that existed before between the charismatic and non-charismatic Christians disintegrated. The prevailing and growing scenario became that of intolerance and prejudice against each other. Secondly, the Charismatic phenomenon seems to promote a more fluid and less rigid ecclesiastical structures of authority. "The message of Spirit-baptism and ecumenical reconciliation carried the seeds of Church disunity, a less structured church polity and was a significant reason for the birth of the independent



charismatic churches by the late 1970s. The influence of the Charismatic Renewal Movement had waned by the early 1980's"(Thompson 2004: 132). Thus we saw the growth of independent charismatic churches without forming any ties with any of the existing denominations. Leaders like Ed Roebert and Fred Roberts left their denominational churches to form independent charismatic churches, since, some of them felt the denominational environment would limit their freedom to pursue the promptings of the Holy Spirit. It was almost difficult to put "new wine into old wineskins"(Matt.9:17).

### **5.1.2 The Emergence of Charismatic Evangelicals and their Pentecostal Heritage**

The Charismatic evangelical movement has its roots in Pentecostalism. Pentecostalism, within the global evangelical movement, that is part of the history of the Protestant Church, is a phenomenon that has permeated the whole Church. Therefore it cannot be limited to one denomination or movement. In our study we deliberately refer to the Pentecostal – Charismatic Evangelicals. "The term *Pentecostal* is derived from the Greek, and refers to the fiftieth day after the second day of the festival of the Jewish festival of Passover" (Coleman 2000:20). This, in the New Testament, is linked to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that is described in the book of Acts, when the Church was empowered for its global witness and received the gift of tongues. Coleman (2000:20 - 21) describes the development of Pentecostalism in this manner:

"At such time, according to Acts 2:1 – 4, the representatives of the early Christian Church in the first century were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke in other tongues. By invoking the possibility of deploying *glossalalia* in the present (as well as other spiritual gifts such as healing), the Pentecostals of the early twentieth century saw themselves as traversing (indeed, bypassing) history in order to embody the beliefs and practices of an original, authentic Christianity. They drew distinction between tongues as a sign of initial baptism in the Spirit and later manifestations of the gift. Tongues were an important indication of the reception of the grace of the Spirit but also a form of subsequent empowerment."

Thus it was believed to have ushered in a new dispensation, that of the supernatural, in the Church. They interpreted their baptism with the Holy Spirit to be an experience that enhanced their Christian life, enabled them to experience the phenomenon of signs and wonders and strengthened in their faith.

Twentieth century Pentecostalism has its roots in American Evangelicalism. It is a movement that emerged within the Black Christian Evangelical minority in the USA. According to Smith (1992: 41),

“It is generally agreed that Pentecostalism has its roots in an alliance of Black Christianity with the Holiness movement at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. John Wesley had emphasized a distinction between ordinary believers and those who had been sanctified by a second, crisis experience (after conversion). His views were promoted by a number of American revivalists who were active seeking greater rights for blacks. They were convinced that ‘Holy Spirit power’ was needed not just to win people for Christ, but also to correct social, economic, and political problems.”

At that time, the Christianity in America was also affected by the policies of segregation, and injustice was rife in society, especially against the Blacks. This is what Coleman (2000:21) writes about the birth of Pentecostalism in the USA:

“According to most accounts of the origins of Pentecostalism, an outbreak of *glossalalia* in a Bible college in Topeka, Kansas, followed by the ‘Azusa Street’ revival in Los Angeles in 1906, initiated by the black evangelist William J. Seymour. On the 18<sup>th</sup> April of that year, a Los Angeles Times reporter described the Azusa Street Revival incredulously as a ‘Weird Babel of Tongues’, indicating the scepticism and hostility with which it was received in wider, polite society. Much in the faith appeared to have black, slave roots including its orality, musicality, narrativity in theology and witness, emphasis on maximum participation, inclusion of dreams and visions in worship, understanding of correspondence between body and mind and antiphonal character of worship services.... Extensive criticism, frequently from fellow Christians, of their

supposedly indecorous fanaticism encouraged some believers to form separate churches where they could worship.”

News of what happened at Topeka in 1906, which was a result of other events prior to it, spread progressively through other areas in the USA. It created a new impetus for renewal within the established churches and led to new Pentecostal churches being founded. “Although Seymour continued at the Azusa Street Mission, the church gradually declined and at Seymour’s death in 1922, there was a small band of blacks only”(Smith 1992:44). Yet, what came to be known as Pentecostalism, was on the rise countrywide and even extended into other parts of the world.

Pentecostalism from the West spread also to the African continent. Thus it became part of the Christian community in South Africa. Smith (1992:47), describing its growth in Africa writes:

“It is generally accepted that the message of Pentecostalism was first introduced to the African continent by American missionaries. Two reputed disciples of Alexander Dowie who had been converted to Pentecostal faith, John G. Lake and Thomas Hesmälch, began holding services in a South African native Church in late 1908 or early 1909. Out of curiosity, many whites attended. A large number received Spirit baptism. Larger facilities had to be obtained, and they were filled every service. David du Plessis, in sermon delivered in 1938, said of their mission that it stirred the city [of Johannesburg]. Jews and Gentiles were saved. About that time, a Canadian, Charles Chawner, came to South Africa from Hebden Mission in Toronto. He was an evangelist primarily to the Zulu people.”

This was the beginning of the growth of Pentecostalism in South Africa, which resulted, in the growth of new denominations. “There, the three main groups are the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM), the Full Gospel Church of God in South Africa, and the Assemblies of God in South Africa”(Smith 1992:47). These groups which became embroiled in racial issues, however. South Africans within the Pentecostal movement were individuals like David du Plessis, Elias Letwaba, Nicolas Bhengu, and Richard Ngidi, who made significant contributions to its growth in South Africa and

internationally. Research has only been recently undertaken into the role of Ngidi and others from the Black community who have made a contribution to Pentecostalism. People like Elias Letwaba were the pioneers of Pentecostalism in South Africa. “It seems that Elias Letwaba was one of the first African Pentecostals in South Africa. He is mentioned in the Executive Council minutes of the AFM in February 1909; and De Wet (1989:65) considers him to be ‘one of the most outstanding black leaders in the history of the AFM’”(Anderson 1992:36 –37). He was one of the highly gifted leaders whose contributions towards the growth of Pentecostalism went beyond the circles of the black community. Elias Letwaba stands in the history of the Pentecostal Church in South Africa with leaders like Richard Ngidi. This is what Khathide (2001:ii) writes about Richard Ngidi, “Undoubtedly he was one of the giants that helped carry the torch of the gospel light in Southern Africa. His influence will continue to have rippling effects in the church on the Southern tip of Africa.” Richard Ngidi made a significant contribution as a minister and an evangelist within the AFM in areas of church planting, pastoring, mass evangelism, prayer movement, healing ministry, and the encouragement of women participation in ministry and the growth of Pentecostalism. Nicholas Bhengu also contributed immensely in the expansion of Pentecostalism, which later on contributed to the emergence of Charismatic Evangelicalism in South Africa. Bhengu’s revivalist movement within the Assemblies of God was known as, the ‘Back to God Movement.’ “Right from the beginning Nicholas Bhengu felt his calling was that of an itinerant gospel revivalist. He was travelling with a team”(Khathide 2001:10). Richard Ngidi himself in his formative years of Evangelical Pentecostalism was inspired and influenced by Nicholas Bhengu. “Rev. Nicholas Bhengu of the Back to God gospel team was conducting revival meetings. Ngidi resolved to use his leisure time to attend these revival meetings... He was impressed by what he heard and as a result gave his heart to the Lord”(Khathide 2001:9). Rev. Bhengu is counted amongst the pioneers of Evangelical Pentecostalism in Africa.

Pentecostalism and Charismatic movements in their evolution resulted in the formation of new denominations, but also influenced the universal church’s life in certain aspects of Christianity. According to Marsden,

“Over the past three or four decades, the charismatic styles of worship have diffused throughout congregations and denominations of varied theological persuasions. An important influence in spreading the message to mainline churches and middle class churches throughout the world was David du Plessis (1905 – 1987), a Pentecostal minister from South Africa and an associate of Oral Roberts (Marsden 1991:78). David du Plessis had himself been touched by the spirituality of the black South African Christianity with its healing, tongues, dreams and visions” (Coleman 2000:22).

David du Plessis contributed to the spread of Pentecostalism nationally and internationally. He said, describing his role in the Pentecostal movement:

“In 1927 I was ordained by the Apostolic Faith Mission of SA. So I became a preacher and a teacher in the Pentecostal movement, and was privileged to minister to Black and White and Indian and Coloured. In 1932, I became general secretary and an editor of all the publications of the mission. I served in this capacity up to 1948 when I moved to the USA to serve as secretary of the Pentecostal World Conference. This enabled me to travel around the world in an attempt to bring unity among Pentecostals in almost all countries. By this way I came into contact with the Ecumenical Movement, and with the Roman Catholic Church” (Cassidy & Verlinden 1978:590).

David du Plessis became a worldwide ambassador for the Pentecostals. He interacted with church leaders within the Evangelicals, Ecumenicals (WCC) and the Roman Catholic Church. Within the Pentecostal church he had personal connections with notable figures like Smith Wigglesworth, by whom he was influenced.

Pentecostalism is linked to the emergence of the Charismatic movement in the history of the Church. It laid a foundation that became a springboard for the Charismatic Evangelicals. Coleman (2000:21 – 22) says,

“In a sense, Charismatics of today revive not only Acts but also the history of the early Pentecostal Church in their practices and beliefs - involving *glossalalia*, healing and prophesy, personal testimony and consciously cultivated liturgical spontaneity – even if they do not always call themselves Pentecostals. The

connections between the ‘classical’ and newer styles of worship can be seen in Poloma’s (cf. 1992: 4 –5) definition of Charismatics as: ‘Christians who accept the Bible as the inspired word of God, but emphasize the power of the Holy Spirit in the lives of those who have accepted Jesus Christ as their Saviour.’”

The Charismatic movement grew from the ranks of the Pentecostals and spread to other mainline churches. It had its ancestry in American Pentecostalism. Although there are common elements of spirituality and doctrines in the Charismatic churches, there is a form of dynamism in church life that differs from church to church. Smith (1992:117) gives the following account of its origin:

“The Charismatic movement, also known as ‘the second wave of the Spirit,’ may be regarded as a spin-off from the classical Pentecostalism among the mainline denominations. It became popular in the 1960’s and has had profound effect on both Protestant and Roman Catholic Christianity... The Charismatic movement has its roots in the days of World War II and some momentous happenings in the traditional Pentecostalism which led to the latter’s growing acceptance as part of the mainstream of evangelical Christianity. In 1943 the National Association of Evangelicals invited American Pentecostal groups to join its ranks. For the first time in the history of the church a Pentecostal/Charismatic movement was accepted as part of Christian orthodoxy. Following the war, Pentecostals participated in the general economic prosperity, which overtook the United States. The new financial resources were evidenced in large modern church facilities. At the same time, Pentecostals were being increasingly seen in leadership positions in industry, finance, commerce, education, and medicine. It was obvious that this charismatic brand of Christianity was no longer limited to lower classes and the ‘have nots.’ About this time there was a heightened interest across North America in divine healing. A number of Pentecostal evangelists - including Oral Roberts, William Branham, Jack Coe, and T.L Osborne – held healing/evangelistic crusades which extended their ministry far beyond normal Pentecostal boundaries, attracting large numbers of mainline Christians.”

The events of the Second World War and the circumstances created by peace after the war provided an impetus for the growth of the Charismatic movement. The subsequent economic boom provided an abundance of capital to finance this movement and helped it to grow in greater proportions. There was also the significant contribution of outspoken evangelists whose great charisma appealed to the masses. The growth of television turned Charismatic Christianity into a national sensation in America. “By the mid – 1950’s, Oral Roberts was pioneering his crusades on television, and within a few years, millions of Americans were exposed to his ministry via this medium”(Smith 1992:117 –118). Television in essence marketed this brand of Christianity in the national and international arena.

The euphoria of the Charismatic movement reverberated through the American society. A number of events and individuals made notable contributions. It was Christian business people and church leaders of different backgrounds who participated in the upsurge of the Charismatic movement. An example is the Full Gospel Business Men’s Fellowship International (FGBMFI). “The FGBMFI numbered over 100,000 members in some 300 chapters by the mid-1960’s and, towards the close of the 1980’s, there were over 3,000 chapters in almost 90 nations”(Smith 1992:118). This business fraternity helped to disseminate the message of the Charismatic renewal throughout the church and into the broader society. It appealed to business people across the broader Christian community. Other Christian leaders such as David du Plessis, Harold Bredesen, Agnes Sanford, Dennis Bennett, Jean Stone and Larry Christenson each contributed in his or her unique way. This is how they respectively made their mark on the expansion of the Charismatic renewal:

“ In 1957, Bredesen (a Lutheran pastor) accepted the pastorate of the Mount Vernon Dutch Reformed Church, where he began a charismatic prayer meeting... In 1963 he used the term ‘charismatic’ as an alternative to ‘neo-Pentecostal,’ which was being employed by some media sources... Agnes Sanford, the child of Presbyterian missionaries to China and the wife of an Episcopal priest, ... became interested in the healing ministry after being healed of depression... Sanford actively promoted Charismatic renewal in the traditional denominations. Many of

her books ...(1947, 1966, 1969) were well received by non-Pentecostals. The Charismatic movement is often dated from November of 1959, when Dennis Bennett, the rector of Saint Mark's Episcopal Church in Van Nuys, California, received the baptism in the Holy Spirit accompanied by the gift of tongues... In 1968, Bennett and his second wife Rita, founded the Christian Renewal Association to promote evangelism, healing, and renewal in all denominations throughout the world... In 1981 they ...devoted their time to writing, speaking, and conducting seminars and conferences. Jean Stone...organized the first charismatic renewal fellowship in Van Nuys, known as the Blessed Trinity Society (1962 –1966). One of the initial directors was David du Plessis. It not only offered fellowship opportunities for Charismatics, but it also produced a magazine, *Trinity*, to introduce the charismatic renewal to non-Pentecostals in the mainline denominations. It also marketed... charismatic teaching seminars. These activities attracted all sorts of people all over the continent. Larry Christenson ...a Lutheran pastor from California... in 1961... experienced the baptism in the Spirit and accompanying *glossolalia* at the Foursquare Gospel Church... A pamphlet he wrote, 'Speaking in Tongues: A Gift for the Body of Christ,' has had strong influence on the Lutherans and was even translated into German. His denomination, the American Lutheran Church, appointed a Committee on Spiritual Gifts in 1962. Its report spurred an official statement in 1964 that tongues were to be restricted to private devotional prayer"(Smith 1992: 119 – 122).

Thus worldwide various autonomous churches that share the Charismatic tradition have evolved. The movement grew from just being an American phenomenon to one that would influence the broader Christian community globally. "Ultimately, the charismatic church identity was based on a spirituality and practice that was both a separation from the world and mainline Christianity" (Thompson 2004: 136). When the movement spreads, it mutates to absorb local elements but it retains its Charismatic nature.



### **5.1.3 Pentecostal or Charismatic.**

There are those who make a distinction between the Pentecostal and the Charismatic Evangelicals. It is true that there are notable differences between the groups, but there are also areas of convergence. Their interconnectedness, however, is sometimes denied. “Older Pentecostals may dislike the worldliness of newer Charismatics, but they are increasingly likely to see such tendencies within their own congregations”(Coleman 2000: 24). One does note certain elements characteristic to the Pentecostals surfacing amongst the Charismatics, and visa versa. In our time these movements have continued to influence each other and globally both of them support the World Pentecostal Movement. Percy “describes early forms of Pentecostalism as expressing a relatively homogenous response to secular modernism. Contemporary revivalists forms, however, appear to compete with and borrow from a post-modern world of healing movements, the New Age, materialism and pluralism. Percy may be exaggerating the unity of classical Pentecostalism. The point remains, however, that the older boundaries between charismatic lifestyles and those of the wider world do appear to be shifting and becoming increasingly permeable”(In Coleman 2000:24). For this reason many today consider themselves to be Pentecostal-Charismatic Evangelicals. They embrace strong elements of both movements in their form of Christianity. The Pentecostal - Charismatic movement, despite its innovative contributions to the church globally, has been controversial. This controversy has dogged their doctrines, the practice of charismatic gifts, and the moral discrepancies of their leaders and the growth of their mega-churches, to which they are accused of attracting members from the mainline churches.

## **5.2 The Phenomenon of Charismatic Evangelicalism in South Africa**

There is little data about the Charismatic Evangelicals as a group within the broader church community in South Africa. Unlike other denominations that have published extensively about themselves this doesn't seem to have been the trend within the Charismatic Evangelical circles - probably because theirs is still a relatively young Church as compared to the Pentecostal Evangelicals in this country. The Charismatic

Evangelicals are an offshoot of the Pentecostal movement. In most of the Christian literature they are classified with Pentecostals and the ‘other’ churches in South Africa. In this country, according to Hendricks and Erasmus, “The three oldest Pentecostal Churches in SA, the Apostolic Faith Mission, the Full Gospel Church and the Assemblies of God, were established as independent missions mainly for Black South Africans in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, before the Union of South Africa was founded in 1910. They grew steadily into fully fledged denominations”(Kritzinger 2002: 20). Various other Pentecostal churches, that were independent from these three denominations, followed, established by individuals or groups who had previously been associated with the three earlier Pentecostal denominations. Those new churches joined the other local churches that were part of the established Pentecostal denominations, to form part of the Charismatic movement in South Africa, a movement that was given impetus by the Charismatic renewal globally. “In the British dominions of New Zealand, Australia, and South Africa, visits by Dennis Bennett, Michael Harper and David du Plessis aided the spread of the Charismatic movement in the late 1960s (Smith 1992:123). The Charismatic movement made a marked impression in South Africa around the 70’s and early 1980. Churches like Hatfield Christian Church [formerly Baptist], Christian City, Rhema Ministries, Zoë Ministries, Grace Bible Church, Vineyard Ministries, Durban Christian Fellowship and various evangelistic organizations like Christ For All Nations, to mention a few, appeared. These were affiliated to the organization known the Believers Ministers International (BMI). Its founding leaders were Pastor Ray McCauley, Evangelist Nicky van der Westhuizen, Pastor Fred Roberts and Evangelist Reinhardt Bonnke. It later evolved into the International Fellowship of Christian Church (IFCC) under leadership the late Pastor Ed Roebert, Ray McCauley, Nicky van der Westhuizen, David Thebehali and Tim Salmon. It was only in the mid 1990’s that Black Charismatic leaders joined the ranks of the executive structure of the IFCC, which had been the preserve of White Charismatic leaders, since its inception. Leaders like Mosa Sono, TS Muligwe, Don Phillips, Fred May, Robin Oliver, EMK Mathole, and Abraham Sibiyi were elected as members of the executive council of the IFCC. Meanwhile, Pastor Theo Wolmarans led an independent Charismatic church known as Christian City. Other Churches like Vineyard Ministries were affiliated with TEASA. The Charismatic

Evangelicals outside the major groups exist as numerous independent local churches that are led by the founding leader, and are not affiliated to any national church body except a local ministerial fraternity. Another phenomenon that has developed within both the independent non-affiliated churches and the affiliated Charismatic churches is that they form their own family of churches to consolidate their church-planting initiatives, churches like Zoë Ministries founded in 1985 by Bishop Gladstone Botwana (and which has several branches countrywide), and Rhema Ministries (started in 1979), Grace Bible Church (started in 1983, in Soweto), and His People Church (started in 1988), have developed their own groupings (probably resulting from the church planting initiatives) and might turn into new Charismatic denominations.

### **5.3 The Struggles For Unity Post 1994**

Post 1994 in South Africa and even after the ten-year celebration of democracy the Charismatic Evangelicals are still dealing with the challenges of unity. These struggles were compounded by the legacy of racism that had created racially divided Evangelicals that included the Pentecostals and Charismatics in South Africa. Therefore just like the political scenario in South Africa the Charismatic Evangelicals became a racially divided church. Since the winds of political change were beginning to blow in the late 1980's the Charismatic Evangelicals were forced to grapple with issues of unity and reconciliation, in a church that has been divided by racial discrimination. Many of the Charismatic Evangelical churches have not fully integrated to be non-racial and multicultural churches, since, some of them are still geographically located in areas that were designated according to the predominance of a certain race and social status. Charismatic Evangelical churches that are in townships and former *Bantustan's* are predominantly black. Meanwhile, those, which were previously designated white suburban areas, are predominantly white, with an exception of churches like Rhema which has a significant number of Blacks in the membership. This racial discrimination made the Charismatic Evangelical movement to be an almost white dominated movement in South Africa, which resulted with the black leaders who are present within the Charismatic movement are sidelined. "Up until the present, leaders of white Pentecostal and Charismatic

churches are still reluctant to grant more than token leadership to black South Africans, and most of these churches remain dominated by white males”(Anderson 2005:71). Therefore this is the reason you find some of the prominent Charismatic Evangelical churches still being led by white and male leadership, even though they have a multiracial constituency within their congregations. In the past decade of democracy, the Charismatic Evangelical churches have grown tremendously within the Black communities with more assertive leadership.

Also, the issue of unity is complicated by the various backgrounds of the diverse leadership of the Charismatic Movement, which is still stratified according to racial lines. Previously, the white-led Charismatic Evangelical churches never participated actively in the liberation struggle of Africans, the poor and all the other marginalized groups during the time of segregation in South Africa. Some even sympathized with the previous unjust government, thus, during the time of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission these Charismatic Evangelical made their submission in regard to their previous undesirable response to injustice. “Both the IFCC and the AFM made representations to the TRC on behalf of the Pentecostals and Charismatic Churches... confessed to the ‘shortcomings’ of white Charismatics who ‘hid behind their so-called spirituality while closing their eyes to the dark events of the post apartheid years (Anderson 2005:73). Therefore, despite these significant changes some of them are still viewed with suspicions by their Charismatic Evangelical counterparts who minister amongst the previously disadvantaged communities. Even though both these respective leaders could belong to the same broad based Charismatic Evangelicals’ organizations, you find Charismatic Evangelical churches like those led by Black leadership pushing a ministry agenda that is more relevant for their communities and contrary to that of their white counterparts.

We have to accept however that there is a significant improvement on cross-cultural and racial relations within the diversified constituencies of the Charismatic Evangelicals. These relations are better than what they were during the prime of apartheid. There is growing interaction but we still have to assess the impact of the dialogue when it comes to ministering together to this nation. Anderson (2005:73) said:

“The representation of the IFCC and AFM indicates that a significant change of view had taken place, and that the apartheid government was now seen as part of the evil invisible forces that had been overcome by good forces of truth and reconciliation. The question of how this remarkable about-face was achieved is still a matter of conjecture, but pragmatic motives influenced by a new dispensation undoubtedly played a major role.”

With the influx of black people into the former white residential areas, some of the Charismatic Evangelical churches were forced to deal with the challenge of their churches becoming multiracial. They had to welcome families from other racial groups that were previously restricted from their area. They could not continue with their business as usual ignoring other members of the Body of Christ who had a different racial identity from them. The challenge of embracing non-racialism still continues for our young democracy and it's also an on-going struggle for Charismatic Churches too. Apartheid is dead politically in South Africa but non-racialism and unity in diversity is not fully entrenched within many of the South African national institutions including the Church. Anderson (2005:76) observed:

“Although the white Charismatic and neo-Pentecostal churches became significant voices for racial reconciliation (but not political protest), the openness or otherwise of the new churches to nonracialism depended to a large extent on the socio-political convictions of the senior pastors. At first Ed Robert's church, and then Rhema, and most recently Hatfield under its leader since Roebert's death, Francois van Niekerk, have become churches that welcome all races, although the issue of according to Africans leadership positions has yet to be resolved in most cases.”

Africans are still to make inroads into influencing the life and structures of these multiracial churches to also reflect their perspective of faith, in a manner in which they can make their theological input to shape the current Charismatic theological positions that associated with white led Charismatic churches, such that they could accommodate different people in terms of the cultures, historical backgrounds and spirituality.

There are also differences and tensions amongst the Charismatic Evangelicals in terms of their political positions in the dispensation of democracy in South Africa. There are those

whose views are mainly conservative(right), centre (moderate) and radical(left). Politically some have aligned themselves to the African Christian Democratic Party(ACDP). “The leader of the party, Kenneth Meshoe, is the minister of a Charismatic church who commutes between his activities as a pastor and a Member of the Parliament”(Balcomb 2004:159). The ACDP has publicly taken a very controversial stand, to claim that it represent Christians especially Evangelicals. Its tendency has been to be vocal inside and outside of Parliament, condemning moral violations that the secular state seems to be legislating: ‘sinful issues’ such as the legalisation of abortion and homosexuality, relaxing the regulation of pornography, the gambling laws and the removal of trade restrictions on Sundays especially on alcohol – things that the ACDP knows quite well have created an outrage amongst the majority of Evangelicals. Evangelicals like Frank Chikane now serving in government and Moss Ntlha (from TEASA) strongly criticise the ACDP’s political positions. “While they acknowledge the ACDP’s right to exist in a democracy, they are clearly embarrassed by its lack of political acumen and expertise, the uncritical identification of its political agenda with the values of the gospel, and its narrow concerns with around what Ntlha calls ‘the sins of sex – abortion, pornography and homosexuality’”(Balcomb 2004:158). The ACDP has continued in the past decade to be the voice of conservative Evangelicals’ views on socio-political issues, which are founded on their quest to ensure that this secularised nation is governed according to the principles of the Word of God.

Furthermore, there are Christians amongst Evangelicals who are more radical in their socio-political stance to identify with the ruling party the ANC. “So, for example, Frank Chikane, a leading light in the Concerned Evangelicals in the eighties, is presently Director General or chief administrator in the office of the State President, even as he continues to have leadership in his church – the Apostolic Faith Mission” (Balcomb 2004:157). They identify with this government because of its liberation struggle credentials and agenda to redress the discrepancies of Apartheid that have created poverty. Also, due to its articulated broad based commitment towards respect for democracy and its objectives to bring about societal transformation, they are more likely

to sympathize with it as it represents the majority of the previously disadvantaged communities.

Lastly, those Evangelicals who take a moderate stance when it comes to socio-political issues. They do not necessarily align themselves with particular position of any political party like the conservatives and radical Evangelicals. Balcomb (2004:150) called these Evangelicals who were at the 'centre,' exponents of the "Third Way." This implied that they refused to choose the obvious sides of either aligning with the group on the right or the left. "Third Way theology was far more than an expression of the desire for reconciliation. It was a theology embedded in the liberal antipathy towards power, traditional identity, and conflict. The struggle for power was seen as linked with supremacist intentions of both the left and the right in such a way that it appeared fundamentally ideological and therefore freighted with corruption"(Balcomb 2004:151). During the apartheid era they condemned apartheid but refused to support the revolutionary armed struggle orchestrated for the removal of the *apartheid* government. Instead, they opted to register their protest to change apartheid through peaceful initiatives that sought to be conciliatory. The Third Way became an alternative political response for a significant number of white Evangelicals, and it was not a popular option for the majority Blacks. "Whereas Concerned Evangelicals was a powerful voice of the oppressed people of society, exponents of the Third Way such as Cassidy and Bosch held considerable influence in the broadly middle sector of society, especially insofar as the church was an important agent of change in this sector"(Balcomb 2004:153). The Third Way almost became a white liberal phenomenon. But it was a notable Christian response that did not necessarily promote neutrality amongst the Evangelicals in the midst of segregation. Instead, they opposed apathy when it comes to the Christian's participation in the course of justice. It is clear that Evangelicals have different responses when it comes to socio-political issues.

## **5.4 Charismatic Evangelical Teachings and Theology**

In spite of their many differences and emphasis between the different Charismatic Evangelical denominations, there are insights they all share, teachings that are central to their common theology.

### **5.4.1 Jesus Christ**

Christ is at the centre of the teaching and the activities of the Charismatic churches. Jesus is portrayed largely as Lord and Saviour who died for the redemption of the world. Thus Christ is the one who commissions Christians to mediate the salvation of humanity in the world. “A strong emphasis [is laid] on the lordship of Christ. Those who have experienced baptism in the Spirit of Christ generally speak in terms of surrender to Christ as the Lord of their life. They freely acknowledge that He is the One who immerses them in the Spirit; their experience makes them sensitive to His presence within them. ‘Jesus is Lord,’ the motto of believers in the early church, equally the motto of Charismatic believers”(Smith 1992:127). But in practice the emphasis is purely on personal Lordship rather than cosmic Lordship of Christ. Thus the Charismatic Evangelicals are portraying Christ as a Saviour who changes people as individuals as if they did not belong to groups, nationalities and tribes. The Lord of their hearts is also the Lord of all life, that is, in the public arena. But there is a growing awareness, when facing the intricacies of our modernized and globalized world, that indeed, if our gospel is to have significance, Jesus should be understood as the Lord and Saviour of the world. “It is this world of this complex phenomenon, man, which God so loved that he gave his only begotten Son ‘that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life’”(Costa’s 1974:7). This Christ is the crucified one, who took the world’s sin, corruption, condemnation and death upon himself to become God’s appointed sacrificial substitute, for our redemption. Jesus went to the cross so that all humanity should have the prospect of a better life by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God.



#### 5.4.2 Baptism of the Holy Spirit

The primacy of the Holy Spirit is in the power with which He endows the Church. The phenomenon of endowment with the Holy Spirit is a dramatic experience that is called the baptism with the Holy Spirit. “The baptism with the Holy Spirit is a second encounter with God (the first is conversion) in which the Christian begins to receive the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit into his life. Jesus promised this power to his disciples... Acts 1:8. This promise was fulfilled at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit fell on the one hundred and twenty gathered in the upper room...Acts 2:4” (Jorstad 1973:59). In certain Charismatic circles it is called the ‘anointing’. This anointing empowers the church to teach, preach, and employ the supernatural power of healing, tongues, prophecy and others gifts of power, faith and knowledge. “The baptism in the Holy Spirit is as basic to the Charismatic theology as it is to traditional Pentecostal theology. It is always the baptism of power for praise and service”(Smith 1992:129). Charismatic Evangelicals believe that it is through the power of the Holy Spirit that they have such vibrancy in their spirituality, which is expressed in ecstatic and animated praise when worshipping God. “Praise is a major aspect of worship among Charismatics, both in tongues and in rational speech... Praise is often expressed not only verbally, but physically as well. Self –prostration, clapping, the raising of hands, and dancing ‘dancing in the Spirit’ are frequent modes of expression”(Smith 1992:128). This kind of praise is ascribed to the effect of the baptism of the Holy Spirit upon their lives. This can happen through various spectacular experiences such a prayer or the laying of hands upon a person after he or she has been born-again. One of the signs that a person has truly experienced the baptism of the Spirit is the gift of tongues. The baptism of the Holy Spirit has missiological significance to the Pentecostal – Charismatic Evangelicals. Petersen says, “Pentecostals believe that the baptism of the Holy Spirit will uniquely empower them to witness to others the reality of the saving grace”(Samuel & Sugden 1999:86 – 87). Here one can note the influence of Acts 1:8 and Lk 24:49. Thus they have demonstrated fervour for missions globally, although some criticize their strategies. Baptism with the Spirit empowers Christians with spiritual gifts that should be expressed in their witness. Indeed, all the spiritual gifts of 1 Corinthians 12:8 – 10 are seen as basic to God’s equipping of

the local church for service. It is through these spiritual gifts that laity was mobilized to be of service to Christ in their communities and that they were able to deal with the forces of wickedness that beleaguered their communities. “Charismatics realize that believers are engaged in a spiritual battle with powers of evil. As a result, many Charismatics are involved in ministries of spiritual healing, exorcism, and deliverance”(Smith 1992:129). Furthermore, baptism in the Spirit deepens people’s conviction of the nearness of God to them. They testify about having experienced a sense of having been in the presence of God. “The most radical effect can only be called simply the knowledge of God. For those who have been touched by the Holy Spirit in the Pentecostal experience, God is no longer a vague, distant figure, but a reality encountered. He has demonstrated his reality to them” (O’ Connor 1971:141 –142). It is a phenomenon that assures them of God’s care and love for them as they continue with their challenging earthly existence. Thus for many it is expressed in their devotion to prayer arising from this experience of Spirit baptism. They have a growing new spontaneity and intensity in prayer.

### **5.4.3 The Scriptures**

The Charismatics have a passion for the Scriptures. The Bible is a focal point in Charismatics spirituality, a major source of their teachings. According to Smith (1992:127), “Charismatic Christians find that their experience has given them a deeper love and reverence for the Bible as God’s Word.” One cannot separate them from the Word that has become such a part of their traditions that members enthusiastically carry the Bible along with them wherever possible, even when commuting daily. Fee (1991:20) says,

“Charismatic Christianity is a religion of the Word. Powerfully charged language is read, spoken, written, memorized, prophesied, translated, pinned up on signs in houses and cars, stripped of semantic meaning in *glossolalia* and, so it is believed, embodied not only in the flesh of Christ but also in that of its followers which they believe it is the inerrant, accurate and inspired Word of God. The first task of the interpreter is to discover what the text meant when it was originally written.

The question of inerrancy and trustworthiness of the Scripture must be carried on at that level, not at the level of ‘what does it mean for us today.’...The hermeneutical task is to free the word to speak to our situation.”

As we read and interpret the Bible to speak in our context we must acknowledge that its initial context was completely different from our present circumstances. There is bound to be a socio-historical and cultural gap between our own situation and the Scriptures, hence the need for contextualization. The Charismatic Evangelicals believe the Scripture is a source of truth to shape Christians’ personal and public behaviour, whether it be social, economic, political, educational or spiritual. Parades says,

“Even as the Bible integrates the personal and the collective, it does the same for the material and the supernatural. It presents both to us as integral dimensions of life of the world and of humanity. In the Old Testament, the liberation of the Hebrews from Egypt was not only socio-political but also spiritual. Physical oppression had affected their spiritual relationship with God”(Samuel & Sugden 1987:79).

There has been some controversy about the hermeneutics of the Charismatic Church, as well as its tendency towards their privatisation, Biblicism, de-emphasis of tradition and continued openness to the Holy Spirit for new revelation. “Charismatics are often associated by outsiders with another wing of conservative Protestant revival – Christian Fundamentalism... Charismatics’ supposed ignorance of Christian tradition and theology, apparent emotionalism and emphasis on the possibility of continued revelation from the Holy Spirit, remains anathema to many representatives of fundamentalism”(Coleman 2000:24 – 25). They are very practical in their teachings of the Scriptures, since they focus on current issues that are of major concern to people. When they teach they do not seek to be theologically sound, but rather pragmatic. It was Nida,

“Who observed that though Pentecostal preaching is often criticized for its lack of theological content, it is, nonetheless, preaching directed to the needs of people. It challenges people to make a crisis decision; it is person-centred and it is *kerymatic* proclamation. Such power of preaching, avers Nida, provides a

personal participation and psychological identification that cannot be equalled in the traditional churches”(Samuel & Sugden 1999: 79 – 80).

In their teaching and preaching they seem to be very topical. They address contemporary issues. This method has shortcomings since it is less dogmatic and does not expose people to the fundamental principles of the Christian faith. “Indeed, I think its is fair to say that this tradition has lacked both hermeneutical sophistication and consistency”(Fee 1991:x). These people are too often obsessed with quick fixes, and this tends to guide Charismatic Evangelical hermeneutics.

#### **5.4.4 Conversion**

According to Charismatic Evangelicals, the word ‘conversion’ describes a one-time and dateable experience of personal renewal upon exposure to the gospel (Rom 10:17f). This can be confirmed with a sinners prayer offered by a person in surrender to Christ as his Lord and Saviour. Graham gave this definition: “Conversion... is the impact of the *kerygma* upon the whole man, convincing his intellect, warming his emotions, and causing his will to act with decision” (Fiedler 1994:321). It refers to a person confessing his or her private sins and acknowledging Jesus as Lord and Saviour (Rom 10:9 –10) upon his or her conviction by the Holy Spirit, when exposed to the gospel. This conversion is popularly called the ‘born-again’ experience (John 3). Petersen says, “When a person converts, their testimony almost invariably follows a pattern of contrast between their old life ‘in the world’ and their new life ‘in Christ.’ Once they were ‘lost’ but now they are ‘found.’ They opted to choose between two alternatives – this ‘world’ or for God”(Samuel & Sugden 1999:79). This conversion must be followed by a renewed lifestyle, and changed moral behaviour. A born-again person has to abandon his or her carnal behaviour for a more Christlike moral behaviour. Wagner says:

“Evangelicals during the twentieth century concentrated largely on saving souls. Wes Michaelson is correct in his observation that the evangelical heritage has been ‘dominant individualism,’ with great emphasis on ‘converting.’ While assigning a peripheral status to ‘questions of discipleship, justice and the shape of the church. The Church Growth Movement, firmly in the evangelical camp,

uncritically, and somewhat innocently participated in this ethos”(Samuel & Sugden 1987:70).

It is a personal transformation rather than a group transformation that is emphasized. It is an approach to salvation that is more individualistic in dealing with sin, sickness and problems. Furthermore, for the Charismatics, conversion is like the first baptism that precedes the second baptism, which is baptism with the Holy Spirit. According to Jorstad (1973:60),

“The first is conversion; the sinner’s acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, which brings salvation. He (the repentant sinner) gives testimony to his response to the gospel and his acceptance of Christ by receiving baptism in water for the remission of sins. Here we see the new believer as the object of God’s redemption...So, a second time we are confronted with the power of God; this time in the baptism with the Holy Spirit through which the Christian is brought into a deeper relationship with Christ and the Holy Spirit for the purposes of making him – not an object, but an instrument of redemption.”

Others call the initial conversion a baptism into the Body of Christ that signifies an act of repentance. In the latter experience the believer receives the power of the Holy Spirit and the accompanying gifts to equip him or her for Christian life and service.

#### **5.4.5 Healing**

The Charismatic Evangelicals believe in divine healing and practice it as part of their witness. They base their doctrine on Jesus’ mandate to the Church to proclaim the message that portrays Jesus is a Healer who has commissioned the church in its witness to mediate healing. The gospels are presented in such a manner that Christ’s ministry is depicted as a healing ministry. Thus the church also has a healing ministry given to it by Christ. One of the signs that the Christian witness is authentic, is that it embraces a healing ministry (Mark 16:15 – 18). Healing occurs in a situation where ordinary people are exposed to detrimental sicknesses and diseases, which would be very costly for them to cure themselves. Petersen (1999:89) says,

“The tragic reality of the public health care has left millions of people in the two-thirds world with little possibility of receiving medical care. Sickness in the new economic models becomes an everyday experience for large sectors of the population.... In many Pentecostal churches, for the depressed, malnourished, and the diseased, divine healing is offered as the only available option for medical care.”

In our times there are many people whose helplessness compels them to seek divine healing. The need to be healthy is one of the most urgent needs of ordinary people. Therefore the Pentecostal-Charismatic Christians attend to these needs. Looking at God’s promises for healing in the Scriptures, they give hope to the sick. Peterson (1999:89) says,

“Belief in divine intervention and an assurance that prayer can alter circumstances give personal confidence often lacking in traditional cultures which are considered generally to be inclined to fatalism. There is a new sense of worth and access to the group’s collective and tangible and intangible resources. Identification with the group that verifies such occurrences becomes the basis of God’s empowerment. Healings and other putative demonstrations of divine favour in such a context are taken at face value. Two-thirds World Pentecostals make little distinction between God’s providence and sovereignty or His acts of healing or miracle. The consequences of such confidence in immediate access to divine power, for whatever reason, are easily extended to every area of life. A Pentecostal worldview that does not make a division between ‘miracles’ of providence, ‘natural healing’ or ‘supernatural healing’ forms an important plank in the base for the euphoric confidence that sustains Pentecostals. The healing testimonies of the Pentecostals should be interpreted in the framework of a theology that subjectively meshes ‘methods’ with results. The healing may be sudden or gradual, supernatural or natural! God is the One who is actively in charge of all events.”

It is common practice to approach all possible situations of sickness with faith in God who is to provide a cure. Admittedly, there have been incidents in which, even when healing was mediated through prayer, the situation did not change for the better.

Believers will insist that this is probably due to a lack of faith on either the part of the sick or of those interceding for the sick. Petersen (1999:91) says: “However, Pentecostals, though anticipating the miraculous, theologially interpret the silence of God when He chooses not to intervene as his right to sovereignty” When there is no manifestation of healing; Charismatic Evangelicals conclude that may be it is not God’s will to heal at the expected moment.

Furthermore, one of the problems of the Charismatic Evangelicals in their teachings on healing is that they have a narrow view to healing. Healing is restricted to physical ailments. This comes as result of their heritage in Pentecostalism, which had the same problem in its proclamations on healing. According to Dempster, Klaus, and Petersen (1999:21),

“The problem with much of the popular teaching of Pentecostals evangelists on healing is its implicit isolation of sickness from the broader plight of human injustice and suffering... Within such an individualistic narrow and isolated theological context, the robust faith and the strong body of the evangelist is all that is needed to convince a multitude of followers that healing has been accomplished and may be attained instantly by all who can lay claim to it.”

The Charismatic Evangelicals have not been linking the sickness of the poor to other socio-economic and political factors causing these health problems. Therefore, they have not been challenging structural issues that perpetuate ill health amongst the poor in oppressive societies. This will enable them to shift from the tendency of making healing just a private issue to be also a public issue.

#### **5.4. 6. Faith Alone**

One of the strong principles of the Charismatic movement is its message of faith. Its emphasis does not follow a uniform pattern amongst the Charismatics. Faith becomes a key that opens all avenues of divine blessings (Rom. 1: 17; 2 Cor. 5:7; Heb. 11:6). It is through faith, that God’s promises become reality, as they become fulfilled in a believer’s life. Behind this tenet of faith alone is the belief that all believers are Abraham’s heirs

(Gal 3). Thus they are entitled to the entire divine blessing that was promised to Abraham by God. “As a born-again Christian, the believer is a possessor of faith, and learns to draw upon new - found power not only through obedience to God, but also through specific acts that draw divine influence into the world”(Coleman 2000:28). It is almost impossible for Charismatics to think about life without faith. Charismatics say they draw from the Scriptures to enrich their concept of faith. One of the practices of exercising your faith to change your negative situation is positive confession - in words that are based on the Scriptures. The words that are part of that confession are extracted from the Bible because the Bible is a source of divine promises, that the devout believe will be fulfilled in their favour. Hollinger says, “Thus ‘positive confession’ is a statement that lays claim to God’s provision and promises in the present”(Coleman 2000:28). These statements express the believers’ hope to change undesirable conditions like sickness, poverty, marital crisis, and lack of security etcetera. They quote Mark 11:24, “which says that you will have whatever you say’. Hunt and Coleman (2000:28) in their critical assessment of this practice say,

“A clear implication of ideas concerning positive confession is that words spoken ‘in faith’ are regarded as objectifications of reality, establishing palpable connections between human will and the external world. They form a kind of inductive fundamentalism. Believers are supposedly enabled to assert sovereignty over multiple spheres of existence, ranging from their own bodies to broad geographical regions. Emphasis on both personal empowerment and the unlimited capacities of objectified language can reinforce each other when a Christian uses words to create desired effects in the self.”

These teachings of faith have been cascading into society through the Charismatic churches. They have been shaping people’s perspective about life. “Considerable followings are found in large urban areas with middle class constituencies, for instance in South Africa, South Korea, Guatemala, and Brazil. Faith teachings have also appealed to the less-advantaged groups who have maintained aspirations for personal (and sometimes wider) forms of transformation and empowerment”(Coleman 2000:28). In South Africa this type of faith teaching is strong within churches that are associated with the Rhema Ministry, led by Ray McCauley, due to its lineage to the late Kenneth Hagin. Visits and



media exposure attracted crowds to the Churches of the likes to people like Oral Roberts, Kenneth Copeland, Jerry Savelle, Fred Price, Morris Cerullo, Jim Baker, Jimmy Swaggart, the late Lester Sumrall and Benson Idahosa (a Nigerian), Reinhardt Bonnke (a German), Creflo Dollar, and Charles Capps. These above mentioned preachers, of whom the majority are Americans, were also teachers of prosperity.

#### **5.4.7 The Church**

The Church in Charismatic Evangelical thinking is the body of Christ in which all members are equal. Thus there is an increased participation of laity in their church life. People are encouraged to use their unique talents in fulfilling the great commission. The Church is a place where Christians are disciplined and equipped for God's service in their society. According to the apostle Paul: "It was he [Christ] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up"(Eph. 4:11–12). In the past, Charismatic Evangelical Churches have been accused of unecumenical behaviour, proselytising members from amongst mainline Churches. They thrive through their evangelistic activities, which enables them to create mega-churches. The Charismatic movement rode on the impetus of the church growth phenomenon that was taking roots within Evangelicalism. The phenomenon led to the upsurge of the formation of large local churches that had membership and attendance of several hundreds of thousands of enthusiasts at their worship services and evangelistic activities. These led to the local churches with huge attendances to be dubbed 'mega-churches.' This happened at a time when statistically the number of adherents attending church activities was at the lowest levels in many established churches. McGavran states that: "A chief and irreplaceable purpose of mission is church growth. Service is good, but must never be substituted for finding"(Samuel & Sugden 1987:71, 72). This concept of church growth was an expression of intensity in evangelism. Unfortunately this view created the perception that evangelism in the Christian witness was more crucial than service or social action. Many other Evangelicals, however, refuse to accept this dichotomy between service and evangelism. Wagner says, "True Christians, for whom Jesus is Lord,

do not have the luxury of sitting back and coolly deciding whether they will participate in carrying out one or the other. There is no such option. Serving God, the King, necessarily includes both the cultural mandate and evangelistic mandate”(Samuel & Sugden 1987:71). Furthermore, the creation of mega-churches resulted in daunting pastoral challenges faced by the leadership of those mega-churches. This resulted in the creation of small groups, house churches and cell groups in which a few members of the church would meet for weekday fellowship. The house churches, small groups or cell groups concept is a strategy used by mega-churches to deal with the challenges of enhancing community life. In a mega-church people do not interact in a manner that would promote *koinonia*, which is an indispensable characteristic of the Church. Therefore house churches; small groups and cell groups are becoming a means to promote Christian fellowship. These are smaller units in which a group of approximately 10 to 15 members in a common residential area, workplace or sharing a common interest or course will meet frequently, normally weekly. They meet to fellowship together [to read and discuss the Scriptures, pray, care and support one another]. The activities, purpose, size, leadership and frequency of meetings differ from one denomination and local church to another. If groups grow beyond their recommended size, they are subdivided. In these groups people are also encouraged to use their talents to serve one another, and their community. The groups are also used widely as a tool for evangelism.

#### **5.4.8 Prosperity Theology**

This notorious teaching on prosperity emphasized the point that God wants all his children to be ‘successful.’ They ought to live a life of abundance in material possessions, good health and spiritual power. Unfortunately the prosperity that is propagated borders on a life of opulence, influenced by the American dream. It is a teaching that has come to characterize the ‘Faith Movement.’ It is a prosperity that is almost always presented materialistically, as personal enrichment. It is like becoming a slave to capitalistic consumerism, in which people amass things to depict their success. Even though prosperity theology is offered in Western cultural wrappings, it is beginning to lure the

poor in the South - in Africa, Latin America and Asia. Chesnut as cited by Coleman (2000:57),

“Perceives one of the attractions of the Pentecostalism in Brazil to be its apparent ability to provide spiritual power that will provide healing as well as freedom from material deprivation. In the context of declining real wages and high levels of underemployment and unemployment, the health and wealth gospel of post-modern Pentecostal churches... reverberates through the slums of Brazil. Members of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God... preach forms of prosperity...have been attracted by the idea of running their own business.”

This church has also emerged in South Africa in the past few years and it is experiencing strong support amongst the poorest of the poor. Yet, those who have previously enjoyed this kind of prosperity, do not have a history of having engaged in the struggle for justice in the world. Some have been remarkably indifferent to anything but their personal economic empowerment and have not participated in ending the oppression, segregation and pauperisation of the majority. But all the Charismatic Evangelicals in South Africa do not embrace the teaching of prosperity especially those doing ministry in previously disadvantaged communities.

#### **5.4.9 Eschatology**

Charismatic Evangelicals have through the years fervently accentuated the coming of the Lord and life in heaven. Initially in their evangelistic endeavours they sought to help people to find heavenly bliss and escape condemnation in hell as sinners. Therefore, in their early history they employed hit and run evangelistic strategies that were not geared for social transformation, but rather for recording impressive statistics of altar-call conversions, void of serious discipleship. Dempster notes how the missiologist L Grant McClung, Jr., Church of God,

“...identifies the missiological interpretation of this Pentecostal interpretation of the twentieth century outpouring of the Spirit, when he notes that, ‘[e]arly Pentecostals were characterized by an ‘urgent missiology’ that caused them to seek immediate evangelisation in the light of their conviction of the imminent

return of Christ. McClung concludes, 'Eschatological urgency is at the heart of understanding the missionary fervour of early Pentecostalism.' And the experiential force driving that eschatological urgency was the baptism in the Holy Spirit interpreted within the narrative structure of Acts 2'(Samuel & Sugden 1999:46).

But the problem with this message is that it causes people to minimize historical reality. They tend to regard earthly living to be secondary in priority to life hereafter. Thus they emphasize saving the souls of the poor, at the expense of dealing with societal reality, while people are facing the existential challenges of being human in an unjust, discriminatory and oppressive world, which for them is hell on earth. Yet, these earthly miseries are supposed to be tolerated even if they are illegitimate and unbiblical. Therefore this eschatology has caused the Charismatics to be socially irrelevant. Unfortunately, in certain circles, these attitudes are persisting. Frank Chikane, an AFM minister, said in an interview with Sider at the time of repression,

“Pentecostal Christians have used belief in the hereafter to avoid the reality of the present. But it also keeps you strong actually to believe, ‘this is not the end of the world: if they kill me now, it’s not the end.’ When I told the security police man, ‘For me to die is gain,’ it did not make sense to him. And I had to tell him, ‘You are not achieving anything by killing me... So if you make a decision that you’re going to kill me, that is gain for me. But if I’m alive, I do what Christ wants me to do’(Nurnberger, Tooke & Domeris 1989:358).

Whilst some pastors used their eschatology, albeit inadvertently, to promote escapism that created apathy in Christian witness when facing oppression and poverty, many others like Rev Chikane used it as a pillar of strength, enabling them to refuse to be silenced in their opposition to injustice. The same eschatology, depending on people’s hermeneutics, domesticated some and made them bystanders at a time of repression; whilst it invigorated others to become prophetic in their witness when facing the challenges of oppression. It gave them hope when they were confronted with forces that orchestrated their powerlessness and death. Jesus said: “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both the soul and the body in hell”(Matt.10: 28). Eschatology should mobilize us to bring about transformation, to

usher in the forces of God's kingdom that will empower us to work for the creation of a new dispensation characterized by the values of the Reign of God such as justice, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. We should create a new life, knowing that our Lord, the Creator who is the giver of life, is more powerful than those who spread injustice.

#### **5.4.10 Technology and Media**

The Charismatics have been bold to use technology and the media in their witness. Thus some theologians in jest have been called them 'the electronic church.' According to Coleman (2000:49),

“Charismatic Christianity is flourishing in the contemporary world. It is fluid that is seeping into numerous social contexts and even permeating supposedly secular practices such as economic consumption and the deployment of technology. Charismatics often view such developments in both defensive and triumphalist terms: they regard themselves as reclaiming territory lost to the devil at the same time as they are spreading the Good News of the Gospels to all nations.”

They have creatively integrated the use of technology in their church life and ministry. In elements of worship using electronic and electrical musical instruments, sound systems, multimedia communications such television, computers, Internet and other forms of digital technology. When they evangelize through television, its called 'Televangelism.' They even evolved to use business principles like marketing to popularise their movement. The Charismatic Church is cashing in its expansion on the phenomenon of globalisation. For Poewe:

“Charismatic Christianity is a global culture because it is experiential, idealistic, biblical, and oppositional. Being experiential, it is not tied to any specific doctrine nor denomination. Being idealistic, it embraces the whole person and the whole world. Where church structures and theologies are mistrusted as opponents of spiritual spontaneity, it should become easier to reject specific organizations in favour of an apparently unconfined, all embracing and endlessly mobile force for personal empowerment. Biblical truth can also be viewed as offering a

transcendent model of opposition to confining cultural mores”(Coleman 2000:67 – 68).

The Charismatic Church globally does not only depend on technology and the media in witness to spread the gospel. But, as indicated above it is part of the drive towards globalisation. Sine says,

“Overnight we have all become part of a new globalized society radically changing the context in which we live and do mission... Borders are melting. Distance is dying. One and a half trillion dollars circulates through this global electronic nervous system everyday. All of this is directly contribution to the rapid creation of a one-world economic order”(Mulholland & Corwin 2000:39).

A globalized church connects people across various cultures, nations, denominations, ideologies and geographical background to have a common expression of faith. This is facilitated through technology and the media.

## **5.5 The Missiological Thinking of the Charismatic Evangelicals**

One discovers two opposing positions amongst the Pentecostal-Charismatic evangelicals regarding their concept of missions in South Africa. There are those who view missions purely as *evangelism and church planting* and they do not link these functions to any social concerns. Their aim is to save the souls of sinners, rescuing them from eternal damnation. Yet there are also those who look at missions as *evangelism and social action*. To them any evangelistic activity of the church must be accompanied by social responsibility. The existence of these two opposing positions within the Charismatic movement is typical of the Evangelicals. Cray says, “Both these concerns are certainly valid ones. But in addressing these concerns, those who emphasize evangelism and those who champion social concern are polarized into opposing camps, creating, as a consequence, a fragmented approach in many of the church’s missional programmes”(Samuel & Sugden 1999:47).

### 5.5.1 Missions as Evangelism

From this position missions prioritise evangelistic activity above any social concern. In fact, the mission mandate of the church is perceived without any socio-political or economic ramifications. According to this standpoint Christian witness must transform individuals and enhance their lives so that they may become better spiritual beings. What is important is that those who are sinners should be reconciled to God through Christ, so that they may receive eternal life, a life that is free from the corrupting influences of this sinful world. This concept of missions does not encourage any serious social involvement in society. Coleman (2000:234) says,

“Missionising through electronic media allows the imaginative construction of an unbounded and endlessly responsive constituency of consumers. Ridicule from those who refuse to be evangelised, or criticism from representatives of religious, journalistic and medical authorities, can be interpreted as originating from a common source: a satanic figure who is converse of God not only in his evil intent, but also because he represents the forces of stasis and lack of ambition.”

The church ministry of societal transformation is minimized. The attitude of those who subscribe to this view seems to be: Decry the corrupt state of the world, avoid it, but do nothing to change it. Cray says, “In checkmating the first concern, for example evangelism is typically elevated to ‘the priority task’ of the church; social service and social action, by implication, are thereby demoted to secondary, or perhaps tertiary tasks of the church”(Samuel & Sugden 1999:47). Social action is only important if it softens people up to receive the gospel. It is appreciated only if it results in people being converted. The church’s task is reduced to saving people from this dying world for a better life in the coming world, ‘heaven’. Those people seem to argue that this world is denigrated for its worldliness and bewitching demonic systems that contradict the gospel. Therefore it is a waste of time to embark on any social action when this world is already sold out to the influence of the evil one. Rather concentrate on preparing people for a better world in the afterlife. They cite the fact that Jesus in his Ascension has gone to prepare a far better place for those who would preserve themselves from the beguiling

influences of this rebellious and sinful world. Thus many of the Charismatic Churches are considered to be socially irrelevant, and sometimes, apolitical.

### **5.5.2 Missions as Evangelism and Social Action.**

Many evangelicals in their spiritual journey during the past decades have learnt that evangelism and social responsibility are aspects that together constitute the mission of the church in the world. They are not separate and unrelated tasks that should be undertaken, with one being primary and the other being secondary. Rather the two together are the essential elements of the mission of the church. For the church “mission is then defined as evangelism plus social action”(Bosch 1980:16). Therefore the church as it goes into the world, becomes engaged in evangelistic activities as well as social activities that promote justice and peace in society. This thinking on missions within the evangelical circles has evolved over many years. There have been various historical milestones such as Lausanne, Wheaton, and San Antonio, which have contributed to a paradigm shift in the evangelical concept of mission. The journey to reach consensus was full of challenges, but eventually some form of convergence in missiological thinking with the ecumenical movement within the WCC was achieved. I would like to examine the various consultations: the Berlin Congress, Lausanne, Pattaya, Wheaton, San Antonio, Lausanne II, Manilla, Salvador, GCOWE, Inguasso, Kuala Lumpur and Pattaya consultations. I also refer to the developments amongst the Concerned Evangelicals in South Africa.

#### **5.5.2.1 Berlin Congress 1966**

Many Evangelicals from various parts of the world attended the Berlin Congress in 1966. At the Berlin Congress various Evangelical denominations, movements, and organizations were represented. This congress contributed significantly towards the growth of unity of the Evangelicals worldwide. It also contributed to the development, by Evangelicals, of a comprehensive concept of missions. The link between evangelism and social action was now clearly evolving. “In his address, Billy Graham spoke for many



evangelicals when he included a social dimension within evangelicalism but then added that improved social conditions were a result of successful evangelism (: 28),

I am convinced if the Church went back to its main task of proclaiming the Gospel and getting people converted to Christ, it would have a far greater impact on the social, moral and psychological needs of men than any other thing it could possibly do. Some of the greatest social movements of history have come about as the result of men being converted to Christ” (Bosch 1991: 404).

It is clear from the above statement that the thinking at the time still emphasized evangelism not social action as the core function of the church. Although evangelicals at the time considered social action as significant the primary function of the Church was still seen to be evangelism. Thus social action became almost an appendage to evangelism. It came as a consequence of evangelism in society when the church had faithfully fulfilled its primary responsibility, the preaching of the gospel. McGavran, reflecting on Graham’s statement, says, “By this definition evangelism relates to social responsibility as seed relates to fruit; evangelism remains primary (‘the church’ s main task’) but it generates social involvement and improved social conditions amongst those who have been evangelised”(Bosch 1991: 404). They expected social engagement to be the natural consequence of evangelistic endeavour. But in reality we know that once people have been involved in evangelism they get swallowed up in the euphoria of the evangelistic breakthroughs.

#### **5.5.2.2 Lausanne Covenant 1974**

Further development from the Berlin Congress was the hosting of another conference, by the delegates of Evangelicals from different parts of the world, which was held in Lausanne Switzerland, eight years later. The clearest understanding of missions as evangelism and social action can be traced back to the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelisation, in 1974. It was more lucidly expressed at the conference than any other forum previously organized by the Evangelicals. According Samuel and Sugden (1987:ix),

“Evangelicals had united around their basic concern, the evangelisation of the world, and had affirmed the place of socio-political involvement in the mission of the church. Evangelical relief and development agencies around the world would receive fresh energy because they could now appeal to the evangelical constituency as ‘family’ without the fear of either being rebuked for preaching the ‘social gospel’ or being charged with compromising evangelism.”

It gave new impetus to the church to broaden its horizons and to include social action in its missions, or rather to abandon its dualistic tendencies in pursuit of its missionary mandate. At Lausanne a clear definition was reached of both evangelism and Christian social responsibility:

“To evangelise is to spread the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead according to the Scriptures, and that as the reigning Lord he now offers the forgiveness of sins and the liberating of the Spirit to all who repent and believe. Our Christian presence in the world is indispensable to evangelism, and so is the kind of dialogue whose purpose is to listen sensitively in order to understand. But evangelism itself is the proclamation of the historical biblical Christ as Saviour and Lord, with the view of persuading people to come to him personally and so be reconciled to God. In issuing the gospel invitation we have no liberty to conceal the cost of discipleship. Jesus still calls all who would follow him to deny themselves, take up their cross, and identify themselves with his new community. The results of evangelism include obedience in the world. (2 Cor. 15:3,4; Acts 2:22 –24; John 20:21; 1Cor. 2:40,47; Mark 10:43 – 45)” (Samuel & Sugden 1999: 505).

In terms of this definition evangelism entails the proclamation of the gospel and a lifestyle that does not contradict that proclamation. This message does not come with ‘cheap grace’ but with ‘costly grace.’

Delegates to the conference also explained Christian responsibility in this manner:

“We affirm that God is both the Creator and the Judge of all men. We therefore share his concern for justice and reconciliation throughout human society and for the liberation of men from every kind of oppression. Because mankind is made

in the image of God, every person, regardless of race, religion, colour, culture, class, sex or age, has intrinsic dignity because of which he should be respected and served, not exploited. Here too we express penitence both for our neglect and for having sometimes regarded evangelism and social concern as mutually exclusive. Although reconciliation with man is not reconciliation with God, nor is social action evangelism, nor is socio-political liberation salvation, nevertheless we affirm that evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty. For both are necessary expressions of our doctrines of God and man, our love for our neighbour and our obedience to Jesus Christ. The message of salvation implies a message of judgment upon every form of alienation, oppression and discrimination, and we should not be afraid to denounce evil and injustice wherever they exist... The salvation we claim should be transforming us in the totality of our personal and social responsibilities. Faith without works is dead”(Samuel & Sugden 1999:505 – 506).

The above description spells out the role of Christians in their contribution towards the creation of justice and reconciliation in a world that is challenged by inequality, injustice and prejudice. Even though this social mandate is distinguished from evangelism, it should not be separated from it. Our witness will be incomplete if it does not include both evangelism and social responsibility.

### **5.5.2.3 Pattaya Conference 1980**

In 1980, six years after the Lausanne conference, various Evangelical leaders and scholars from various continents meet in Pattaya, Thailand, for a conference. The Pattaya Conference culminated in the watering down of positions reached at Lausanne and previous evangelical mission conferences. According to Bosch (1991:405),

“... Both the Congress and the Covenant continued to operate in terms of the two-mandate approach and uphold the priority of evangelism. It affirmed that ‘in the church’s mission of sacrificial service evangelism is primary’. It was explicitly stated that ‘reconciliation with man is not reconciliation with God, nor is social action evangelism. Nor political liberation salvation.’”

This thinking was beginning to be challenged because it implied that missions had two distinct dimensions with one being evangelism which was central and the other being social action which was of minor importance. If evangelism is at the centre stage of mission's activity, it becomes easy to minimize social involvement. "What is more, if one suggests that one component is primary and the other is secondary, one implies that the one is essential, the other is optional" (Bosch 1991:405). The unintended consequence is paying lip service to social involvement whilst engaged in evangelism. Meanwhile evangelism had once again become a major priority of the church at the expense of social action. This was the inadvertent outcome of the Pattaya Conference. "The *Thailand Statement*, released after the Pattaya conference of LCWE (1980), affirmed the movement's commitment to Lausanne Covenant's emphasis on both evangelism and social action but went step a further to say 'nothing contained in the Lausanne Covenant is beyond our concern, *so long as it is related to world evangelisation*' (emphasis added)"(Bosch 1991:406). It was through continuous deliberation that the delegates to the conference fashioned their thinking on missions, and inclination to embrace social activism.

#### **5.5.2.4 Wheaton 1983**

Another consultation was held by the Evangelicals in Wheaton, Illinois, in June 1983, to further consolidate their position. The Consultation theme was *The Church in Response to Human Need*. The conference began with the acknowledgement that delegates came from different contexts in which they were witnesses. Part of the introductory statement of the consultation reads,

"Some of us belong to churches which are situated amongst the marginalized peoples who live in situations of poverty, powerlessness, and oppression. Others come from churches situated in affluent areas of the world. We are deeply grateful to our heavenly Father for allowing us the privilege of sharing our lives with one another, studying the Scriptures in small groups, considering papers on aspects of human development and transformation, and looking closely at the implications of case studies and histories which describe different responses to human need.

Because God hears the cries of the poor, we have sought each other's help to respond (Exod. 3:7 – 9; James 5: 1 – 6). We rejoice at what we believe the Holy Spirit has been teaching us concerning God's specific purpose and plans for His distressed world and the part the Church has to play in them" (Samuel & Sugden 1999:261 – 262).

From the beginning of this consultation there was a sober realization of various contextual challenges that different delegates were facing. The importance of dialogue was highlighted, as well as ways in which people from those diverse backgrounds could assist one another to come up with a viable, biblically grounded and God-inspired response to various human needs. Further statements indicate that a more comprehensive and holistic understanding of missions was developing amongst Evangelicals. We read:

"We acknowledge, furthermore, that only by spreading the Gospel can the most basic need of human beings be met: to have fellowship with God. In what follows we do not emphasize evangelism as a separate theme, because we see it as an integral part of our total Christian response to human need (Matt. 28:18 –21)... Both Scripture and experience, informed by the Spirit, emphasize that God's people are dependent upon His wisdom in confronting human need. Local churches and mission agencies, then, should act wisely; they are to be both pastoral and prophetic. Indeed the whole human family with its illusions and divisions needs Christ to be its Wisdom as well as its Saviour and King. Conscious of our struggle to find a biblical view of transformation that relates its workings in the hearts of believers to its multiplying effects in society, we pray that the Spirit will give us the discernment we need. We believe that the wisdom the Spirit inspires is practical rather than academic, and the possession of the faithful rather than the preserve of the elite. Because we write as part of the world full of conflict and a church easily torn by strife we desire that the convictions expressed in this document be further refined by God's pure and peaceable wisdom"(Samuel & Sugden 1999:262 –263).

The views that emanated from the consultation expressed the Evangelicals' intentions to be involved in a mission that would culminate in societal transformation wherever the Church was located. At this conference both the pastoral and prophetic aspects of

Christian ministry were highlighted. One of the significant outcomes of the consultations was the adoption of the concept of transformation: “One aspect of Mission as Transformation is the central place of the poor in the Mission of God... how good news to the poor and the bias to the poor faithfully express and expand the meaning of the biblical gospel of grace”(Samuel & Sugden 1999:225). In our witness for the transformation of society we realize God’s preference for the poor. The God of salvation, who sends his Church into the world to share in his mission to save it, is God the Protector of those who are marginalized and dehumanised by unjust societal systems. God as a just God cannot be neutral, but sides with the impoverished to condemn their subjugation and their oppressors.

#### **5.5.2.5 San Antonio 1989**

Representatives from the Ecumenical movement meeting under the auspices of the WCC also contributed to the development of the Evangelical position on evangelism and social action. A number of clear points were made, indicating some consensus on the necessity of social action being included in the witness of the Church. Signs of this development also emerged at the WCC conference on mission and evangelism that was held on the campus of Trinity University, in San Antonio, Texas, in May 1989. This conference gave a message that gave impetus to the all-embrasive mission of the Church, bringing traditional Ecumenical and Evangelical views closer to one another. According to Wilson (1990:20), “The two most important significant trends of this Conference were the spirit of universality (catholicity) of the gathering, and its concern for the fullness of the gospel, namely:

To hold in creative tension  
spiritual and material needs,  
prayer and action,  
evangelism and social responsibility,  
dialogue and witness,  
power and vulnerability,  
local and universal.”

The message was all-embracing, appealing to different sectors of the church and addressing various aspects of missions and evangelism. Yet for the purpose of our study I will only highlight those outcomes of the conference that relates to missions, evangelism and social action. The theme of the conference was: *Your Will Be Done – Mission In Christ's Way*. At this conference the cause of the poor, oppressed, and marginalized groups like women, children, youth, and refugees received special attention. The following appeal was made in the message of the conference:

“God calls us, Christians everywhere, to join in:  
proclaiming the Good News of God’s redeeming love in Jesus Christ;  
acting in solidarity with those who suffer and struggle for justice  
and human dignity; sharing justly the earth’s resources;  
bearing witness to the gospel through renewed communities in mission”(Wilson 1990:22 –23).

Inspired by the intention to pursue *Mission in Christ's way* the conference was sensitive to the numerous struggles of the majority of people who are disadvantaged in societies worldwide. Christians globally were encouraged to be involved, as part of their witness, in the eradication of those hardships. They were to be companions of those who were downtrodden and share in their suffering and fight against such injustice. Section II of the conference report reads:

“Participating in the suffering and struggle is at the heart of God’s mission and God’s will for the world. It is central for our understanding of the incarnation, the most glorious example of participation in suffering and struggle. The church is sent in the way of Christ bearing the marks of the cross in the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. John 20:19 –23)... All three elements – participation, suffering, and the struggle – are important. Some people suffer but have ceased to struggle, and their suffering is ultimately meaningless. Some want to struggle but are not willing to endure the suffering necessary for achieving transformation. Suffering is not to be romanticized; rather it is to be overcome through struggle. It is inevitable in the struggle. The character of participation is determined by the nature of the suffering and struggle “(Wilson 1990: 37 – 38).

The San Antonio conference revived the activism of the church, the determination to join the poor in their struggle against any subjugating element. The church had to become part of the resistance front of the marginalized in their struggle for survival and freedom from oppression. The delegates defined resistance as follows:

“Resistance is an attitude of vigilance in the defence of life, so that the purposes of the God of life may be upheld – a combat to restore life sapped by distress, sickness, injustice, and death. Resistance becomes a creative power when a community is formed and is actively involved in the struggle against powers of evil. Resistance is refusal to accept the vision of society imposed by the oppressor; it is the envisioning of an alternative society, with equality, justice and love... The active choice to resist and to effect change in unjust situations entails suffering... The church should articulate in words and participate in the struggle and suffering of those working for justice through different forms of resistance. It should cease justifying unjust structures and change its attitudes towards these structures to side with the poor, joining them in resisting the powers of injustice, and helping develop a spirituality that comes from action locally and globally towards transforming this world” (Wilson 1990: 41 – 42).

The conference, in highlighting the need for resistance, acknowledged the fact that those who perpetuated oppression and injustice had been intransigent in their refusal to abandon their errant ways.

#### **5.5.2.6 The Evangelicals Response to San Antonio, Lausanne II Manilla, 1989.**

After the San Antonio Conference, a group of Evangelicals wrote a letter addressed to the Lausanne II Manilla, 1989, to voice their concerns. In that letter they commended the WCC on various positions that taken at San Antonio. The response of the Evangelicals to the WCC was more conciliatory in its tone, promoting a constructive dialogue and unity. This was major shift in the attitude of the Evangelicals towards the WCC, which was more positive than in previous years of interaction. Even the language the Evangelicals used in their reply it was closer to the expressions of Ecumenicals in how they expressed



their views on ministry to the poor and issues of justice in missions. I quote some extracts from this letter as cited by Wilson (1990:191- 194) cited these statements from the Evangelicals:

I. We wish to share with you many of the good things we have learned and have been enriched by at this conference. We have appreciated the diversity of the make-up of the conference.... We have valued the concern at this conference for justice for all the peoples of the earth ... It is a particular privilege, and a commendation of witness of the church, that many people from the suffering and oppressed groups feel that they can find in the company of Jesus' disciples a listening ear to and indeed a platform for their cries. The fact that World Council of Churches conferences are places where they can voice their concerns should be seen as a very positive affirmation of how the poor see the church....

We feel that the expression for the rights of the poor must not be misunderstood as showing that World Council of Churches has relinquished the central concern of devotion and faithful witness to Jesus. For he is the very basis for the compassion and justice that requires that the voice of the poor be heard... Jesus was indeed a prophet and exercised prophetic ministry. But unless Jesus is also acknowledged as the Saviour crucified for the sin of the world and the Lord risen as the victor over all evil, we are without hope and without God in the world....

II. We wish to encourage you to pursue a number of concerns, which you bear as a gift and a trust for the worldwide body of Christ....

Evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of the Christian duty, as the Lausanne Covenant of 1974 reaffirmed. Many thousands of evangelicals have found innovative ways to issue the invitation to follow Jesus in the context of engaging in social action. Encouraged by what we have seen God do through these, we give thanks to God and urge you to pursue a stronger relationship between proclaiming and demonstrating the good news in relation to the social and political dimension of life....

For too long, the World Council of Churches has been perceived as being involved with justice without relation to justification of sinner; and the Lausanne

movement has been perceived as being concerned for personal justification without reference to the personal and corporate sin at the root of injustice. Without an affirmation of the invitation of Jesus to repentance, faith and discipleship, mission amongst the poor for justice can become indistinguishable from the economic development notion of eradicating poverty without respect to the many cultural and human values of poor communities. ...

There is a special need for the Lausanne movement to relate authentic evangelism in the context of social concern and witness in relation to people of other faiths....”

The San Antonio conference had produced some points of convergence of the Ecumenicals within the WCC and the Evangelicals from the Lausanne movement. There was no significant difference between their positions in terms of issues of justice and ministry amongst the poor. The issue was just different ways of expressing their views. In essence the Evangelicals lauded various declarations from San Antonio in relation to worship, diversity and evangelism and social action, sharing in the sufferings of the poor; which are some of the positions they affirmed. The Evangelicals, however, were inclined to strongly emphasize the kind of ministry that calls people to repentance and the acceptance of faith in Christ who is the Saviour and the Lord of their lives. They stressed the kind of invitation that challenges people to become Disciples of Christ even while their socio-political needs are being addressed. Some matters that are a priority within the Evangelical movement were not addressed at San Antonio Conference. This the Evangelicals accepted, merely offering to make further contributions in future dialogues. These contributions would be made in a spirit of enriching the church community worldwide in the same way the diversity of the church community that had gathered in San Antonio had enriched them. Even when they raised their concerns about the position of WCC they also highlighted the issues on which they agreed.

#### **5.5.2.7 Manilla, 1989**

The Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation convened its second International Congress on World Evangelism which was held from the 11 – 20 July 1989, in Manilla.

This conference expressed an unwavering commitment to the Lausanne Covenant and the theological positions that emerged amongst them as the result of the Lausanne movement. Further progress emanated out of the discussions in Manila, on how Evangelicals repositioned themselves in their witness with the adoption of a Manila Manifesto. The LCWE report states, “The Manila Manifesto takes up the two congress themes, ‘Proclaim Christ until he comes’ and ‘Calling the Whole Church to take the Whole Gospel to the Whole World.’”(Scherer & Bevan 1992: 293). The Manifesto sought to make a connection to the positions already assumed at the Lausanne I breaking new ground in their original stance so as to advance their mission mandate as Evangelicals. At this conference they consolidated their views about the gospel being propagated as the whole gospel. This gospel was considered to be more appropriate to address people today in their current situations, since humanity has been affected by sin in all aspects that encompass their existence as a result of the fall of humans . Consequently, humans have been subjected to living a life that contradicts the word of God, under the negative influences of wicked forces. According to the Manila Manifesto,

“The gospel is the good news of God’s salvation from powers of evil, the establishment of his eternal kingdom (Col. 2:15) and his final victory over everything which defies his purpose (1 Cor. 12:24 –28). In his love God purposed to do this before the world began and effected his liberating plan (Eph. 1:4; Col.1: 19) over sin, death and judgement through the death of our Lord Jesus Christ”(Scherer & Bevan 1992:294).

But, this all embracing gospel must be preached in a manner that deals with the challenges of people in the present time. Especially in a world in which the majority of people are living in adverse condition. As Christians, we have to embrace them with the good news that enables them to find their liberation in the midst of turmoil. This was LCWE response, “We have been reminded that the law, the prophets, and the wisdom books, and the teaching and ministry of Jesus, all stress God’s concern for the materially poor and our consequent duty to defend and care for them (Am.2: 6,7; Zech. 7:8 – 10; Prov.21:13.... The scripture also refers to the spiritually poor who look to God for mercy (Zep. 3:12). The gospel comes as good news to both” (Scherer and Bevan 1992: 295). Both the materially and spiritually poor are humans, who are therefore, sinners in need of

God's saving grace. Which has already been made available through Christ and is offered graciously to all who repent. However, the proclamation of the gospel should not allow the status quo that has created an unjust society of disparities between the materially poor and spiritually poor to persist. In essence, the preaching of the gospel must necessitate social responsibility. This is how the Manila Manifesto captures it:

“Evangelism is primary (Rom. 10:14) because our chief concern is with the gospel, that all people may have opportunity to accept Jesus Christ a Lord and Saviour. Yet Jesus not only proclaimed the Kingdom of God, he also demonstrated its arrival by works of mercy and power (Matt. 12:28). We are called today to a similar integration of words and deeds (1 Jn. 3:18). In a spirit of humility we are to preach and teach, minister to the sick, feed the hungry, care for the prisoners, help the disadvantaged and the handicapped, and deliver the oppressed”(Scherer & Bevans 1992:297).

From this conference's positions there was a clear departure from narrow views of the gospel that separated proclamation from social action. Rather, they restated their positions of a gospel that encapsulates social responsibility through the reflection of the scriptures so that they have a biblical gospel.

Manila also made Evangelicals to take stock of themselves in terms of their commitment to the fulfilling of God's missionary mandate in the world. They had to review their mission activities in the context of a growing world population and when the end of the millennium was just a decade away. The year 2000 was approaching thus they had to look at the fruit of their witness as this millennium was closing. Furthermore, they had to focus on how they would respond to the challenges of missions in the new millennium. In the light of this soul searching, this was their confession according to the Manilla Manifesto:

“We are deeply ashamed that nearly two millennia have passed since the death and resurrection of Jesus, and still two-thirds of the world's population have not yet acknowledged him. On the other hand, we are amazed at the mounting evidence of God's power even in the most unlikely places of the globe”(Scherer and Bevans 1992:303).

Then, they used the year 2000 that was closing in as a rallying point to revitalize them to evangelise the world. The end of the millennium became a strategic target through which they would mobilize their constituency for world evangelism. The Manila Manifesto reads, “There is nothing magical about the date, yet should we not do our best to reach this goal? Christ commands us to take this gospel to all peoples (Lk. 24:45 – 47). The task is urgent. We are determined to obey him with joy and hope”(Scherer and Bevan 1992: 304). This goal motivated them to take the task of world evangelism seriously and start to use their time fruitfully in that mission. They did not have time to waste as a church since the dawn of the new millennium was fast approaching. It was going to require a lot of dedication and sacrifice from them, if they hoped to reach the target. They realized that they had a challenging goal that they could not accomplish on their own. Rather they had to strive to complete this mammoth task of world evangelism the in collaboration with other churches. Hence, they committed themselves to work for unity with other churches in missions.

#### **5.5.2.8 The Concerned Evangelicals in South Africa**

The above-mentioned discussions were closely followed by a number of South African Evangelicals, who increasingly felt uncomfortable with the conspicuous apathy of the majority of the fellow Evangelicals in a society where injustice and oppression was rife. The repressive system of apartheid was aggressively expanding its brutal assault on the disenfranchised Africans at the time. “Therefore, somewhere around September 1985 a group of ‘concerned evangelicals’ met to discuss the crisis in South Africa and how it affected their lives, the faith and in particular the evangelical mission which was usually their preoccupation. It was during the previous state of emergency, which lasted eight months (July 1985 – March 1986). Many people were in detention and people were dying at an alarming rate everyday in the country”(Concerned Evangelicals 1986:1). They could not be onlookers, when a so-called ‘Christian government’ was violating the fundamental rights and dignity of God’s people. Therefore they denounced the actions of this unjust government and stood in solidarity with the oppressed against their marginalization. The Concerned Evangelicals at some point articulated their stand against

Apartheid and their actions to eradicate it through the *Kairos* document and other resolutions from other consultations. Their stand against injustice unleashed a flood of persecutions, repressions, incarcerations and conspiracies to assassinate against them. The enemy was the oppressive Apartheid regime and its collaborators who were within the ranks of the church. But even against this avalanche of opposition they stood their ground and worked with the oppressed and the Ecumenicals to destroy injustice, inequality and segregation in South Africa. They persevered, even when some of their fellow Christians ostracized them and scandalized them and accused them of being instruments of the anti –Christ, working with Communists to overthrow a so-called ‘Christian government.’ They continued to face the defamation of the apologists of the apartheid regime, whose propaganda machinery was so strong that it threatened the unity of the church. Members of the Church were at loggerheads, because they were either for the present repressive regime, or opposed it. Others, due to their fears of repression, chose to be neutral and never did anything either to assist the oppressed or to protest against repression. They merely continued with their spiritual activities, undisturbed. The Concerned Evangelicals saw their mandate to preach the Gospel, to include good news that declared that subjugation and humiliation of God’s people would end. They believed that God’s people must experience salvation that would not only touch the soul, body and mind of a person but would also transform the societal conditions that condemned people to oppression, inequality, poverty and created alienation instead of reconciliation, peace, justice and prosperity for all.

The Concerned Evangelicals soon created tension within the Evangelical movement. People began to question the theology, teachings and ministry of the church in the context of oppression, and blamed the Church for having insufficiently prepared them to respond as just witnesses of Christ against oppression. The Concerned Evangelicals themselves expressed their frustration with their theology as follows:

“Our frustration was that our own churches, groups or organizations were almost lost and could not provide prophetic light in this situation. At worst most would be supporting the status quo instead of being a conscience of the state. We felt that although our perception of the gospel helped us to be what we are, saved by

the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, born again into the family of the Kingdom of God, our theology nevertheless was inadequate to address the crisis we were facing. In our series of discussions...we realized that our theology was influenced by American and European missionaries with political, social and class interests which were contrary or even hostile to both the spiritual and social needs of our people in this country”(Concerned Evangelicals 1986: 2).

The Concerned Evangelicals confessed that they were often complacent when God’s people were being treated unjustly. Theologies needed to be reviewed and ministries renewed to be able to bring good news to the oppressed and the oppressor. The indifference in the face of apartheid could not persist unchallenged. It is unfortunate that some Church leaders did not change their positions but continued in way that perpetuated the policies of segregation and oppression. But among others dialogue revived, and the Church began to assume a more visible ministry that addressed the societal ills and sins in the same way it dealt with more personal ones. Furthermore, they closed the gap between the Ecumenicals and the Evangelicals and created unity within the church in a struggle against apartheid. Rev. Frank Chikane, a Pentecostal, became the General Secretary of SACC, even though some within the Pentecostal – Charismatic circles decried his position. The Concerned Evangelicals contributed to shaping the thinking of many Evangelicals, motivating them to revisit their theology, which they now realized, had perpetuated dualistic thinking.

#### **5.5.2.9 Salvador, de Bahia, Brazil 1996**

Further developments in forums within the Conciliar movement also had an impact amongst Evangelicals. The WCC organized an Ecumenical Conference on World Mission and Evangelisation just towards the close of the twentieth century in Salvador de Bahia, Brazil between the 24 November – 3 December 1996. The theme of the conference was “Called to One Hope – The Gospel in Diverse Cultures.” This was a very important subject for the delegates to reflect on as they pondered on their missions endeavours for Christ, in the world that God created to celebrate this diversity of human cultures. Yet, this diversity in the world had become a sore thumb since, it’s a source of

tension, misunderstanding, conflict, segregation, injustice, oppression and pauperisation between people within their societies, nations and continents. Instead, of it being the basis of unity, peace, equality, justice and safety for people. At the time in our world when people are struggling to have a peaceful, mutual existence. Therefore, they believed that the message of the Church, that is, the good news of Christ can be propagated and lived in the world in a manner in which, it contributes meaningfully to reach out to all people and minister to them in their struggles created by that diversity. The report of WCC-CWME reads, “It is our hope that this last great mission conference of the twentieth century has clearly illuminated that the gospel to be most fruitful... true to itself, and incarnated or rooted in the culture of a people. We have had first hand experience in seeing and hearing Christians from many diverse cultures expressing their struggles and hopes together”(Scherer & Bevans 1999:198). Delegates at this CWME conference drew their inspiration to strive to be witnesses of the gospel of hope in a world of diversity, out of their own celebrated diversity that was solidified by their shared faith. They also reflected on the legacy of the church from Pentecost, how in its roots it was characterized by diversity that was even reflected in its witness to the world.

This conference revealed notable progress with regards to the convergence of views between Evangelicals and Ecumenicals on missions embracing social action. Firstly, it was in how the CWME articulated the work of the Holy Spirit in all cultures of the world. According to CWME report,

“Culture is both a result of God’s grace and an expression of human freedom and creativity. Culture is intrinsically neither good nor bad; it has a potential of both – and is thus ambiguous... The human response to God is always through culture... The gospel cannot be identified with a particular culture... But within the mutual interaction between the gospel and cultures, the gospel functions as a new and inspiring principle, giving rise to the renewal of cultures through the transforming work of the Spirit”(Scherer & Bevans 1999: 200 – 203).

There is common understanding between Evangelicals and Ecumenicals that the gospel must be preached to people in their cultures without denigrating their culture. The Gospel should not be used as vehicle to uproot people from their cultures with the aim of giving



them a culture of those witnessing to them. The Holy Spirit reveals the gospel, convicts the world of sin and is the one who ushers genuine transformation in the lives of people and their cultures too. According to CWME,

“The transformation brought by the gospel may be described as a lamp ‘that gives light to all in the house’ (Matt. 5:15). Such transformations are taking place in different parts of the world, bringing new meaning to religio-cultural activities such as marriage ceremonies, funeral services, liturgical rites and rituals related to health and healing”(Scherer & Bevans 1999: 203).

The Spirit is the one who makes people to experience real freedom, peace and fulfilment through the saving power of the gospel in their cultures. Therefore all people must be summoned to respond to the call of the gospel of Christ that brings God's salvation to them, in experiencing the power of God's salvation in their cultures. These cultures are also impacted in a manner that propels them to be renewed so as to enrich people's lives in terms of the promises of God.

Secondly, there is convergence on the fact that the gospel must deal with all the issues that affect matters that are essential to humans. As witnesses, we must not just stop at the point of just being sensitive to other people's cultures when we witness to them, although this is very important, rather, we should be heralds of a holistic gospel. CWME's reports reads, “The gospel addresses all aspects of human life, including the structural dimensions of culture”(Scherer & Bevans 1999:207). In this world of diversity people continue to be disadvantaged politically, economically, socially, culturally, religiously and educationally. They have been rendered powerless and are forced to live a life under oppression, unable to realize their dreams. People who sideline the others use gender, race, class, religion, culture, disability, age, and disease as their tool to oppress them. Thus, as Christians, as we fulfil our mission mandate we should not ignore the cries and pains of people whose identity has been undermined by present unjust societal structures. Rather, together with the victims of these dehumanising forces, we should seek to uproot them through God's power until justice is fully established. According to the CWME report, “A holistic understanding of mission as including both evangelism and service,

leads the church to faithfulness to God's continuing act in Christ"(Scherer & Bevans 1999:230). The church shows its true signs of discipleship to Christ when becomes sensitive to the needs of the disadvantaged and uses its resources to help them in its witness. With such a practical response, it has revealed its obedience to fulfil the call of Christ to minister both in word and deed to the marginalized.

Thirdly, there was convergence on aspects of the church expressing its unity in how it engages in missions. This was not something new, it was highlighted at the San Antonio and Lausanne conferences respectively. Scherer and Bevans (1999: 230) reported indeed that mission challenges "the whole church to take the whole gospel to the whole world (The Lausanne Covenant, 1974, para. 6)." This message was reiterated at Salvador that all churches must be united in their efforts to take part in the mission of God. Churches must refrain from tendencies of working in silos competing against each other in missions. According to the CWME report, "Mission and unity are inseparably linked; missions remain a goal to[or towards] which the church aspires. Visible signs of commitment to the goal of unity include collaboration, cooperation and networking among the churches and mission agencies in the same area, across cultural and denominational boundaries, and across national and regional boundaries" (Scherer & Bevans 1999:231). They called for a unity that is not just spoken about but that is demonstrable. This must become evident in the life of the church as it witnesses to the world. It must be seen in the entire life and ministry of the church. CWME's report reads, "Such mission is engaged in by and for persons of all races and social strata, women and men, young and old, lay and ordained, poor and rich, and persons with different abilities"(Scherer & Bevans 1999: 230). It means the church has to renew itself in how it has been doing missions to transcend these abovementioned hurdles. To foster a true spirit of fellowship characterised by equality, love, justice and peace within the church. This will make it possible for all different Christians out of their cherished uniqueness that they take their rightful place within the Church and make a contribution partaking in missions without any unwarranted hindrances.

Finally, the WCC seem to be revisiting the issues of the role of the church in the transformation of society. Something that has been emerging at certain times at the consultations of Evangelicals too. This issue has been put on the agenda of the next 9<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the WCC which will be held in Porto Algere, Brazil, 14 – 23 February 2006. The suggested theme will be “God in your grace, we transform the world. “The assembly will be a time of encounter, prayer, celebration and deliberation for thousands of Christians women and men from around the world”(WCC Website). The theme mentions the word grace, which is a word almost overused by Evangelicals. The proposed programme is not dominated by discussions but also sessions for some spiritual experiences through liturgy and various ways of celebrations. There is anticipation in the air that issue of the gospel that is, incarnated through social action will be reviewed with a fresh perspective.

#### **5.5.2.10 Global Consultation on World Evangelisation, Pretoria 1997**

This was another significant forum that contributed in shaping the missiological thinking of Evangelicals. In June 30 – 5 July 1997 the GCOWE 97 conference was held in Pretoria, South Africa. It was a build up of the GCOWE 95 that was convened in Seoul, Korea in May 17 –26, 1995. The theme of GCOWE 95 was, “A church for every people and the gospel for every person by AD 2000.” The goal being to ensure that everyone in the world inspite of their background should have been reached with the gospel by the end of year 2000. Similarly, GCOWE 97’s mandate was to extend a mandate of the Great Commission to the majority of the unevangelized people in the world especially those who were adherents of the non-Christian faith. One of the statements that emerged from this consultation is that: “The world Christian movement has largely stalled in relation to the Hindu, Muslim, and Buddhist Blocs of unreached peoples...” (Guthrie 2000:59). An opportunity was seen to evangelise the world at that envisaged time before it was too late and they miss it. This was at the time when the concept of the 10/40 Window was being popularised. “The 10/40 Window is an imaginary box drawn between the 10 and 40 degrees longitude, encompassing parts or all of the 62 countries in Africa and Asia, and a bit of Europe... Undeniably, the Window highlights areas of tremendous missiological

and physical needs. Some 3.1 billion people [at that time], approximately half of the world's population, live in the Window" (Guthrie 2000:58). Thus, delegates made a commitment to even intensify their church planting efforts in their mission endeavour worldwide. But with the people located within the Window as their major priority in their missionary work, it was observed that the majority of the people within this Window had lived under horrendous physical conditions. The quest was mainly to fast track the pace of the great commission and finish it by reaching all these unreached people with the gospel, with a planted local church in close proximity to these deprived people's community ministering to their needs. This became a goal they sought to complete by the year 2000. Therefore, it orchestrated the AD2000 movement world evangelism.

GCOWE 97 can be lauded for raising a sense of urgency and resurgence of more commitment towards the Great Commission with its constituency. Although this movement was accused of being unecumenical, especially with its desire to reach people who were already adherents to other non-Christian religions such as Moslems, Hindus, Buddhists and indigenous religions of the world. GCOWE 97 contributed towards reviewing a triumphalistic approach in world evangelism with its millennial goals as pushed by the AD 2000 movement. Some of its critics were of the view that their millennium goals were too ambitious, unrealistic and unattainable. "By GCOWE II...many leaders were speaking of 2000 as a kind of springboard for the new century outreach, rather than as a deadline by which to finish the task of world evangelisation" (Guthrie 2000:67). In their opinion, by the end of 2000 they could not reach all those mission goals, therefore they distanced themselves from such millennium projections on world evangelism. Hence, they began to reposition themselves for world evangelisation by AD 2000 and beyond. Furthermore, GCOWE II was critiqued for accepting some of the views of the proponents of 10/40 Window. This proved to be politically incorrect for Christians in the South since it left a probably intended consequence of making the majority of people in their continents, to be regarded as 'heathens.' Meanwhile, other people who were geographically positioned in the West or North were almost considered to be Christians. Therefore, it left bitter taste since just like in the past colonial era the North assumed a self-acclaimed task of evangelising the South with little or no

participation of its people. Guthrie (2000:58) writes: “Propounded just over a decade ago by Luis and Doris Bush of the AD 2000 and Beyond Movement, the Window, like any successful marketing tool, provide not only a convenient (if oversimplified) way of looking at the world, but also shows a lot about ourselves.” Thus people in the South did not appreciate the perception of those who categorised them into that Window. It reflected North’s bias towards South in the light of the Christian faith geographically, since, it would be a wrong assumption to exclude the North from the global effort of the Christian movement mandate for evangelism as the Window had done.

The GCOWE 97 also deliberated on the ministry of the church towards the disadvantaged. In one of their consultations, they made special reference to the poor and the needy. Their focus was on exploring initiatives that could be implemented to break the cycle of poverty through a holistic ministry. The delegates were led in deliberations on this issue through this thought provoking question: “The Lord’s practice exceeded His Teachings but does yours exceed your teaching?”(Potgieter 1991:1). This motivated delegates to review usual ways of conducting ministry in their context. In this self – evaluation they had Christ whom they could emulate as model in their witness, in order to for them to check if their proclamation of the gospel was in harmony with their lifestyle. Furthermore, the delegates reflected on the scriptures that highlighted the ministry of the church to the poor like Is. 58. “Delegates were shown the real reason for Isaiah’s fast, the motivation for ministry to the poor. We were shown our own sinful ways, doing God’s work for our own self-interest. Our response was obedience with 2 Chron. 7:14 and confess our sinful ways to the Lord”(Potgieter 1997:1). Through their study of the Scriptures they realized their failures in responding adequately to those who are deprived. Therefore they had to corporately repent from their wrongdoings and recommit themselves to their wholistic ministry towards the poor. According Potgieter (1997:1), “the delegates acknowledged God’s call on their lives and committed themselves to stand in the gap, to be vessels to pour out God’s blessing and anointing to the needy people all over the world.” This was a ministry they could not afford to be complacent about, instead, they had to make it a high priority for Christians. They had to make it an important aspect that is part of the whole mission of the church. Finally, at the close of

the session there was a strong conviction to really devote a prayer as a group with remorse. “The session ended with all the delegates spontaneously calling out to God, responding to His Word. They called out to God to forgive their sinful ways and asked God’s Spirit to guide them and give them humble hearts. Some of the delegates cried out to God on behalf of their countries, some of them confessing that their countries use their riches for wrong purposes, others called out to God on behalf of the poor. It was a time of healing and reconciliation”(Potgieter1997:1). There was earnest sincerity in the manner in which delegates acknowledged the need for the gospel to address issues of poverty. Some delegates were exposed to conditions of poverty as they had to be accommodated in Mamelodi for the duration of the conference and they experienced its reality.

#### **5.5.2.11 Inguassu Consultation, Brazil 1999.**

Further discussions on missions within the Evangelical circles continued outside the auspices of the Lausanne movement, as was the case with the Missiological Consultation which was held in Iguassu, Brazil from the 10 –16 October 1999. The World Evangelical Fellowship’s Missions Commission had organized it. Around 160 delegates participated in the deliberations of the consultation out of which a declaration was adopted, which was called the Iguassu Affirmation. At Iguassu the delegates noted the significant change that had evolved in Christianity over the past years. It was amazing how the majority of Christians within the church globally were living in countries which are in the South rather than the North. “Just as the epi-center of the global church has shifted from ‘North’ to the ‘South,’ in the same way the epi-center of creating and doing theology is changing. We rejoice in the former shift and realize that the second one invites us to greater missiological partnership” (Corwin & Neff 2000:227). This change had a significant impact on the theology and missiology of the church. It meant that the ‘South’ was making significant inputs in shaping theological positions of the church and its practices on missions. Therefore, it became a major contributory factor in the growth of Christianity in the world. Also, the South despite being disadvantaged socio-political and economically as compared to the North they had vibrant Christian communities whose hope and faith in God continued to grow as they struggled for justice and a better life.

The South had become a sending Church, deploying missionaries to other parts of the world. It was no longer just receiving missionaries but it was even commissioning missionaries to the ‘North.’

This consultation also made its contribution to shape the thinking of Evangelicals’ missiology. This will be noted when we analyse the objectives of this consultation. The aim of the consultation according to Corwin and Neff (2000:231) as enumerated in its preamble was to:

1. Reflect on the challenges and opportunities facing world missions at the dawn of the new millennium;
2. Review the different streams of the twentieth – century evangelical missiology and practice, especially since the 1974 Lausanne Congress;
3. Continue developing and applying a relevant biblical missiology which reflects the cultural diversity of God’s people.

The openness of these aims enabled delegates at this consultation to explore many possible trends that had developed over the past years within the church globally. Therefore, they had an opportunity to assess those trends and inform themselves as they took new positions to redefine their role in missions when facing present challenges. This meant their objectives helped them to focus on today’s issues regarding missions, with insight on how their predecessor had dealt with issues of their era and the manner in which they anticipated the future in terms of the gospel. According to the Iguassu declaration this is their view about the gospel:

“The gospel is good news and addresses all human needs. We emphasize the holistic nature of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament demonstrate God’s concern with the whole person in the whole of society. We acknowledge that material blessing comes from God, but prosperity should not be equated with godliness”(Corwin & Neff 2000:235).

Their view is that the gospel, if it is to have impact today for our communities it must address all aspects that pertain to life. The gospel should not be proclaimed in a manner that is stereotypical addressing issues of life in a narrow way, since life exists in totality and not in divisible compartments of the spiritual and the material. This consultation also

reinforced the holistic approach of the church in its pursuit of global evangelism. Furthermore, it articulated its position on Christian Responsibility and World Economic order to give direction to its constituency in response to globalisation since it had implications for missions. Their statement reads:

“In a world that is increasingly controlled by global economic forces, Christians need to be aware of the corrosive effects of affluence and destructive effects of poverty. We must become aware of the ethnocentrism in our view of economic forces. We commit ourselves to address the realities of world poverty and oppose policies that serve the powerful rather than the powerless”(Corwin & Neff 2000:239).

It is a fact that globalisation is a world phenomenon at this moment which cannot be ignored by the church universally. Even when we welcome it we must realize that within its merits there are demerits too. One of them is that there are growing economic and power disparities in the world. There are those few individuals, families, societies and nations that are increasing their wealth and power in disturbing proportions. On the contrary, the majority remain in the gutters struggling for survival. Therefore, as church globally engaged in missions we cannot just accept this inequality as a normal way of human existence, rather we should be agents of God justice, to bring equity that would promote a good quality life for all of God’s people all over the world.

#### **5.5.2.12 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia 2001**

The World Evangelical Fellowship held its 11th General Assembly on 4 –11 May 2001, in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. It was a build up on the momentum that was already developed at the Iguassu Consultation in Brazil, 1999. “Some 600 Christian leaders from 84 countries attended the strategic week long gathering and pre-assembly meetings”(Alford 2001:512). These delegates represented different Evangelical churches worldwide. Therefore, their inputs reflected the richness of their varying backgrounds. It was a very important conference in the life of the WEF since a proposal was given for a name change in order to reposition the organization strategically in its mission. “WEF will become the WEA.... It’s a move that comes as evangelicals around the world are restating their commitment to full obedience to the Great Commission of Christ. This



commitment extends to social issues, whether helping refugees or taking on Third World debt and on the abuse of women, all of which received special focus at this assembly” (Alford 2001:512). They were aspiring to move the organization forward in aspects of mission to practically implement their intentions of dealing with social responsibility in the manner in which they practiced missions. This should not just end with a verbal declaration that they would practically commit to social action as part of their witness. “The focus of the Kuala Lumpur gathering was wholistic, rather than reducing the gospel to ‘simple proclamation’”(Alford 2001:513). Evangelicals were challenged to move beyond their usual passion in global mission that was characterized mainly by preaching the gospel. This preaching was to be accompanied by deeds that seek to assist people to find their freedom from anything that is a hindrance preventing them to experience life to the fullest. Instead, to embark on viable social responsibility programs that engages their beneficiaries, in so doing they ultimately reinforce the pulpit ministry. Furthermore, they were sensitive and focussed their discussions on the plight of the world’s poor. The question of poverty eradication featured as an important item on their agenda at this conference. This is how it was articulated: ‘While welcoming pledges made by Western governments to cancel the unpayable debt owed by developing nations, WEF, said “There is unfinished business on the international agenda” to meet the goal of cutting world poverty in half by 2015’ (Alford 2001:513). They positioned themselves to join the global movement that is pushing the struggle to remove poverty. To be part of this global campaign that envisages the reduction poverty levels drastically in the world in terms of the set deadline. This implied that they were prepared to work hard in unison with other national and global agencies to fast track the process of poverty reduction with the ultimate aim being its total elimination.

#### **5.5.2.13 Pattaya, 2004**

Around September- October 2004 the Lausanne Forum was held in Pattaya, Thailand. This event marked the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Lausanne Conference. Over those 30 years, the Lausanne movement had crossed many milestones that had contributed tremendously to missiology. It was attended by various delegates from around the world who are

associated with the Lausanne movement. At this forum delegates were divided into 32 working groups that were to discuss contemporary issues that had an impact on missions. According to Borthwick (2005:182):

“Forum 2004 was designed to assess issues to the current religious profile of the world and articulate responses to many issues facing the global church. These issues addressed topics such as future leadership, Islam, other non-Christian religions, terrorism, the need for reconciliation in a hostile world, globalisation, the significance and the needs of the world’s children and youth, the persecuted church, religious nationalism and the church’s response to HIV/AIDS. Not every issue group was equally successful...”

This forum dealt with matters that were point of concern for people in our societies today. These things were affecting people’s lives detrimentally, daily things like, HIV/AIDS and world terrorism. In certain parts of the world like in South Africa people are feeling the devastation of HIV/AIDS since it is affecting their loved ones, whilst some are terrified by the violence and destruction caused by terrorism. There is also a fear of possibly becoming a target of suicide bombers. These people who once enjoyed the relative peace and security now have become vulnerable to these imminent terrorist attacks The church would be relevant if it addressed these challenging issues practically with the gospel. In this manner they were setting the agenda of the church for missions that would minister to people according to their specific needs. They would be scratching where it is itching the most rather than have a missions response that is irrelevant to people’s underlying needs.

## **5.6 A Critique of Charismatic Evangelicals**

In paragraphs above, positive developments have been noted amongst Charismatic Evangelicals, which have benefited the Christian community worldwide. There are, however, a number of questions and challenges to these churches, which also needs mentioning.

### **5.6.1. The African Context.**

Firstly, Charismatic Evangelicals will have to deal with the challenge to be African. Charismatic Evangelicalism has not adequately addressed the realities of Africa. It has not always been practised in a manner that is relevant to African culture, history, philosophies and indigenous socio-political and economic systems, institutions and structures. “Contextualization here expands to include the politico-economic aspects of life and seeks to produce symbols and language that are universal and inclusive of Africa’s reality”(Oduyoye 1986:54). Many Charismatic Evangelical churches have close connections with the American Charismatic Churches. A number of the American Charismatic Church leaders have TV programmes that are broadcast widely in South Africa. Some of their teachings that are popularised in South Africa are more relevant to the United States of America, and out of context in South Africa. They can learn from some of the Pentecostal Evangelicals who have to some extent been addressing contextual issues in relation to their version of Christianity. Anderson (2000:26) says, “Pentecostalism has been successfully incarnated into a uniquely African expression of Christianity because of its emphasis on spiritual experience and its ability to adapt any cultural background in the world.” The Charismatic Evangelicals need to preach and practise the gospel in a way that it is socially relevant to Africa.

### **5.6.2. Prosperity Theology**

We refer to the highly criticized “prosperity theology” which confuses people and equates the American dream, of wealth creation, western materialism, consumerism and jumboism to Biblical prosperity. The Concerned Evangelicals (1986:32) in their criticism of it said,

“We are concerned that some of these groups are blatantly capitalistic and materialistic. They preach the gospel of prosperity claiming that this ‘blessed’ capitalism is from God by faith if one believes the Scriptures, confesses them and claims the possessions (material) desired! What false ‘God of materialism!’ This sounds like real idolatry of mammon!”

This kind of prosperity if globalized, it is not sustainable because our resources are not limitless. God wants us to prosper and succeed but these concepts have to be earthed in contextual theologies that have been trimmed of Western ideologies that are not compatible with the African reality of life. Furthermore, it would be contrary to the teachings of the gospel to make Christianity a problem free life. Sometimes prosperity theology seems to promise believers a comfortable, struggle-free life. “It would be quite wrong to suggest that the New Testament is all about sweetness and light. Unfortunately, some Christians today interpret it that way, thereby laying upon themselves and others the impossible burden of being constantly happy”(Koenig 1978:49). The Bible teaches that abundance may include a dose of tribulations in the same package (c.f. Mk. 10:29 – 31). Anyone who wants to follow Jesus is expected to take up his or her cross.

Another undesirable outcome of prosperity theology was to create a mindset of a kind of faith that produced people who were full of self-interest than care for the needs of others. Producing Christians who would be prone to seek personal blessings at the expense of their obligation to be involved in social transformation. Such Christians have little or no interest in the mission of the Church and contributing to the renewal of structures of society. “Most Evangelicals would, however, draw a line when it comes to the Church’s direct involvement in structural changes in society. Such changes—which are often indeed regarded as desirable by Evangelicals—are rather to be viewed as a possible result of evangelism. The emphasis is on evolution rather than revolution”(Bosch 1980:33). Charismatic Evangelicals need to realize the need to be involved in the transformation of social structures especially those that perpetuate injustice, inequality and oppression. Jennings, Jr. (1990:47) says,

“Whenever wealth and power are uncritically celebrated as the gift of God, and so as the sign of the divine favour, then the presence of poverty and powerlessness is all too naturally seen as an indication of divine disapproval, as punishment for sins of sloth or unbelief. The remedy suggested by the proponents of the gospel of wealth and success is conversion; this will lead to those material blessings that, it is presumed, follow from a life of faith. Such a position makes it possible to hold

the poor in contempt and makes the wealthy and powerful the role models of faith.”

In South Africa, the prosperity of the privileged minority historically has come as a result of the marginalization of the majority. Otherwise, if the proponents of prosperity theology fail to recognize historical disparities, the very prosperity they preach will be an elusive dream for those who are being exploited and marginalized.

### **5.6.3 The Gifts of the Holy Spirit**

The experience of being filled with the Holy Spirit is often misunderstood by some Charismatic Evangelicals. The Holy Spirit is divine and no one can manipulate the Spirit of God to make Him do what he or she wishes. The Spirit is God, and Sovereign. Just as the wind blows where it wills, so it is with the Spirit (John3:8). Even when we have received extraordinary gifts, it is as the Holy Spirit wills and not as we will. Sometimes their experience of the Holy Spirit, borders on sensationalism. There is a tendency to present certain extraordinary experiences of the presence and workings of the Holy Spirit in a manner that is not consistent with the Scriptures. The phenomenon of the work of the Holy Spirit; which is portrayed in striking examples for personal and group therapy; should be balanced by the Spirit’s ministry in acts of structural liberation. One has to acknowledge, however, that Charismatic churches are characterized by a vibrancy that has waned in some of the mainstream churches. Furthermore, Charismatic Christians sometimes use a language that seems overly enthusiastic when talking about their experience of Charismatic renewal. This creates an impression that theirs is a movement of quick fixes. The Charismatics tend to portray their experiences in a spectacular way.

According to O’Connor (1974: 171 – 172):

“These dramatic examples should not mislead us. The majority of spiritual developments, even among the Pentecostals, take place quietly and gradually...the baptism in the Spirit has been a mighty intervention of the power of God in their lives, giving them suddenly and effortlessly results for which they had laboured and prayed without success, and placing them many steps ahead on the road to sanctity than their previous progress would ever have entitled one to

expect. These are not, however, cases of ‘instant sanctity,’ as some have supposed. No one is changed overnight into a saint. The graces in question are powerful aids towards sanctity, but they leave the recipient with many steps yet to take, in which he is subject to all the laws, perils and exigencies inherent in the spiritual combat. “

No transformation brought through Charismatic renewal, no matter how overwhelming it may be is an instant occurrence. Yet, this does not mean we should dismiss accounts of these experiences of the power of the Holy Spirit, unless they are obviously distorted. “Pentecostals are guilty of many exaggerations, oversimplifications and personal quirks that do not come from authentic Pentecostal spirit, but from the human subjects that embody it”(O’ Connor 1974:219). Thus we must have an openness to embrace Charismatic renewal but maintain our discernment to reject anything that is not *kosher*.

#### **5.6.4 The Baptism with the Holy Spirit**

Also, there is a tendency to express the phenomenon of *Spirit baptism* in a way that makes people feel as if they ‘possess’ the Holy Spirit. According to Barth (1963:57 – 58), “In such a situation theology forgets that the wind of the Spirit blows where it wills. The presence and action of the Spirit are the grace of God who is always free, always superior, always giving himself undeservedly and without reservation. But theology now supposes it can deal with the Spirit as though it had hired him or even attained possession of him. It imagines that he is a power of nature that can be discovered, harnessed, and put to use like water, fire, electricity, or atomic energy.”

There is an inclination to appropriate the Holy Spirit, as if He were only active in the personal arena of Christians. Thus these Christians miss an opportunity to see the Holy Spirit at work in our world. The Holy Spirit’s task is not just to bring personal renewal and edification of the church, but also to transform the world for which Christ has died. The Holy Spirit extends God’s salvation to the entire world. Costa’s (1974: 7) states:

“The Holy Spirit is the executor of God’s mission. Following the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, God’s redemptive mission to the world continued in the coming of

the Holy Spirit...Paul says that he is the very Spirit of Christ (2 Cor. 3:17). That is, the Holy Spirit makes the loving Lord present in the many situations in which men and women find themselves... In other words, he is the force that extends redemption, which has its centre in God, out into the world. He is the centrifugal-centripetal force that takes Christ to the world and calls the world to become part of Christ. The ultimate goal of the Spirit's ministry is to fulfil God's redemptive purpose in Christ, namely, the creation of a new humanity."

God's redemptive plan of which the Holy Spirit is the 'executor' cannot be privatised, since it covers all aspects of human existence. It should not be limited to either the private world of Christians, or to the religious sector of the church.

### **5.6.5 Conversion**

One of the flaws of Charismatic Evangelicals' view on conversion is the tendency to put too much emphasis on the personal aspects of conversion. This creates an impression that conversion is about dealing with the convert's individual sins whilst neglecting the social consequences of his personal sins. Bosch (1980: 31 –32), in commenting on this individualistic evangelical view of conversion, said:

"Man's greatest anguish is his lostness before God, his greatest need is to be saved and reconciled to God, his greatest fear for eternal punishment of hell, his greatest hope for glory in the hereafter. Sin, in this definition, has to do primarily with man's relationship to God that has gone wrong. It is, moreover, something, personal and individual: '... the eye of the evangelist is always on the individual, with a view to motivating personal conversion... Only individuals *qua* individuals can be saved."

The shortcoming of this perspective is that it stresses the vertical aspect of Christian spirituality, at the expense of the horizontal. Conversion should be addressing both the vertical and horizontal aspects of faith in a balanced manner. The teaching of the gospel must lead to both personal conversion and the transformation of society to be in line with Kingdom values.

### 5.6.6 The Aspect of Church Growth

The ecclesiological modalities of *church growth*, as practiced by some Charismatic Churches, are fraught with various shortcomings. Their ‘mega-church’ concept tends to allow the experience and achievement of qualitative growth to overshadow quantitative growth. “Growth is a complex phenomenon. It takes place at different levels and in different ways. It is multidimensional. Consequently, it cannot be appraised superficially, nor can it be understood apart from its concrete historical manifestations”(Costas 1974:88). Growth is more than just filling the empty pews and putting bodies into them. It is how these people are converted, disciplined, and integrated into the community of the faithful to become meaningful members of that community, contributing to its life and ministry. What we need is a more holistic approach to church growth. “In order for church growth to be holistic expansion it must encompass four major areas: the numerical, organic, conceptual and incarnational”(Costas 1974:89). A holistic approach is more balanced, since it embraces all the essential qualitative and quantitative aspects that make up the character and life of a Church. We must move away from ‘jumboism’ that creates a bloated but shallow church that has no substance in its spirituality and ministry to the community. Such growth is contrary to the demands of the gospel. It is just cosmetic. Costas (1974:92 – 93) expresses these views on church growth:

“Jesus views the growth of the new community not only quantitatively, i.e., as the gathering in of the harvest, the fruit-bearing interaction between him and the community, and the incorporation of those who repent and believe into the life of the kingdom of God. The kingdom, he says, ‘is like a grain of mustard seed’ (Matt. 13:31). It grows organically, from a very small seed to large tree. Though it must cope with resistance (the seed falls sometimes by the wayside, on the rock, or among the thorns), it experiences healthy growth when it falls into good soil (Lk. 8:5 –8, 11-15; Matt. 13:1 – 8, 18 –23; Mk. 4:1-9, 13 –20).”

We need to propagate a concept of church that grows with new believers being assimilated to be full members of God’s redemptive community and participating concretely into all aspects of its life as true Disciples of Christ. The church must be a



community in which all its members develop in their personal faith and of which they can become productive members, manifesting kingdom life in their context.

### 5.6.7 Dualism

The Charismatic Evangelicals have tendencies to be dualistic in their thinking and in their spirituality. There is an inclination to prioritise what is regarded as being spiritual above the earthly. What is ‘spiritual’ like prayer is considered to be more important than what is physical like ordinary work. “The African world view does not permit the Western tendency to separate physical and spiritual, or personal and social. There is a presumed interpenetration of both. Even for African Christians, the Spirit pervades all of life, and not just the ‘spiritual’ part of it”(Anderson 2000:29). Their dualistic attitudes make them to have a negative attitude towards the world. Bosch (1980:32) said,

“Evangelicals tend to regard the world in which we live as essentially evil, surrendered to the *prince of this world* (Jn 16:11; cf. 1 Jn 5:19). The Christian may not enjoy this world; rather he should consistently shun ‘the things of this world.’ After all, his citizenship is in heaven. Contact with the world should therefore be reduced to the minimum.”

This is the reason aspects that characterize church life receive greater attention than things that pertain to public life. The world is considered to be a mission field in which Christians are God’s labourers saving the lost souls from this sinful earth and preparing them for heaven. Their business is not to entangle themselves in the mundane affairs of the world but to focus on what is heavenly. According Bosch (1980:34 –35),

“What happens inside the church building really matters: public worship, baptism, confirmation, prayer meetings; the quality of a convert’s Christian life is measured mainly according to his involvement in these activities. The Evangelical tendency to withdraw from the world for of defilement is, strangely enough, often coupled with the idea of viewing the world as a territory that has to be invaded and its prisoners liberated. In this way parts of the world can be reclaimed for God.”

In terms of the abovementioned view investing in the world is considered to be less important than investing in devotional aspects of Christian life. Christians who invest in public responsibilities are not as highly regarded as those who serve in aspects that promote Church life. Charismatic Evangelicals need to uproot these dualistic tendencies to ensure that both pietistic aspects of Church life and Christian public responsibility are equally prioritised in ministry.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

The Charismatic Evangelicals are a church that is part of the Christian community in South Africa. They have developed in their blend of Christianity to emphasize the primacy of the Holy Spirit in the expression of the life of this church, with strong fervour for the manifestation of charismatic gifts, signs and wonders, vibrant praise and worship, evangelistic potency and growth into mega churches. Also they seem to be a Jesus-centred Church, shaping their spirituality and ministry with Christ as their model. This Church has some traits in common with other churches, that have propelled its growth, especially the Charismatics Evangelicals in the United States of America, which have influenced their theology on Christ, the Holy Spirit, Scriptures, conversion, healing, faith, ecclesiology, prosperity, eschatology, technology and the media. But Charismatic Evangelicals faced a crisis in their faith and theology in South Africa when they had to deal with contextual realities such as apartheid, violence, injustice, oppression and poverty. Some responded in a way that caused them to be branded as apolitical. Others began to reshape their theology to accommodate both evangelism, which was their passion, and social action, which was their blind spot. This was not a shift that happened overnight and smoothly; rather it was a product of tension and pain. “Evangelicals in South Africa like elsewhere have been at the crossroads for too long reacting to situations in the world to work towards the Kingdom of God” (Concerned Evangelicals 1986:7). Their current thinking has been influenced by many historical factors. They have evolved to be a church that is having some convergence with Ecumenicals in their thinking on issues of social activism. Their journey has not been easy. It has taken them to consultations like Lausanne and Pattaya, and other forums initiated by Concerned

Evangelicals. Yet, there is still a minority in their ranks who have stuck to their guns and resisted change.

## CHAPTER 6

### THE CHARISMATIC EVANGELICALS RESPONSE TO POVERTY IN SOUTH AFRICA

The focus in this chapter is on how the Charismatic Evangelicals are responding to the big question of poverty in South Africa in their witness. It is based on the responses that I solicited from interviews I conducted with various leaders across the nation. First, I shall elucidate on the interviews with key national leaders of churches within the Pentecostal-Charismatic Evangelical movement. In my approach I have tried to have a broad representation of nuances that occur amongst the Charismatic Evangelicals. This is the reason I have featured these different national leaders:

- Dr Isak Burger whose denomination is Pentecostal but it is open to certain elements of Charismatic Evangelicalism. He acknowledges that those aspects have enriched some aspects of their witness as Pentecostals.
- Rev. Moss Ntlha is an evangelical and not a Charismatic but is also a renowned leader within a broader body that represents evangelicals in South Africa with some of the Charismatic Evangelical Churches being part of his constituency. The interview was basically draw information about the experiences of the Charismatic Evangelicals within his organisation.
- Pastor Ray MacCauley who is a Charismatic Evangelical but who does not necessarily represent the poor. But since 1994 his church has a majority of people who come from previously disadvantaged communities, the intention is to observe how has that change impacted their ministry.
- Pastor Chris Venter who is a Charismatic Evangelical leader within a body that represents a specific sector of some Charismatic Evangelicals. The idea was to glean on his insight about how his constituency witnesses amongst the poor.
- Pastor Mosa Sono who is a leading Charismatic Evangelical figure is a minister in the disadvantaged townships and rural areas. He is a relevant candidate who has experience of doing ministry amongst the poor.

I shall also reflect on their positions and examine the role the different Christian backgrounds are playing in their mission in the midst of deprivation. This will be followed by a comparative analysis of these backgrounds in terms of their witness in the context of poverty. Then, I shall proceed to reflect on the viewpoints and experiences of the leaders of local churches, people who have diverse denominational backgrounds within the Charismatic Churches across the various provinces and regions of South Africa. In this instance I have featured the interviews report on Bishop Gladstone Botswana and Pastor Don Phillips who are Charismatic Evangel ministers doing ministry in marginalized communities.

## **6.1 The Positions of Key National Leaders Within the Pentecostal-Charismatic Evangelical Movement**

### **6.1.1 Dr Isak Burger – Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM)**

Dr Isak Burger, the Moderator of the AFM in South Africa, considers himself to be a Pentecostal-Charismatic Evangelical, like many other ministers within his denomination. Prof. Jurgens Hendriks and Dr Johannes Erasmus, in their research and census of 1996 found that (in), “South Africa, the AFM, with 3,7 % of the total Christian market share and 1.1 million members, is the oldest and largest denomination in this group. Its membership is 70 % Black, residing mostly in Gauteng, the Eastern Cape and the Northern Province”(Kritzinger 2002:20).

#### **6.1.1.1 The Experience of Poverty**

Dr Isak Burger estimates that about 50 % of their church is affected by poverty. They have scientifically evaluated poverty amongst their members and community in collaboration with researchers from the University of Stellenbosch. Poverty is prevalent extensively in churches that are located in previously disadvantaged communities. It therefore affects the black and coloured members of the church in particular, the majority of whom are still living in the same needy communities. The areas within their

constituency that are highly impacted by poverty are mainly the rural areas and townships. This, however, does not suggest that there is no experience of poverty in the more affluent areas. There are occurrences of penury amongst some white members of the church, but at this stage, poverty among whites is negligible compared to the rampant poverty within the black and coloured communities. The needs that they have identified correspond to the ones picked by our national surveys:

- Food
- Clothing
- Shelter
- Education

The use of racial groupings to indicate the varying incident of poverty within the AFM church does not suggest any disunity within the church. It is done to enhance a better understanding the reality of the occurrence of poverty in South Africa and the profile of those it is affecting within this church, which is characterized by diversity.

#### **6.1.1.2 Theology/Teachings In Relation to Poverty**

Dr Burger cites Jesus' words, "The poor will always be with us." Yet, this he does not interpret as encouraging complacency when their church is facing the challenges of deprivation. He rather regards this as a call to continue to address the issue of poverty as it continues to occur in society. His church also acknowledges the fact that the poor are primary beneficiaries to the gospel of Jesus Christ. When John the Baptist sent his disciples to Jesus to inquire if he was the Messiah, Jesus replied by asking, "What do you see?" They replied that they observed that the poor were being fed, and the gospel was being preached. Furthermore, when one reads Luke 4:18-19 it becomes obvious that the poor are close to God's heart. The church does, however, refrain from using any language that may suggest that God sides with the poor against the rich. They do not ascribe to the notion of 'God's preferential option for the poor.' But, they would still stress that God is against oppression and exploitation. For them it is not a matter of having to be poor to get to heaven. Rather, God takes sides with Christ and if you are in

Christ, that is the basis for salvation. Whether you are poor or rich, there is no different or special way of getting saved.

Dr Burger has indicated that their church was born within a Christian movement that had a concern for the poor. When the Pentecostal movement started in South Africa there was a spontaneous involvement with the poor like in the early Christian Church. Many of the early Pentecostals came from the ranks of the poor, even if there were a few affluent people. Dr Burger says if you read the early history of their church, and study the foundation which they built on, the roots from which they grew, it is evident that their intense involvement with people in need, the run-down, the hopeless, was one of the most outstanding characteristics of the AFM – like it was in the case of the early church. Poor people accepted the gospel and were touched by this revival. It was a very spontaneous thing that happened. But the second generation Pentecostals had to some extent neglected their responsibility to the poor. They did not take social responsibility as their ministry. Thus they were liable to the accusation that was levelled against them that they focused too much on the salvation of the soul and not enough on the person's urgent needs of the day. According to Dr Burger they had somehow, and to some extent, lost something of that compassion for the disadvantaged, and involvement in the woes of their communities. There is a divine obligation upon them to recover their unique design and redemptive purpose – to get back to their roots. During the last decade there has been an increasing awareness that the gospel of Jesus is the gospel for a total person and not only meant to get a person saved and going to heaven.

Their message has consciously aimed at empowering the church to get involved in the community. Their basic value in terms of the church's master plan is empowerment. The thrust of the church for 2004 was to empower and inspire the local church for greater community involvement and community transformation. The AFM leadership set aside 2004 as the beginning of a season of changing the mindset of their church, so that they may become a community church in the true sense of the word. Their Master Plan, vision and slogan makes this clear. Their vision statement reads: "We see a church, accessible to all people, celebrating our unity and God-given diversity, empowering our members for

caring and transforming our communities to the glory of God”...The word “accessibility” is a key-word in their vision. But they should not only think of their church as being accessible, the church must also position itself to access its communities. Every pastor and leader should honestly consider this question: Is our church really accessible, and, to what extent have we explored and utilized the different avenues of access into our community? What have we constructively done to transform, or at least influence our community? From their head office they visit all regions and meet AFM local church leaders, providing them with theological basis, inspiration and practical guidelines for community engagement. Their intention is to enable the local leaders set up local church-driven community involvement initiatives and transformations.

They are conscious of the fact that they come from an era of segregation within their own church. Some of their members were previously unaware of the other part of South Africa, that is grossly poor. They are now being exposed to that reality at all levels of the Church. It seems there are two worlds in South Africa, one of the affluent and the other of the poor. In 1996 unification was ushered in, to bring about the integration of previously segregated churches within the AFM churches, and break the bonds of the historical legacy of the Apartheid society. This resulted in the integration of their separate denominational structures, which had been organized according to various racial categories, into one national structure – a change that enriched the church as a whole.

These are the lessons learnt:

- a. A greater awareness of the real South Africa within the Church through their unified church, and of the bitter reality of impoverishment faced by other communities that were previously disadvantaged. Although the previously advantaged members of the church had been involved in relief initiatives amongst the disadvantaged, they were not really aware of the great extent of poverty within the previously disadvantaged communities. They became exposed to the reality of a Third World outside their own context.
- b. They discovered a fresh perspective of Jesus. They realized that Jesus Christ was concerned about the physical and economic aspects of human life. Jesus worked



- with the broken, healed the sick, and clothed the naked. His theology addressed to the total person.
- c. The AFM church experienced a blessing in realizing the importance of the extended family of God. They noted the limitations of the Westernised form of Christianity with its individualistic emphasis, and understood that they had been influenced in such a way that they had almost forgotten their responsibility to other members of the Christian body. They returned to the biblical concept of extended family amongst God's people. They learned that in the African community, community (*ubuntu*) is more important than just the individual. This is closer to the Middle Eastern culture, as depicted in the Bible, than to the Western concept. An example is Ruth, who returned to her homeland after the death of her husband. Her husband's relative, Boaz, had to take responsibility for her so that she would not be destitute. The early church also had a strong sense of responsibility for the family of God (Acts 6). They were sensitised to the broader needs of the family of God in such a manner that no one had too much and no one had little. In essence there was equality. The concept of sharing was characteristic to this church. The AFM still has a long way to go in entrenching this value amongst their own members. But there is an increasing realization that the family of God is the first priority. God's household should be cared for, through giving and sharing.
- d. There have been other unexpected forms of enrichment in terms of their faith. Prior to integration, some previously privileged members of the church thought they might find themselves solely on the giving side, while the previously disadvantaged would be on the receiving side. But they have discovered that there are other forms of wealth to be gained from mutual sharing, benefits that cannot be equated to anything in monetary terms, like spontaneity in worship and commitment.

### 6.1.1.3 Response to Poverty

The AFM church has an extensive national welfare programme that is driven by local congregations in their communities and supported by their national office. The AFM church has established a National Welfare Council that promotes the vision of ministry to the poor within their denomination and backs projects that are run locally through various local congregations. In the National Welfare Council there are various substructures, like the Executive Welfare Council, the Management Team, Director, Deputy Directors, Administration Staff and various projects.

#### *uMephi Project*

This is one of their national flagship projects, launched to deal with children in distress. These children come from different backgrounds and age groups, and have faced various disadvantages and problems. According to Pastor Eben Miller, the director of the uMephi project, the children are offered “the opportunity to have a *Mephiboseth* experience and to receive back what they have been robbed of, to be part of a family and to feast at a table as a child that belongs” (2 Sam. 9:3). Children being assisted fit into five major categories, namely:

a. Street Children

These are the children who come to the uMephi shelter after being taken off the streets. They are children who live on their own in groups on the streets without parental supervision and care. They come to the streets as a result of various social problems.

b. Maltreated and sexually abused children

These ones are children who have been victims of physical or emotional maltreatment and neglect by their families.

c. Abandoned Children

This group consists of children who have been abandoned by their parents in hospitals, many soon after birth. Some are left in public places and are ultimately found by members of the public and handed to the police.

d. Infants saved from Abortion

Through one of their programmes, Africa Cares for Life, they run pregnancy care/crisis centres and homes for unwed mothers. This programme enables them to assist pregnant unwed mothers who have not opted for abortion but have chosen to save their babies. They provide support for them and assist them in dealing with their decision to save their babies.

e. Aids Orphans.

In response to the growing social problems of Aids orphans, the AFM church is running a programme to help these children.

The AFM runs various programmes in responding to the abovementioned categories of needs faced by children who come into their *uMephi* Project. Street children and maltreated abused children would be put in a shelter once taken from the street. Then they would probably be taken to a satellite home where they would be taken care of. This might result in the child being reunited with family, or placed in foster care, or adopted. The children who have been abandoned, or saved from abortion and Aids orphans would be put in a care programme through satellite homes, places of safety and halfway houses. Depending on their health conditions, some will be put in adoption programmes, foster care homes, or hospices for the frail ones who ultimately die with dignity in their care. From January 2001 to April 2004 they had 960 plus babies in their project. About 540 babies were placed with adoptive parents, first in South Africa and then internationally in participating countries. According to the Winter 2004 issue of *uMephi News*, the *uMephi* Project cares for 324 children in 2 registered Children's Homes and their Satellite homes. Proper care and screening ensures that best possible foster parents are found for these children. They also network with other organizations that run welfare and community-related programmes nationwide.

### **Poverty Alleviation**

The various local churches have basic relief programmes like feeding schemes offering food parcels. They run initiatives like Week of Bounty in which contributions are sought

to assist the disadvantaged in the communities where their local congregations are situated. They have realized that they should not just provide for basic needs but also work to prevent the causes of poverty. Their aim is to provide people with skills that will enable them to be self-reliant. Some local churches launch job-creation and skills development projects, to assist the poor in their communities. They regard it as their responsibility to assist the people of God within the broader Church, not within their denomination only. They target the poor Christians across all denominations in their ministry. As a matter of fact, they help all the poor, without asking them what their faith allegiance is.

Dr Burger gave four reasons why the members of his church must become more passionate about involvement with communities:

1. *Because God cares.* Their motivation is not merely a philanthropic concern and love. They have to love the struggling because God loves them. They haven't got an option. In the light of the Great Commission they can only start to be really effective in this world, if they sense something of God's love for sinners, the broken and the lost. Dr Burger admits that one of his most painful embarrassments, is that the hurt of the people does not have the same effect on him as it obviously had on Christ. He is ashamed that they have shed too few tears about the brokenness around them. Each one has to judge himself/herself in this matter. Do we prefer not to be reminded in any way of the pain of others? Do we resemble the attitude of the priest and the Levite and prefer not to be involved? Are we truly moved by the plight of the Aids victims and the poor? He believes that almost every Christian, and more so the leaders, need to be touched by God so that something of his love, compassion and care will ignite in their hearts. His plea is, Lord, please begin with me!
2. *Because Jesus set the example.* At the start of His public ministry, according to Luke, He uttered these words: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and the recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the

Lord”(Luke 4:18 –19). That was the main stumbling block of the religious leaders of his time: the fact that He ventured out of the religious cocoon, not to judge and condemn, but to save and heal. Typical was the reaction of the religious leaders when Jesus mingled with sinners and outcasts at dinner...(Mk. 2:16 –17). Even today some may have the conviction that the church only has the obligation “to win souls” for the Lord and not to worry about community involvement. It is for this reason that the AFM carefully takes cognisance of Jesus’ ministry. There is no doubt that the main purpose of Jesus’ coming to the world, and also of the church’s ministry, is that as many people as possible should be saved from eternal condemnation and be redeemed and go to heaven. For this purpose Jesus shed His blood on the cross. However, if we look at Jesus’ earthly ministry, it is obvious that he did more than that. He did not care only for people’s spiritual salvation; He was also concerned about their earthly condition and situation. He was not only concerned about people’s souls (spirits) but also about their physical health, their relationships, their empty stomachs, their sorrows at a graveside, etc. The gospel involves the total person. Of course Christ’s ultimate purpose in showing love and doing good, was to win the people for God’s kingdom, but his love was unconditional. For example, only one of the ten lepers came back to thank Him and to receive not only the healing but also the Healer. Yet He did not withhold healing from the other nine. Likewise, although the highest and final goal of our community involvement is to win our communities for Christ, we should also be involved because God loves them, cares for them and wants to do good unto them – and we are His instruments and channels.

3. *Because the church is not a club.* A club only exists to serve the interests of its members. The church is there for the world. It is tragic that, right through the history of the church, it tended almost without exception, after some time, to develop a ‘club mentality.’ That was the mentality of the religious people in the time of Jesus. In fact, that is a typical ‘religious’ trait: “Us four and no more.” The church should not be ‘distant’ and aloof from the community; the church ought to exist in close proximity to the people – right there in the marketplace. That was where Jesus was to be found during His earthly ministry – where it hurt the most.

Dr Burger says he got the impression that right from the beginning, it was one of the Lords' most difficult tasks: to get the church out of its safe and comfortable 'clubhouse' – into the world and into their communities. A church that lives only for itself and not for the community and the world in need, is denying the example and purpose of the Head of the church!

4. *Because people in need, were the easiest to reach.* People in need – of whatever kind – are as a rule more 'vulnerable,' open to God and His Gospel. The mightiest man in all Syria needed only the simple witness of a slave girl to bring him into traditional enemy country, to the humble prophet, with a wagonload of gifts – because he was a leper and needed healing! In our world unscrupulous people often exploit the vulnerable. However, the gospel brings hope, healing and restoration to those in need. Fact is that every person, without exception, at some or other time, becomes vulnerable. And that is the church's opportunity! That is why South Africa is 'paradise' for the gospel: because of the tremendous needs in our country. Jesus Himself said: "They who are whole have no need of the physician, but those that are sick." Marl 2:17. People in poverty, people with Aids, the unemployed, and the victims of crime – they are vulnerable people who are accessible to the gospel and they should be our prime targets. These are the people who need our attention, compassion and a ministry that can relieve their socio-economic, psychological and spiritual needs. For this to be done, we will have to be the "church in the market-place!"

The AFM has not reached a point yet where they can say they have done enough. But they have made a significant difference to the lives of the poor. Due to the high levels of poverty in communities they still have a long way to go. They are making a meaningful contribution at local church level with their various local church-driven programmes. But they also have to realign their strategies to involve the poor to participate in their mercy ministry. They should guard against implementing finished and tailor-made social development programmes without input from the disadvantaged who are the beneficiaries.

#### **6.1.1.4 The Relationship Between Poverty and the Work of the Church**

The social involvement of the AFM is not separated from their witness. It is not a matter of choosing between evangelism and social responsibility. These two are inseparable in the witness of this church. Also they do not use their poverty alleviation initiatives as an incentive for the poor to get converted. They do not lure the poor to Christ with these social welfare initiatives. They are interested in the total welfare of the person. They model their ministry on Christ's. Jesus was good to those who accepted and those who rejected his message. Also they wish to avoid any dualistic tendencies in their ministry to the disadvantaged. They do not have any hang-ups about people being converted just because they have been assisted in their distress. Rather, they want to show practical love that is more than just preaching. Their concern is to demonstrate the love of Christ as God incarnate, through their actions as His church.

As a Church they make a distinction between general acts of goodness or kindness that are obligations for every Christian, and specialized ministry gift practiced by a special group of Christians. It is generally accepted that every Christian as a follower of Christ has a biblical mandate to be generous, pray, share the gospel with others and show care to those that are weak, among other duties. But Romans 12 shows that not all Christians are gifted in the same way. Some have the special ministry gifts of leadership, mercy, healing etc. Therefore, even though all Christians are expected to fulfil all the general obligations, those with gifts of mercy should maximize their gifts within the church. The members of the Church who have received the gift of mercy are to become the champions of the poor. They need passion and compassion to accomplish this. The aim of AFM is to mobilize every local church and pastor to become aware of their calling and responsibility towards their community, in a manner that will stir up their enthusiasm and concern and make a difference to the impoverished.

The AFM church funds its ministry amongst the poor with resources collected from different stakeholders. All local churches as autonomous entities use part of their

collected funds to run mercy ministries. They do pay a levy to head office to cover administrative costs. A process has been started to decentralize some of the welfare programmes that have been run at national level so that they will become the responsibility of the local churches. Some of their funds come from outside donors, in the Government and private sector. The AFM budget for their mercy ministry is huge. It runs into several millions of rands.

### **6.1.2 Rev Moss Ntlha – The Evangelical Alliance of South Africa (TEASA)**

Rev Moss Ntlha is the General Secretary of TEASA. TEASA is the result of the merger of two organizations, namely the Evangelical Fellowship of South Africa (EFSA) and the Concerned Evangelicals (CE). These two organizations, representing different experiences and racial divisions of the apartheid era, disbanded to exist at the end of 1995, to re-form again in a joint expression of evangelical unity in a post-apartheid society. 8 to 10 November 1995 saw the launch of TEASA. TEASA represents a bold initiative of evangelical unity and witness. An estimated three million Evangelical (this includes Pentecostal and Charismatic) Christians now work together through the alliances in their denominations, mission agencies and para-church organizations to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ in South Africa in word and deed. TEASA builds on the ecumenical efforts of EFSA and CE, while drawing in the other churches and groups who were not connected to either of the previous groups. The result is a broad-based organization in which many evangelicals in SA feel represented.

#### **6.1.2.1 The Experience of Poverty**

Poverty affects the Christian Evangelical community that is represented by TEASA significantly. Rev Moss estimates that 80 % of their constituency is affected by poverty. Many of these poor people are mainly in the Black and Coloured communities. Although there is a growing incidence of poverty in the white communities of their member churches, the number of poor whites is comparatively low. Women in the black community are the ones most severely affected by poverty. Children are amongst these



vulnerable groups. TEASA has never actually measured the prevalence of poverty, except to observe their own communities and church membership to identify those who are poor and unemployed. There is no scientific data that they have produced and can refer to in their analysis of impoverishment.

TEASA is aware of the fact that the communities in which the majority of the member churches are operational have serious needs. Problems that need to be dealt with, include the following:

- Unemployment
- Illiteracy
- Lack of skills/education
- Hunger
- HIV-Aids
- Lack of leadership

It is these challenges that they should address if they are to be relevant to their communities in their witness.

#### **6.1.2.2 Theology/Teaching in Relation to Poverty**

According to Rev Ntlha, poverty occurs when people do not have a viable plan to change their situation for the better but accept their status quo. Those who are poor now will probably still be impoverished if you meet them ten years later. They are people who have been marginalized to the extent that they are without any exit plan to escape from the conditions of deprivation. As, TEASA's membership is characterized by diversity, groups respond differently to the challenges of poverty. Within the church they have had two perspectives. There are members who are determined to take action and assist those who are struggling because they are destitute, while others, do not consider poverty to be of sufficient spiritual significance to warrant their response. The two categories can be summed up as follows:

1. Those who don't consider poverty to be a spiritual problem that warrants their special attention and opt not to prioritise it.

2. Those who respond to poverty by making a contribution towards its alleviation. It is mainly the Black leaders who prioritise dealing with the problems of poverty, whilst the leaders of the mainly white community would be passionate about societal moral dilemmas such as abortion, homosexuality and other controversial issues typical of a secular state.

The Evangelicals do not generally express their ministry to the poor in their liturgy. But in Black communities where there is a high level of awareness of poverty, Christians are learning to deal with poverty issues as they evangelise. When they meet desperate people like those with HIV/AIDS or orphans, they help them without thinking of it as part of their ministries. Therefore they would not share a testimony to the experience of having assisted someone who was impoverished. Whether they assist one another as Africans due to the philosophy of *Ubuntu* is not clear, but TEASA has no articulate theology of poverty. This has been identified as a weakness of the Evangelicals – the fact that they have not elaborated their theology of poverty and care for the poor.

In ministering amongst the poor in response to Christ's commands, they have learned many lessons that have enriched their spirituality and commitment to serving the Lord. These include the fact that:

1. God is interested in more than simply the soul of a human being, He is concerned with the whole person.
2. Expressing God's love can be done not only through the proclamation of John 3:16, but through caring too. John 3:16 is used by the Evangelicals in conjunction with Luke 4:18, which is more concrete in dealing with issues of poverty. Some evangelical Christians, in their evangelistic endeavours, are learning to move from John 3:16 to Luke 4:18 because it makes more sense to the poor and they respond to it better.

### **6.1.2.3 Response to Poverty**

Below we list some of the areas in which members of TEASA have initiated programmes to assist the poor:

- Skills development, including computer training. Programmes range from computer literacy to using common software programmes and programming.
- Education, in which issues of adult literacy are addressed, and youth are helped to complete high school through various support programmes such as providing assistance with school uniforms and school fees.
- Micro enterprises: – People are helped to become entrepreneurs. As a consequence of apartheid education, the majority of blacks were socialized to be job seekers, not entrepreneurs.
- Food parcels being distributed amongst the poor to supplement their nutritional needs.
- Development Agencies: – World Vision, World Relief, and Tear Fund are Evangelical developmental agencies dealing on a large scale with community development issues and questions of poverty. These organizations, although international, also have a presence in South Africa.
- Advocacy: – There is a growing awareness amongst Evangelicals that the tool of advocacy may be used to deal with social problems. They use ecumenical forums, and engage government and other stakeholders like organized labour and business, to lobby for an agenda that would promote development that is pro-poor. Individuals and communities are assisted in gaining access to better social services, such as social grants provided by government.

The above-mentioned programmes are intended to aid the desperate and the unemployed in communities. People, who are perceived to be disadvantaged and excluded from the benefits that they are entitled to, are targeted by these development projects. Yet, when TEASA leaders evaluate themselves in light of their historical and current programmes in ministry, they feel they could have done more than they have. They admit that they have not responded adequately to deprivation in society at two levels:

1. They have not theologized their response – they have not formed an appropriate theology to deal with issues of poverty.
2. The scope of work covered is not satisfactory since more can still be done in those communities that are struggling with lack.

TEASA is determined to increase its momentum in ministering to the poor through its broader constituency.

#### **6.1.2.4 The Relationship Between Poverty and the Work of the Church**

The significance accorded to poverty alleviation programmes pursued in their ministry to the poor varies from one denomination to the other within TEASA. Some denominations have invested millions in poverty alleviation initiatives and personnel to deal with poverty, whilst others do it as a by-the-way response; there is no coordinated campaign to deal with the challenges of poverty. Where development initiatives are undertaken, people do regard them as part of their Christian mission. They are well aware of the theological trends in past decades, expressed in documents like the 1974 Lausanne Covenant, which directly connected social concern and evangelism as one aspect of the Christians witness. The Lausanne Covenant, however, had a more significant impact on those churches with international connections, like the Baptists. Those with global exposure are the ones who are more familiar with the Lausanne covenant and have been more profoundly influenced by its theology.

Within TEASA, the leadership of churches usually adopt a top-down approach to ministry amongst the poor, when they do engage in it. They would not readily involve communities as stakeholders in the activities meant to empower them, except as beneficiaries. They would rather do things for them than enlist them as partners working with them. Yet, when the congregants become involved, the tables are turned, and the poor are consulted. The congregants are often ahead of the leadership and hierarchy of the Church in engaging their own communities. The Church members are the ones who are actively involved in initiatives that deal with poverty alleviation. Congregants engage their communities without the support of the church hierarchy in certain instances. They are the ones who respond to the needs of the community and have contact with them.

There are various impact levels in their ministry to the poor. Some are of public interest and are acknowledged by the media, while others are local development projects that

have no impact other than on their immediate beneficiaries. Many accomplishments remain unrecognised due to lack of media coverage. It has been argued that assistance to the disadvantaged should be sustainable and transformative. In a democratic context, people's voices should be heard and access to the services that they are entitled to, should be encouraged.

In conclusion, Rev Moss Ntlha highlighted some areas of concern that TEASA should deal with in the future. *Firstly*, he would like to see evangelical theology on social issues being developed and made more holistic. There is still a tendency to be concerned mainly about heaven, and urge members to merely tolerate earth. Yet, when pursuing this holism, it should be done without losing the spiritual vibrancy and power of the Evangelicals. *Secondly*, there should be more financial and personal investment in schemes dealing with poverty alleviation. The dilemma is that the Evangelicals at the moment regard themselves a small Christian group. Therefore their number one priority is growth as a church. They are geared for channelling their resources towards expansion. The bulk of their funding comes from their own constituency. In rare instances funds would be sourced from government and the private sector. Most of their initiatives in ministering to the poor; are self-funded by the respective churches.

### **6.1.3 Rev. Chris Venter – International Federation of Christian Churches (IFCC)**

Rev. Chris Venter is the secretary-general of the IFCC. It was established in Durban, on the 18<sup>th</sup> August 1985. "A united Charismatic front was formed to provide spiritual covering, mutual support and open communication channels to other churches"(IFCC, 1995:4). The IFCC is an umbrella body for some of the many autonomous Charismatic churches that are not linked to any Pentecostal or Charismatic denomination. Various Christian leaders who had visions to pursue ministry outside the denominations, but embraced the Charismatic experience, started many of these churches. In 1997 it had a membership of 440 local churches that were spread throughout the country, according to a study done for TEASA by the Evangelical Commission in 1998 (cf. Kritzinger 2002:49–50). A significant number of these were mega-churches.

### **6.1.3.1 The Experience of Poverty**

Churches within the IFCC are confronted with different challenges with regards to poverty in their own communities. They find poverty to be so daunting that their limited resources do not allow them to respond adequately. The problem area of poverty within the IFCC is again the previously disadvantaged people, with Blacks being the most affected. They estimate that around 40 to 50 % of their own membership is affected by lack. The majority of the poor and the most pressing incidents of poverty are concentrated in rural areas. Therefore rural churches face a greater challenge in dealing with poverty than the city churches. Urban areas, however, do not escape deprivation. Here it is mostly concentrated in the inner cities, townships and mushrooming informal settlements. Below are common needs identified by the IFCC:

- Housing
- Food
- Clothing

Ordinary people are battling to meet their basic needs. One of the IFCC churches in the Free State, the Christian Revival Church, feeds 4 000 school children monthly. These children are being educated but they need to be supported in their learning with the provision of meals at school. This, it can be inferred, is just one of many instances of churches dealing with poverty in South Africa.

### **6.1.3.2 Theology/Teaching in Relation to Poverty**

The IFCC executive does not prescribe to affiliated local churches how they should respond to poverty theologically. They just encourage churches to make their best contribution towards alleviating poverty with their available resources. They are also to proclaim the gospel to the poor in a manner that is relevant to their situation. They work as a loose federation of churches and do not have the tight structure of a denomination. They regard it as important to equip the poor, teaching them to fish for themselves, and to improve the quality of their lives. Their aim is to provide hope and skills to sustain their

livelihood. The response of IFCC churches in ministry amongst the poor varies. Some run community development centres that are well equipped and situated in strategic positions so as to be accessible to the poor. Here they attend to an array of needs amongst the disadvantaged, implementing programmes to deal with issues such as HIV/Aids and job creation. They also operate nutritional schemes.

Their position as conveyed through their teachings is that poverty is a curse, and that Jesus came to destroy its legitimacy on the cross. They point people to the cross, so that they may take courage and come up with practical solutions to poverty. For them there is no biblical justification for the impoverishment that has been created by discrimination. They believe that any verbal response to deprivation will be insufficient if it is not accompanied by realistic deeds of grace. This, according to Rev. Venter, is the reason why they should be more practical, and to do more than they speak to alleviate poverty.

One of the greatest challenges poor communities battle with, is illiteracy. How can an illiterate person write a CV? Writing is one of the essential tools you need if you wish to be employable, a skill, which many who are privileged possess and even take it for granted. Many of the poor do not even have a proper home address. It becomes difficult for them to be contacted unless they are fortunate enough to have a cell phone. They have no property or any valuable asset. Adding to these dilemmas faced by the poor, is another challenge – the lack of financial skills. They do not know how to draw up a budget for themselves, in order to use the money they do have to their advantage. They have but a limited understanding of money and generating wealth. It should be the role of the church to educate the downtrodden, and to help them acquire these life skills.

In their witness among the poor the churches within the IFCC have interacted with them in such a way that both parties have benefited. Their spirituality has been improved through contact with the poor. These are the lessons that they have learnt in their witness in a situation of need:

1. To be practical in their witness. To reach out to people in their real struggles, going where people live. In choosing to communicate with them, to listen to their

- actual story in their own language about their life and hope, so as to pick up their real needs and not their perceived needs. People do not need to be scratched where it does not itch. Churches sometimes discuss ways to alleviate poverty, but then do not pursue their plans because they are reluctant to go out to people where they are located.
2. They have been encouraged by government support for the role of the church in helping the poor. The current government has been a willing partner in poverty eradication endeavours.
  3. On the ground, amongst the poor, there is lack of trust. Those who are involved in poverty alleviation projects are regarded with suspicion. This is the result of incidents of corruption that occurred when certain agencies misused the resources they acquired in the name of the poor.
  4. The impact of gambling on impoverished communities is extensive. Some of the disadvantaged are regular patrons of casinos, and other gambling dens, or spend their money on lotto tickets. They are driven by the desire to win the bonanza prizes, which they hope will change their fortunes. The tragedy is that many lose their livelihood and sink deeper into impoverishment. The gambling syndrome creates stumbling blocks to poverty alleviation programmes. In some instances, where there is excessive gambling, even the social grants that are meant to be a lifeline, are squandered. The church needs to hone its skills, to be better able to assist the poor in dealing with the many self-defeating habits that compound their problems.

The IFCC reports that their positive interactions with the poor are helping them to strengthen their witness in ministering to them.

### **6.1.3.3 Response to Poverty**

The various member churches of the IFCC have customized their programmes according to their respective visions and varying local contexts. Their responses include the following:



1. Practical responses – helping people to acquire skills; training them in areas where the need is most urgent, to render them employable or enable them to start their own businesses.
2. Facilitating income generation and saving projects in the form of *stokvels* within communities. The purpose of these *stokvels* is to free people from the stifling debt trap. Many of the poor only have access to loans from micro-lenders. They are at the mercy of unscrupulous loan sharks who exploit them and entrap them in burdensome debts. *Stokvels* have become a user-friendly alternative in which members form a club to pool their resources and help one another on a rotational basis. These funds are also used to finance the empowering ventures of members.
3. Empowering talks or workshops. The disadvantaged need to be taught financial and other skills. Without financial understanding they cannot make wise decisions, or manage their debts responsibly. Those who out of desperation and lack of access to loans from credible financial institutions, are forced to approach ‘loan sharks’ need to understand the risks they take. Otherwise, the financial woes they incur will be worse than their initial troubles.
4. Many of the churches have HIV/Aids programmes to assist both those infected and those affected by HIV/Aids.

Not all the leaders are happy with how the IFCC churches have responded to challenges of poverty. Due to limited resources and varying contexts some churches have not been able to be a credible witness of Christ with a practical ministry towards the poor. Churches have, however, been realistic in their expectations when addressing social problems; since they understand the magnitude of poverty in their community and that there are no quick fixes.

#### **6.1.3.4 The Relationship Between Poverty and the Work of the Church**

In their view, ministry to the poor is part of the mission of the church. There is a growing consciousness amongst IFCC churches that they need to focus on their ministry amongst the poor as one of the primary tasks of the Great Commission. This awareness is accompanied by a strong commitment to that ministry. The church has an indivisible

mission, which includes both spiritual and social concerns. These should not be addressed separately, as they are intertwined parts of the Christian witness. The ministry to the poor is not a special ministry that can be detached from the actual mission mandate of the church. Rather it is part of that mission and should not be isolated from any other church activity.

There has been an attempt by some churches to consult the poor communities, but this is a progressive trend as the various churches are only beginning to understand how important the participation of the poor in their own affairs is. There has been some visible evidence of the success of their witness amongst the poor. Those who have been touched by these poverty alleviation programmes, are now extending a helping hand to others. Having received a lifeline they too have learned to share with others in gratitude to God. They introduce others to the means of empowerment and development. The culture of sharing, after all, has always been characteristic of those who are deprived.

If the IFCC could operate more like a denomination they might be better able to adequately and practically respond to the challenges of poverty. Their loosely structured affiliation has not been beneficial in creating a corporate identity that would promote a common purpose and better cooperation in dealing with social issues. Closer collaboration would enable them to share resources, avoid duplication of programmes, conduct joint researches and transfer skills within the group. Their challenge is to develop the synergy and cooperation needed to consolidate the disconnected responses of various autonomous churches within the IFCC. The IFCC as an umbrella body does not have common funds that can be disbursed for poverty alleviation programmes. Funding for the ministry to the poor is raised by the respective affiliated churches on the ground and allocated at their own discretion. The financial resources used in the ministry to the poor by local IFCC churches are a combination of self-funding, and donations from community donors and business. A small percentage comes from government grants.

#### **6.1.4 Pastor Ray McCauley – Rhema Ministries South Africa**

Pastor Ray McCauley is the senior Pastor of Rhema Ministries in Randburg, a northern suburb of Johannesburg. This Randburg congregation has a membership of well over 20 000. He is also the senior leader of the Rhema Family of Churches, which consists of all the churches that have been started in association with the Rhema Ministries in Randburg. Rhema churches can be found in almost all the provinces of South Africa. Several are mega-churches. Pastor Ray McCauley is also the president of the IFCC.

##### **6.1.4.1 The Experience of Poverty**

Pastor Ray estimates that between 30 to 40 % of the Randburg congregation is affected by poverty. Those who are poor are mainly the unemployed and those employed informally [underemployed]. The church is located in an area, which is affluent as compared with the townships created by the apartheid state. Yet, a number of disadvantaged people enter the suburb as domestic workers, employed in the homes of middle class and very wealthy families. On the surface there are no poor people in the immediate area of the church. But approximately 10 kilometres from the church there are informal settlements in areas like Honeydew, Diepsloot and Lion's Park. Some of these squalid areas are part of the catchment area of Rhema Ministries. In the midst of the apparent wealth of Rhema Ministries, one may also observe the face of poverty – in the church and in the community. Many of these disadvantaged are people of African descent. Church officials measure the levels of poverty in this church by using the indicator of how disposable income is spent. The majority of the poor members spend 80% of their disposable income on food. The critical needs they have discovered in their community are in the following areas:

- Employment
- HIV/Aids prevention and treatment.

These are not the only needs they have identified, but they are the most pressing ones. The church addresses these and other needs through their social development programmes.

#### **6.1.4.2 Theology/Teaching in Relation to Poverty**

Pastor Ray McCauley's opinion is that poverty is not a blessing but a curse; instead, God wants the poor to be prosperous, because God is God of the poor. The greater proportion of the prevalent poverty has been created by the social structures of the previous apartheid regime. Therefore the current poverty of the majority of our people is not God-ordained, although some small proportion of it ensues from laziness and the sinful tendencies of the individuals affected. This happens, for instance, in the case of people who abuse alcohol. They have become careless stewards of their adequate resources and livelihood. Thus sometimes, through hedonistic attitudes and behaviour, people squander their opportunities to live a respectable and affordable life. In their message as a church they express the view that God will always help the poor. They also teach that God expects those who are blessed, to help others who, in comparison to them, are disadvantaged. God's blessings ultimately culminate in people experiencing better life, while persistent poverty results in bondage.

The church must be involved in the quest to improve the lives of the destitute. It is the Christian's responsibility to encourage those regarded as the least in our society, to support initiatives for the redistribution of unequally distributed resources. In essence it means promoting equal access to all opportunities and the empowerment of the poorest of the poor in society. Yet, according to Pastor McCauley, they also recognize that human relationships are not as fulfilling as God intended them to be. People are experiencing emptiness and remain unfulfilled in their relationships. The reason is that they have not surrendered their lives to God. Therefore it is the responsibility of the church to assist people with the gospel to find meaning and contentment in their lives, while remaining accountable to God.

Pastor McCauley admits that their church has not always responded sufficiently to the needs of all who are desperate. It tends to be a swamp rather than a river. A church can become a swamp when members are self-centred, and not Christ-centred. They are swallowed up in their own spiritual programmes and church activities that are all inward looking, focusing only on the interests of the local Christian community. They are devoid of any serious desire to reach out with the gospel, in word and deed, especially towards the distressed in their society. Members of Rhema Ministries, therefore, tend to be more materialistic in their outlook since they have become possessed by self-interest. The church should strive to be like a river that is constantly flowing, with a balance maintained between inflow and outflow, a river that is life-giving. Members of the church need to reach out to the less fortunate, building their self-worth and dignity. The life of Christ that is constantly flowing into the church must be spilled into the community to produce a transformation that will be pleasing to Christ.

According to Pastor McCauley, his Ministries are learning that they should not be irrelevant as Christians by failing to recognize that it is not enough to feed a hungry person just for a day. Ministry to the poor should not be limited to giving handouts without engagement with the poor. It may be a noble thing to be involved in acts of benevolence that contribute to their welfare. But for a ministry to be truly relevant and credible, they should be building meaningful relationships with the disadvantaged. Relationships should never be patronizing, but should boost the dignity of the poor as human beings. In addition, the deprived should be allowed to make a vital contribution. Below are some of the enriching experiences and lessons that have emerged from their ministry amongst the impoverished:

1. The church needs to learn to use power for service and embrace an approach to spirituality that reflects humility and a mindset that is caring, having an element of *Ubuntu*.
2. The poor have exhibited remarkable sincerity and willingness in practicing forgiveness. Despite having experienced injustice they still graciously forgive their persecutors. This is a clear sign of how God's saving and forgiving power continues to work amongst people, even when they have been downtrodden.

3. The poor show a commitment to God that is not motivated by material benefits. The poor display genuine dedication to the Christian faith even when they are barely surviving.

The Christian witness in a situation of poverty has turned out to be a journey to renewal and growth for the witnesses because of the revitalizing fellowship with the God-revering poor, whose love for God is so refreshing and challenging.

#### **6.1.4.3 Response to Poverty**

Poverty, according to Pastor McCauley, is a challenge that has been part of our sad segregated past; even today it is still a reality to many. Therefore Rhema Ministries started a ministry to address social development issues. A number of programmes have been launched to contribute to the reconstruction of society. Rhema's programmes include the following:

##### **Hands of Compassion (HOC)**

The inspirational biblical text for this project is 2 Cor. 8:14. Through its social programmes Rhema shares resources with the intention of achieving equality amongst people. The Rhema Hands of Compassion is a Christian community that lives out their understanding of the gospel, with particular emphasis on practical help to those in need. This vibrant, non-racial, inter-cultural community lives and works to fulfil a three-fold vision:

- Reconciliation
- Recovery
- Restoration

It was established in 1987, on a 47-acre smallholding near Lanseria Airport, Johannesburg, and forms part of the Rhema social services network. The project is funded by donations from compassionate people who believe in the relevancy of love in action.

Who comes to Hands of Compassion?

The community includes people from all walks of life that are in the process of healing and on a journey to recovery and restoration. Two types of people come to Hands of Compassion: those that choose to live more simply and want to serve others in a practical way; and those that have been broken and rejected by society, and need to be restored. Through Christian counselling many draw closer to God and are challenged to walk with integrity before the Lord.

Overseas workers, especially the youth, are often sent by their churches to spend a period of time at Hands of Compassion, learning and experiencing the community and ministry.

#### Projects of Hand of Compassion

Many projects and outreaches are conducted by Hands of Compassion. They include:

#### **Tuesday Workday**

The underprivileged members of the local community are invited to participate in a “work for food programme” every Tuesday. The day starts at 08:00 with a church service. At 9:00 work duties are given out to everyone according to their abilities. At 12:30 food parcels are given to the visitors and on occasion they receive blankets, clothing, shoes, schoolbags for children, toiletries and various other donated goods.

The Tuesday Workers group averages 50 people weekly and several tons of mealie-meal is distributed each month. When regular members of this group are ill, they are visited in their homes and food is taken to them, giving the HOC staff an opportunity to minister to their family.

#### **Rhema Recovery Project**

After being in a rehabilitation programme or prison, it is difficult for recovering substance abusers to face the outside world. HOC offers a “halfway house”, where spiritual and emotional support is given, for a minimum period of six months.

While working and learning a variety of life skills, residents have time to prepare to be re-integrated into society. Families are reconciled and jobs and accommodation sought,

during their stay at HOC. A follow-up system is in place once the resident leaves the programme.

#### Primary Health Clinic

The clinic operates five days a week, offering primary health care to disadvantaged people living in the surrounding areas. Services include baby and pre-natal care; attention to the aged and other much needed assistance. The clinic is run by the Provincial Health Department and tends to the needs of over 50 people a day.

#### Bakery

A well-equipped bakery produces bread for the community and for the soup kitchens. New residents learn to make bread, and at times have been able to take up jobs in commercial bakeries.

#### Literacy Programmes

Literacy programmes are presented once a week. For many of the students, it is a privilege to be able to sign their names. The self-worth that accompanies such achievements brings as much joy to the learners as it does the teachers.

#### Student Empowerment Project

High school children from disadvantaged backgrounds and broken families are given the chance to complete high school in a stable and inspiring environment. They live in the community and are assisted with transport to schools, purchase of books, stationery, and uniforms, as well as learning basic computer literacy and various life skills. Some students that have come through this project are currently doing their tertiary education through correspondence and held responsible jobs.

#### New Mothers Project

Unwed mothers and their babies are placed in this programme for a period of up to eight months. They are counselled on motherhood and supported to make the right choices for



their newborn babies. During this critical time the women are surrounded by a team of caring people who are committed to seeing them successfully continue with their lives.

#### Crisis Response Team

The HOC is often approached to assist with crisis management. Teams on call, give support to people who are in need, including victims of fires, floods, evictions and other disasters. Blankets, clothes and food are often taken to the hurting people. Giving practical help creates a platform to share God's love and concern for others.

The HOC team is part of a bigger network of role-players in crisis-response, called the Disaster Relief Committee.

#### Luke 14

Homeless people and the poor are invited to a festive lunch, where they are served and honoured with a meal fit for a king. The outreach is based on Luke 14:12 –14.

#### Counselling, Pastoral Care and Assistance

The HOC office at the Rhema Church in Randburg offers a “walk in” care centre for people who live on the streets, including a food depot, handout of clean clothes and the opportunity to join in a Bible study group or to be counselled. At times the need is for a shower and clean clothing.

#### Employment office

The core service of this office is connecting people in Rhema Church seeking employment, to members of the congregation that have jobs to offer. Unemployment is still one of the most serious problems in South Africa today and many people have been successfully placed.

#### Emergency rooms

Rooms at the farm are set aside to provide temporary accommodation for people in distress. When destitute people arrive at the Rhema Church they are accommodated for

short periods of time and provided with meals and counselling. There is a network with other organizations to help with more permanent solutions.

#### Chef's Training Programme

A training facility is run from the HOC kitchens to empower and equip young people with tangible skills. After a probation period of six months the trainees are enrolled in Intec College, where they do a Gourmet Chef's Course through correspondence. For a period of two years the trainees are exposed to various types of catering.

#### Soup Kitchens

Over 70 feeding projects are supplied with vouchers donated for food, which they then use in the area. Over 70 000 meals are distributed per month.

#### Local Outreaches

These include visiting schools and churches in surrounding disadvantaged areas, providing spiritual guidance to the youth and support to local pastors. Through counselling and food assistance, families are ministered to and restored.

#### Social Justice

The involvement in legal aspects includes resettlement of displaced communities, mediating in land disputes, providing temporary accommodation and facilitating negotiated agreements between opposing segments of a polarized South African society.

### **Rhema Service Foundation**

#### Overview

The Rhema Services Foundation (RSF) is a non-profit, non-governmental organization with the objective to uplift, and develop and individuals, families and communities, and is an outflow of Christian conscience and community spirit. It is involved in running numerous projects, including children's homes, care for the chronically ill, HIV-Aids patients and community support centres.

Projects:

Hospice facilities

These fully operational hospices have a capacity for 400 patients and are focused on providing care for the destitute, chronically ill and HIV-Aids infected people. The “*Emseni*” Hospice is located in Hillbrow and the “*Phomolong*” Hospice is in Boksburg, east of Johannesburg. Here people are given a chance to live out their lives in dignity, enjoying proper medical care and counselling.

A number of other social care projects that are managed from the hospices, including a nursery school, a nurses training centre and home-based care services.

Children’s Village

RSF has been involved in children’s work for nine years, pioneering a street children’s programme that has rescued hundreds of children off the streets of Johannesburg. These projects are now amalgamated into one facility that is situated in Gordon Terrace, opposite the Johannesburg Athletics Stadium.

The Rhema Children’s Village accommodates children who are placed by the courts. Here they have access to social workers, childcare professionals, medical services and education. The objective of the Village is to stabilize the children and then offer a safe environment where schooling can continue.

A further objective is to reunite children with their families. The social workers employed at the village offer counselling to the families in the hope of reunification.

The project is to offer the children sport and recreation opportunities with the hope of inspiring them to overcome their past and to develop into responsible and happy adults.

### **Primary Health Care Services and Home Based Care**

Itsoseng Community Health Care Clinic

The clinic offers basic health care services and forms part of the Bristol Meyers Squib Foundation. The clinic is the answer to the health needs of more than 1500 people in the *Itsoseng* informal settlement and neighbouring smallholdings in Kya Sand, Nooitgedacht and Lion Park, and falls within the Randburg Magisterial district.

## **Social Services and Home Based Care**

The following services are offered:

Alexandra:

- Facilitation of educational awareness through workshops
- Training of auxiliary work students
- Foster care supervision for HIV-Aids children
- Weekly support groups for caregivers of the needy and children not yet in foster care.
- Youth focus groups on income generating and business skills

Randburg:

- A school for Social Auxiliary Work
- Social services in the area
- HIV-Aids support.

Zandspruit and surrounding areas:

- Women's sewing project and bead work group
- Vegetable garden management
- Support groups for perpetrators of violence
- Food parcel programme for HIV- Aids children
- School uniform programme

## **Care Centres**

Social issues such as crime, abuse and unemployment were the initiating reasons for the birth of the Rhema Care Centres. These facilities were established during the 90's as places of love and caring and are located in Alexandra and Soweto.

Even with such a number of social development programmes undertaken by Rhema, they still feel they can do more. The needs on the ground amongst the poor are overwhelming.

They have responded compassionately with numerous ministry initiatives for the poor in their context with the resources at their disposal.

#### **6.1.4.4 Relationship Between Poverty and the Work of the Church**

Ministry to the poor is very significant to the mission of Rhema Ministries. They subscribe to the concept of four pillars of ministry, of which service to the needy is one.

The four pillars are:

- Evangelism
- Social significance
- Prophetic relevance
- Spiritual potency.

Their development initiatives in their witness are part of the “full gospel”. Thus they perceive the role of the church entailing, amongst other things, seeking to meet the needs of humanity in all areas. The church should become a channel of love and compassion; so that Christ may be demonstrated through his followers. Thus they involved their church members in social development programmes although some of these programmes are managed by a fulltime staff of professionals and other personnel. Members are afforded the opportunity to make a contribution through their voluntary services at various levels of these programmes and they also provide financial support to this ministry. Meanwhile they also seek to involve the poor, who are beneficiaries of the various poverty alleviation projects like soup kitchens, the Hands of Compassion Community and the Work for Food Programme.

#### **6.1.4.5 General**

The church has invested significant amounts of financial and other essential resources in their ministry to the deprived. The annual budget for their poverty alleviation projects is as follows:

- Rhema Service Foundation – approximately R20 million
- Hands of Compassion – approximately R3 million

These funds are come from their congregation, government and corporate partners, and go a long way in helping the community, which is aware of the services that are provided for their welfare. These services are run from a good church infrastructure and strategic locations throughout the city. The favourable impact of these programmes is borne out by good testimonies received from those who have benefited.

#### **6.1.5 Pastor Mosa Sono – Grace Bible Church, Soweto.**

Pastor Mosa Sono is the senior pastor of Grace Bible Church in Soweto. This church has experienced such a phenomenal growth within Soweto and the surrounding areas to such an extent that satellite churches have been planted in those areas. The current membership in the Soweto congregation is above alone 11 000 adults and 1500 children.

##### **6.1.5.1 The Experience of Poverty**

According to Pastor Mosa, between 35 to 45% of their congregation is affected by deprivation. In his estimation on the prevalence of poverty, he says, it is very close to the national census figures as described by Statistics South Africa. Many of these poor people, live below the bread line. They cannot afford to pay for the basic necessities that would enable them to live a normal life as human beings. This is the desperate scenario of poverty that Pastor Mosa paints about his community:

- People with low levels of literacy, and are unskilled, therefore struggling or unable to find employment or to acquire skills essential for any engagement in productive activity.
- Some of the poor come from homes historically embedded in poverty. Their parents were previously unemployed or at some stage underemployed. Their family life was one of hardship. As children, they are at a disadvantage when they start out in life. They are raised in acute lack that has limited their options for upward mobility in society. To be brought up in poverty means, being subjected to a poor quality of life in terms of education, social and recreational amenities, health, and other significant economic and political opportunities. Some of the

- homes have a legacy of impoverishment, and perpetuate a circle of multigenerational poverty.
- They have large households that include members of the extended family. Life gets tougher in such circumstances, especially if all the members of those sizeable families have to share the minimal resources that they just manage to obtain.
  - The upsurge of HIV-AIDS further complicates the situation of the poor. It creates more needs when people are already struggling with the minimal resources at their disposal.
  - Women and children are usually the ones who are highly impacted by poverty. Many households are progressively becoming woman-headed households. Single parents, especially mothers, are the ones who have to take care of children when families break up or there has been a loss of a spouse.

Poverty that is material is real and readily recognizable. Yet, there are aspects of poverty that go beyond the material, which are less obvious. The following issues that are also confronting the poor need attention:

- People's self-esteem is negatively affected as a result of their being marginalized. The result is that such people are not assertive enough and tend to be more doubtful about themselves and their abilities. They become fearful and lack the initiative to venture into anything that has better prospects for their development. The issue of a positive identity is critical, in enabling people to maximize their potential despite adversity. Many, due to low self-esteem, hesitate to use the opportunities that they are entitled to in order to improve the quality of their lives. When possibilities of gaining resources are presented to people, they lack the confidence to take advantage of them. This low self-esteem is so dis-empowering that it locks them into a vicious circle of marginalisation.
- It is common to see some of the poor people in worn-out clothes that become their public trademark.
- Some of the deprived having a resigned look that makes them appear as if they are hopeless, having given up all hope of seeing their lives ever improving.
- Their inability to contribute to the church coffers since they use their meagre resources mainly for their own survival.

- The disadvantaged are forced to walk long distances to carry out some of their errands, due to limited access to affordable transportation.
- The discomfort of making frequent requests to the church, seeking assistance. For many it is humiliating to ask for help, but out of sheer desperation in their struggle for survival, they are pressurized to beg in order to cope with the hardships of impoverishment.

These are some of the needs that are prevalent in the community served by Pastor Mosa:

- People consistently battling to put something on their table for daily sustenance.
- Parents have limited access to the resources required in educating their children. Many parents wish to help their children to achieve significant results educationally, to enhance moulding a future towards a good career. But, this dream remains elusive since they cannot afford to fund their children's tertiary education.
- A proper understanding of the historical factors behind the damning circle of poverty. We should not underestimate the historical reality that has compounded their deprivation. Sometimes, people feel bad simply because they are poor. They have never been able to fully analyse their situation, or injustice that has marginalized them, let alone the fact that there is nothing wrong with them. They are not the cause of their misfortune as compared to others who are more advantaged than these are. Many of those who are affluent, started on a better footing than those who were disadvantaged. Yet, this does not justify blame-shifting and making excuses instead of taking some responsibility for improving their adverse situation.

#### **6.1.5.2 Theology/Teachings in Relation to Poverty**

Pastor Mosa teaches that God is not the author of poverty. God does not like it and God does not want anybody to be poor. However, it's impossible to separate poverty from our present socio-political realities. Biblically, there is always a historical reality tied to the occurrence of poverty amongst a people. Therefore, to tell poor people that they can be



well off without considering their socio-political context, would amount to giving them false hopes. It would frustrate the poor people, since that would not be addressing the fundamental flaws embedded in their societal reality. It would be merely telling them they could be rich whilst neglecting the socio-political factors that are the source of their destitution. In addressing part of this impoverishment, they need restitution, restoration and repentance. This would be in line with the Biblical tradition of addressing poverty, which was not previously well presented in their church circles.

The church should be teaching and exemplifying that God loves the poor. It should also demonstrate that with practical steps, and provide skills that would enable the disadvantaged to be rescued from poverty. This should be done in a positive and affirming way, through the inspiration of the Spirit of God and the Word of God. Poor people should be shown the magnitude of the love that God has for them and how the Bible can assist them in changing their lives. This should result in significant changes in people's:

- Expectations
- Belief systems

The church's intention is to convince people that even if they are poor, they stand a chance of getting out of their current difficulties. People should embrace the possibility of a better life. The Holy Spirit should work through the church, enabling it to preach uplifting messages that suggest realistic ways of dealing with the challenges of pauperism.

In interacting with the poor these are some of the valuable lessons that Grace Bible Church has learned:

- They have been amazed by the way people achieve incredible things in their lives and family with less, by how they manage to live in contentment despite living from meagre salaries and experiencing lack.
- They have learnt to exercise subliminal caution as leaders and as a church, to never exclude the poor from any aspect of their Christian life and ministry. Otherwise, the church would be dominated by the life orientation and values of

the middle class and celebrities. Often people who do not have the means are not part of the equation that makes the totality our society. The poor are usually ostracized and become the forgotten people in society, but this should not be the trend the church is promoting.

- To have an in-depth understanding and experience of Christ's concern for the poor.
- To focus on the task of the missions seeking to be a beacon of hope and rebuilders of the community. When looking at the magnitude of the needs of the poor, they have been motivated to strive to do more in ministering to them.
- To review their commitment and double their efforts for the rebuilding of their community.
- To realize that people can be damaged by poverty to an extent that they lose their God-given human identity. This has helped the church to understand why people resort to extreme and deplorable means to survive. Therefore, one must be very slow to pass judgment, condemning the actions of the poor that we might classify as unsavoury. Yet, without condoning their actions, it should be recognized that such actions are desperate measures adopted for survival.

#### **6.1.5.3 Response to Poverty**

This church has embarked on initiatives that seek to build its community. They believe that until you help people to have skills, which will help them survive without you, and then true empowerment has not really happened. Their objective is to assist people stand on their own feet and do things for themselves. They have observed that when empowered people succeed, they become those authentic and inspirational role models for others who are still suffering. The poor take courage when they see someone who was once struggling just like them but who has prevailed over paucity. This can motivate people to persevere in their resistance to marginalization. Progress of a person or group from their community is a positive stimulus for the development of others in the same community. There is a need to create a testimony of enough homegrown wins against poverty, in our backyard to start a ripple effect of transformation. When the deprived see

their peer's triumph, they too may be challenged not to accept the status quo. To achieve this goal, the church has embarked on community building activities in the following areas:

- Prison ministry. They have an outreach programme that seeks to reach out to offenders who have been convicted, sentenced and incarcerated from society, through criminal activity on their part.
- Skills development focus. They conduct workshops and seminars with the intention to foster an entrepreneurial spirit amongst poor people. Pastor Mosa's congregation is running a computer school as well.
- Leadership development programmes. They conduct seminars in which they have partnerships with leading figures in business, in civil society, in government, in the church and in the community, to educate people on a variety of matters related to the field of leadership. The aim being to create a culture of leadership within the community that would ultimately contribute to people developing self-reliance and having capacity to take responsibility for all their personal, family and community issues.
- Awareness campaigns. They address specific social, educational and health related problems in society. They have been dealing with issues of HIV/Aids, care for the frail and aged, prevention of drug abuse and have conducted career seminars for the youth.
- Trauma Counselling. This service is provided to people who have experienced any psychosomatic or physical trauma, such as people who have been sexually abused, survivors of crime and patients suffering from terminal ailments.
- Feeding Programme. They have a soup kitchen that they run weekly, and also periodically distribute food parcels to the underprivileged families.
- Relief Aid. Through this service, they offer financial grants to the needy in cases of emergencies to deal with issues like displacement and funerals.
- Bursary fund. Through this fund they offer study grants to aspirant students from disadvantaged backgrounds to further their studies for career development.
- Recognition of exceptional people who emerge out of conditions of adversity. When people succeed others in their backyard are inspired by their achievements.

- The church is deliberately encouraging people to believe that they bear the image of God as it is written in the Scriptures; therefore, they are valuable and precious before God. They invite them into a vibrant relationship with their Creator and Jesus their Lord.
- They motivate people to use their talents or gifts for their own empowerment.
- They challenge those who have succeeded and left the deprived township and rural areas, to return and plough back into the community, with that benevolent gesture creating a sense of gratitude and appreciation to God for blessing them.
- They strive to network with other like-minded organizations in order to strengthen their efforts in ministry to the community.

With these above-mentioned ministry projects, they are making a contribution towards community transformation. Their first priority is to raise people's consciousness to the realization that they have been made in the image of God, and to be led into a vibrant and living relationship with their Creator. People should experience the liberty to express themselves through their talents, and consequently, to use those talents and skills to make a living for themselves and their families. Finally, people should be able to plough back the harvest of their productive activity into their community. Transformation, therefore, is realized when people have a sense of pride, knowing that they are becoming that which God has intended them to be, in humanity. Then, they will also appreciate what they have, the abilities they possess, their environment and their community.

In self-critique Pastor Sono feels they have not done enough to his satisfaction in their witness to deal with the challenges of poverty in their community. These are the steps that they intend to take to gain a momentum for their ministry amongst the poor:

- To create the capacity to run projects in a sustainable manner.
- To increase resources to tackle more challenges, that is, to increase the scope of their ministry amongst the poor.
- To look at their mistakes in ministry constructively. Rather, to seek to correct the tendency to quit after experiencing setbacks in their witness, in a context of deprivation.

Those proposed corrective actions would contribute to strengthening this witness to the poor, in obedience to Christ's commission.

#### **6.1.5.4 The Relationship Between Poverty and the work of the Church**

Ministering to the poor is very significant to their mission as a church. This is properly encapsulated in their church mission statement that advocates "Grace Bible Church is a church that D.R.E.A.MS." This acronym is analysed or expressed in the following manner:

D = Discipleship

R= Restoration

E= Evangelism

M= Missions

S= Social Relevance.

They have initiated a D.R.E.A.M.S campaign in an attempt to enhance the quality of ministry and service to all the people in their community, through a variety of programs and interventions. They have made a commitment to contribute in the restoration of broken lives, families and societies. Ministry to the poor is a priority to this church, although it is still in a developmental phase. Some of their programmes are just evolving; they have not yet achieved their aims to the fullest. They have a cluster of designated personnel on the church's payroll, which are the custodians of the vision of ministering to the poor and dealing with matters of social welfare and development. It is so significant to them, that they allocate resources to addressing issues of poverty.

Ministering to the disadvantaged is closely connected to the church's mandate of proclaiming the gospel. They believe Christians should not just proclaim the good news without dealing practically with the actual needs of the people being addressed. The Lord Jesus set an example when He addressed the felt needs of people. Since then, Christians have to earn their right to minister to the poor by responding properly to their needs. That response should follow the example of Jesus, who showed the deprived that he genuinely

loved and cared for them. But, the church should not dilute this concern for the poor with ulterior motives of manipulating people to become its members. The motive should be to demonstrate God's love to them because they are made in the image of God. Experience has taught them that treating the poor with respect has enabled the poor to win their hearts. Therefore, they have been more open to most invitations where they had to engage in dialogue about the gospel.

In their witness to the poor, they have involved members of their church to join the teams that offer this ministry. They have a number of volunteers who are the workforce behind these essential services. Their church relies a lot on volunteers in pursuing ministry activities. They participate by giving generously towards the needs of the poor both financially and in kind, especially by donating food parcels to cater for the pressing needs of the moment. They still have to develop the involvement of those who are beneficiaries in their poverty alleviation efforts, so that they become meaningful contributors. Their past attempts to involve the poor as stakeholders lacked a proper follow-up once the projects were initiated. They are faced with a challenge to explore this issue extensively in their present ministries.

The community that their church is serving appreciates the ministry to the poor. Despite having experienced some shortcomings, those projects have made a difference to the community. There are individuals, families and groups who were given a lifeline when they were in dire straits. The volunteers have memories of families who were thankful for the supplies of food parcels in the face of hunger, for financial help to bury a loved one in the face of lack, and youth who were assisted with bursaries when academic exclusion was an inevitable reality. Also, they have received testimonies of the relief experienced by those who benefited psychologically and spiritually from the counselling interventions of the church. Although, these are just small initiatives, they have provided significant services necessary for the welfare of those who do not have the luxury of many options. The impact has been in proportion to their input. Therefore, they see a need to improve and grow as they witness amongst the have-nots. These are the areas in their spotlight for enhancement:

- To increase the rate of consistency in conducting community projects.
- To improve the level and quality of participation of the poor in poverty alleviation initiatives.
- To obtain more resources to launch projects that will have more impact.
- Structuring their budgeting appropriately to channel enough resources to ministry amongst the poor.

They hope to hone their initiatives as the church to serve the poor with dignity, although they themselves have to make do with what they can raise in a very poor community. Even so, they marvel at the generosity of their church members to assist the poor within the community beyond the structured programmes of the church.

## **6.2 A Comparative Analysis of the Perspective of National Leaders Regarding their Witness in a Context of Poverty**

### **The Experience of Poverty**

These eminent church leaders agree that poverty is indeed a challenge that all the respective churches need to address. There is an unwavering consensus amongst them that poverty is a giant facing the church in South Africa. Poverty is a giant that complicates their witness, because it affects a large section of the population. It is so widespread throughout the nation, that it affects individuals, families, communities and churches both in the urban and rural areas. It continues to destabilize the majority of people in the communities, with women and children being the ones that are most cruelly hit by it. A huge number of families, especially the ones in previously disadvantaged communities, in rural areas and townships, are desperately poor.

The difference is in the extent of poverty their different church members and communities are facing. On the basis of the table below I seek to illustrate how their different constituencies are affected by poverty:

**Table 2: The Extent of the Experience of Poverty**

<b>NATIONAL LEADERSHIP</b>	<b>EXTENT IN PERCENTAGE ESTIMATES</b>
Rev Moss Ntlha – TEASA	80
Pastor Ray McCauley – Rhema	30 to 40
Dr Isak Burger –AFM	50
Pastor Chris Venter – IFCC	40 –50
Pastor Mosa Sono – Grace Bible Church	35 – 45

In view of the figures presented above one can see a vast differences in how these eminent leaders, representing dissimilar constituencies experience poverty. But it does seem that on average, an estimation of at least 40 % of their membership across the board is affected by poverty. Therefore, poverty poses a huge challenge in their ministry. It is a reality they cannot just ignore but have to deal with fulfilling their God-given mandate to care for and serve God's people.

These eminent leaders also seem to have a practical understanding of poverty in their context. They show insight into the profile of the disadvantaged in their setting. This is their common description of those affected the most by poverty:

- Previously disadvantaged communities – Black and Coloured communities
- Women
- Children and youth
- The unemployed.

Also, they have successfully identified the actual needs that are prevalent within their communities. Although in some instances senior church leadership is out of touch with the life world of their constituency, there are leaders who seem connected with their communities. The recurring common needs that they have recognized are:



- Nourishing food and decent clothing
- Proper shelter or housing
- Education and training in appropriate skills for employability or productivity as entrepreneurs
- Job or employment opportunities
- Effective programmes to address all HIV-Aids related issues.

Their profiling of the deprived and identification of the needs present in their communities coincide with the findings of the UNDP and Statistic South Africa reports.

### **Theology/Teaching in Relation to Poverty**

It is clear that these eminent leaders come from church traditions that do not all have the same emphasis when they proclaim the gospel to their own congregations. Yet, from their varying doctrinal positions, they all manage to reflect on theological issues of poverty. They have *four points of convergence* in their theology and teachings on poverty. *Firstly*, that the marginalized are at the centre of Christ's mission as the Saviour of the world. When you look at Christ's message, ministry and life, He was pro-poor. Through the entire mission of Christ God demonstrated His love for the poor. Therefore, if we exclude the poor from the ministry of the church we lose the essence of the gospel. For this reason, Luke 4:18 –19 featured in their viewpoints on poverty. *Secondly*, deprivation within the historical context of South Africa is not an ideal state, to be spiritually romanticized. In short, poverty is a curse and not a blessing from God to be embraced. In their opinion God does not want anybody to be disadvantaged and those who are poor should be freed from poverty. *Thirdly*, the Church has been commissioned to minister to the poor. They consider themselves to have a prophetic mission to help the deprived out of the dehumanizing and unjust conditions of marginalization. They just fell short of saying that the church is the church of the poor. *Finally*, that the gospel of Christ is a gospel that addresses a complete person. All the aspects of human life are significant to Christ. Therefore, the church needs to be a witness of the whole gospel that addresses people in totality.

There are *dissimilarities* in the way these churches communicate their message in response to poverty, due to their varying contexts. Rev. Moss Ntlha and Pastor Chris Venter expressed the view that some leaders within their constituencies do not see the issue of poverty as a major theological priority. Rather, as Rev Moss puts it, they would interpret John 3:16 in such a way that it overshadows Luke 4:18. The emphasis on John 3:16 would be on saving souls without dealing with the contextual complexities of the poverty of those souls. Those who subscribe to this position seem to be more concerned about preserving people for heaven. Later, incidentally, they may deal with their physical needs. There seems to be some dualistic tendencies in their thinking. First, they deal with spiritual issues, which are much more important to them than secular matters.

*Secondly*, there are differences in their perceptions in how God enriches the poor. Pastor Ray McCauley's view is that God does not want the poor to be poor but His purpose for them is that they should prosper. All the leaders share the view that God wants the poor to prosper, especially in a country that through discrimination has marginalized them. But, there is some contention on how this prosperity theology should be applied without producing a small elite that is extremely wealthy whilst the poor are growing poorer. Prosperity teaching was misused in the past to create a minority 'elitist group' of the highly 'blessed' and 'prosperous,' people who had no commitment to the gospel or connection with the poor. They lived a privileged life, which continued to evade the poor. Prosperity theology is irrelevant to the poor, since, it ignores the socio-political, economic, and historical realities that condemned them to deprivation. Thus, Pastor Mosa is of the opinion that even though, he sides with the poor the poor will never escape deprivation unless the church and other relevant stakeholders such as the government participate in the empowerment of the poor. There should be an orchestration of vehement societal movement to deal with the problems of poverty.

These national leaders agree on the fact that ministry amongst the poor should not be a one-way stream from the church, flowing to the poor. Rather, they are continuously learning from the poor in a manner that augments and improves their lives in service to Christ. They all have a sense of indebtedness to the disadvantaged and express admiration

for their commitment to the gospel despite being in appalling conditions of deprivation. But, one of the lessons they seem not to have learnt is to practically involve the poor in their ministry and poverty alleviation initiatives. Their ministries have not mastered the art of making the poor meaningful stakeholders and active partners in all efforts of the church to empower them. They need to change from merely doing charitable work for the poor, to doing things with them, with the ultimate goal being to have the disadvantaged do things necessary for their empowerment for themselves. The poor should not be involved only in ministry as beneficiaries. Rather, they should grow to be contributors, and shapers of their own history and future. The marginalized are the ideal guardians of their own interests, aspirations, rights and freedom. Otherwise, the undesirable consequence of our efforts might be dependency, rather than emancipation and empowerment within the ranks of the poor who are being served.

### **Response To Poverty**

All these key leaders agreed that their church should respond practically in its witness amongst the poor, in way that is harmonious with the spirit of the gospel of Christ. Therefore, they, as leaders in their own structures, have shaped the vision of the church to include programmes that address the needs of the poor. Thus, their churches are making contributions in an array of areas from education, shelter, feeding programmes, HIV-Aids prevention and care, skills development and job creation. The difference is in the broadness, organization and administration, and scope of their programmes as facilitated by different ministries. The AFM and Rhema Churches were amongst the leading churches in how they structured their ministry programmes amongst the poor. Their programmes were well conceptualised, organized, administered and well resourced. Highly specialized and experienced staff, competent to minister to the poor, leads their welfare and social development programmes. Their programmes are also registered with the Department of Welfare and Social Development. This registration status has won them national recognition as stakeholders who make a difference in serving the poor. They are, therefore, positioned advantageously to attract funding from the government and business sector. Meanwhile, other national leaders report having programmes that are

run on a small scale by local assemblies without the support of their national offices. Therefore the level of organization, administration and funding vary from one assembly to another depending on the capacity of the congregations in those areas. Unlike the AFM and Rhema, they do not have the advantage of having a national office or central administrative offices to offer strategic support to the welfare and development projects of local churches within their fold. A point on which national leaders disagree is the recognition of advocacy on issues of poverty as the task of the church. Rev. Moss Ntlha highlighted the importance of advocacy in addressing the issues of pauperisation. This is critical especially if we wish to address socio-political and economic issues that have national and global ramifications. Pastor Mosa has had the opportunity of being able to mobilise his own constituency successfully to provide support for their ministry amongst the poor. Many of their programs that empower the power are supported with local personnel, funds, and resources. Pastor Mosa Sono said, “They marvel at the generosity of their church members, who assist the poor within the community beyond the structured programmes of the Church.” They have developed a culture of sharing their resources with the poor in the church and community fighting against poverty.

There is consensus in their objectives of ministry amid the poor. This is how the leaders enumerated the objectives of their ministry in a situation of poverty:

- To bring immediate relief to desperate situations [like in response to hunger, homelessness, abuse, disaster].
- To promote empowerment through skills development.
- To show and demonstrate the love that God has for the poor
- To incarnate the full gospel
- To foster a caring spirit that should characterize the Church as a family of God.

In the light of these vividly stated goals, they all agreed that ministry to the poor must benefit those who are desperate, in terms of their earlier stated profile. Again all agreed that, despite their respective churches’ participation in ministry to address deprivation, they have not responded satisfactorily to the challenges of poverty. All unanimously conceded that still more needs to be done still, to address the backlog of poverty. Hence, the need to intensify this struggle and increase their resources for their witness in a

situation of poverty. They also need to broaden their network of alliances with those who share this just cause, in terms of poverty eradication, in view of the gospel of the Kingdom.

### **The Relationship Between Poverty Eradication And The Work of the Church**

The leaders of these different churches agree unanimously that ministry to the poor should be viewed as an indivisible part of the whole mission of the church. The church has a mandate to fulfil. That mandate deals with contextual matters that include problems of poverty. Ministering to the poor is an integral and essential part of the gospel. This gospel should be both proclaimed and exemplified in deeds in our communities.

Points of dissimilarities are noticed in the levels of impact, through programmes on the poor and the extent to which communities know about these ministry initiatives in their locality. All the leaders have testimonies that attest to the difference these programmes have positively contributed to targeted communities. Obviously, the scope of programmes run by those who are well resourced, have more impact than those run by churches with limited resources. But, every contribution, even on a small scale, is significant. It may not be making it into the media headlines, but to its beneficiaries, it might be the only lifeline when they are in a crisis. Yet, this should not encourage mediocrity when people launch compassionate ministry projects. Churches with limited resources, which do not see the need to raise the community's awareness of their ministry to the poor, may subsequently inadvertently become domesticated to serving the poor within their own church alone. They may miss the opportunity to extend their service to the poor outside the church and incidentally to also attract additional resources from the broader community that could be employed in this ministry.

The leaders of the respective churches indicated several areas in which they could improve their witness in circumstances of poverty. They need to do the following:

- To do an appropriate needs analysis of the community. To ensure that they engage the poor in order to identify real needs, not just what they perceive to be needs as facilitators of ministry.
- To embark on ministry initiatives that would become sustainable.
- To consolidate their theology with reference to their witness amongst the poor.
- To mobilize their churches to be more involved in community issues such as addressing deprivation in their community.

These leaders have unequivocally expressed and renewed their commitment to focus on poverty eradication in their communities. Contrary, to popular perception, they are aware of the challenges of poverty in their own context and they are growing in their response to the poor. Dialogue about their mission when faced with the realities of poverty has been part of the history of the different churches, although leaders have displayed varying degrees of conviction. Consequently, that dialogue has been translated into some action in various large-scale and small-scale ministry initiatives. They have a challenge to continue the development of their witness to the disadvantaged in a manner that is compatible to the demands of the gospel of Christ – not just socially relevant.

### **6.3 Positions of Some Leading Charismatic Evangelical Leaders in Local Churches**

This is a reflection on the viewpoints of various local church leaders as ministers in their own congregations. The focus is on how they deal with poverty locally. Some of these leaders that I have had dialogues with, are also national and regional or provincial leaders in their constituencies. But, here, the spotlight is on their responsibilities and ministry at a local level of their respective communities, without any motive of undermining their stature as servants of Christ at any other level. Below, is a list of the leaders (with their congregations) who have been interviewed and whose constituencies have been visited:

- Pastor Don Phillips, Umtata Christian Centre, Eastern Cape.
- Pastor Dublin Poswa, Umtata, Eastern Cape.
- Pastor Thembinkosi Ntongana, Africa Evangelical Church, Umtata, Eastern Cape

- Bishop Gladstone Botwana, Zoë Bible Church, Pimville, Gauteng.
- Bishop Stephen Zondo, Rivers of Living Waters, Sebokeng, Gauteng.
- Pastor Thomas Makhubu, Arise Bible Church, Taung, North West.
- Pastor Johannes Monosi, Healing Mission Centre, Free State.
- Pastor Glen Shroedder, Christian Revival Centre, Durban North, KwaZulu-Natal.
- Pastor Molutsi, God's Tabernacle Christian Family Church, Polokwane, Limpopo
- Pastor Blessing Selepe, Family Support Ministries, Limpopo

In this discourse, I will reflect mainly on the positions of Bishop Gladstone Botwana and Pastor Don Phillips. Although in my comparative analysis of their positions I will cite the views of some of the interviewed leaders in few instances. But I have included a more detailed report on their points of view as expressed during these interviews, in the Appendix.

### **6.3.1. Bishop Gladstone Botwana – Zoë Bible Church, Pimville – Soweto.**

Bishop Gladstone Botwana is the presiding Bishop of Zoë Bible Churches in South Africa. They have several congregations throughout the country but at the moment they operate mainly in townships. He is currently pastoring one of their biggest congregation in Pimville, Soweto.

#### **6.3.1.1 The Experience of Poverty**

In his observation, Bishop Botwana noted that slightly more than 50% of his congregation is affected by poverty. Being in Pimville, they have not escaped the poverty that affects township people. However, in their church, they have a number of people who are working, a few amongst them are either middle class or upper class. These church members stay in the surrounding suburbs but they fellowship in Soweto, but they still want to keep in touch with their churches and roots in the township.

Poverty is a real problem that their church and community face, and that impinges on the family. In Pimville, you cannot look at an individual apart from his family. There are families that experience poverty even though they have an employed breadwinner. This person might be unwilling to share his or her resources with the family especially in cases where there is conflict or other family difficulties. Some men are beginning to feel the devastation of poverty as a result of unemployment – just like women. Jobs are no longer an easy privilege for men in our society that is now rightly affirming women who were often marginalized in the previous dispensation. But, there is still more women than men that are severely affected by poverty.

This is how they have been measuring impoverishment:

1. They look at the income of the church and divide it by the number of members belonging to the church. They have discovered that having a large number of people attending church services does not necessarily imply that the church would have an increase in their resources. Their coffers only receive contributions from the 20% of the members of the church who are working. If one looks superficially at their congregation on a Sunday morning, one might see a church filled with thousands of people. On the surface, the people might look prosperous but many of them are unemployed. They are struggling to provide for their daily needs.
2. They assess their struggle for sustainability in running community and other church related projects. When the church initiates community projects, members are willing to support them but they are unable to contribute money to keep the projects in operation.
3. They review how church leadership interacts with the people. They discovered the needs of the people through communication and visitations. They experienced that poverty is a real challenge that their people are facing. When they talk to their parishioners, they hear and see that they have ambitions for themselves and their families. Yet, it is a struggle to earn the amounts of money needed for their children to finish school and go to tertiary institutions. Families struggle, and fail to take a sick family member to a nearby doctor, due to depleted finances.



These are the common needs of the poor in the Bishop's community:

- The disadvantaged need the assurance that though they are struggling, there is someone who cares, who loves and respects them even when they are impoverished. "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care"(John C. Maxwell cited by Botwana).
- People need to have a sense of belonging. The poor should never be discounted but should be included in all aspects of church life despite their lack. They want to feel that they belong to the church despite their poverty. Their background of deprivation should not be an excuse for anyone to discriminate against them.
- The church must have a kind of spirituality that offers consolation to the poor in their suffering. They need to be reassured that it was never God's intention to make and keep them poor, but that they are disadvantaged due to unfair socio-political and historical factors.
- The poor seek to be encouraged and supported to find employment or to be self-employed. Of course, the long-standing problem of the poor has been access to seed capital to start their enterprises. They have the desire to be self-employed but they are battling to get start-up capital for their business ventures.

### **6.3.1.2 Theology/Teachings in Relations to Poverty**

The mission of the church in the context of poverty should be based on the commission that Jesus gave to the church, to reach out to all people in the world. But the church should also model that mission, imitating the example set out by Jesus Christ. Jesus dealt with the basic needs of people, such as, food and health. He fed them when they were hungry and healed the sick. These were the basic needs that Christ addressed in his context. Therefore, we cannot have a different mission from that of Christ, and ignore the basic needs of communities. The church also has to teach that deprivation is not part of God's original plan for humanity. It is a scourge that must be resisted in all societies, among nations and the world. Part of their teachings is to remind people to fight the mentality of poverty that perpetuates the status quo of being marginalized. Sometimes, people accept the conditions of poverty as their inescapable reality. They get accustomed

to lack in their lives, especially if it has persisted for long periods. Thus, there should be some re-programming in people that will change their mindset and motivate them to refute the fact that their lives were meant to end in poverty.

According to Luke 4:18 the good news is that the poor should not continue to be poor anymore. In the gospels, Christ affirms the fact that poverty should not be a permanent feature in people's existence. Reading John 10:10, Christians are presented with the promise of abundant life. This should be the norm for all of God's children, as a result of God's redemptive mission through Jesus Christ's life and ministry. The good news to the poor is that, Christ crushed the legitimacy of poverty as a result of sin out of the Fall; they do not have to be poor anymore. The poor, therefore, need to protest against all the forces that still enforce their impoverishment.

Lessons drawn from their ministry to the poor are:

1. Poverty is a painful experience, because it hinders freedom and dehumanises people. It distorts your 'self' and creates loss of identity as a person. Bishop Botwana cites Henry Ford who said, "Money doesn't change men. It merely unmasks them. If a man is naturally selfish, or arrogant, or greedy, the money brings it out; that's all." We do not know many of the poor, since poverty keeps being or humanity under wraps. We will know who they really are once they rise from the slums.
2. Help people to affirm who they are. Poor people should be respected. They are usually undermined and disrespected because deprivation makes one stand out as being different, maybe due to their unfashionable dress code. From personal experience, Bishop Botwana can attest to this. As one who was deprived, he had to discover who he was. Even if a person did not have a privileged upbringing, there is always a longing in him to be recognized as a human being, not to be despised for his unsavoury background, but to be respected.
3. Poverty can turn people into monsters. It can shatter dreams, aspirations and desires one longs to achieve. If the quest for a desired accomplishment is

frustrated by deprivation, and, if you are not a religious person and you have not been raised in a principled manner, the lure of criminality for survival may be hard to resist. The means you might adopt in desperation may be at the expense of the next person. Apart from the fact that we have a sinful nature, the environment of poverty has the potential to turn some people into monsters.

### **6.3.1.3 Response to Poverty**

Bishop Botwana's church has been involved in programmes to assist the poor on a moderate scale. These are some of their initiatives in ministering to the needy:

- Individuals or families within the church adopt disadvantaged children [not legally], to support them as part of their Christian obligation. The church would frequently check on their needs and address them.
- Gentlemen mentor boys who are raised by single mothers. Through this exercise they attempt to provide these boys with good role models, hoping to have a positive impact on the character development of these children.
- The church runs a relief aid programme called the Helping Hand. They support the poor with food distribution, and provide special meals or lunches, especially for senior citizens and families in need. They intend to expand these programmes beyond the borders of the church once they have increased their resources.
- Youths provide cleaning services for frail people. They volunteer their services and tidy the houses of those frail people in the community who are unable to do it for themselves.
- Outreach programmes are organized by members of the church to assist and support orphanages and homes in the community run by other organizations. They occasionally donate clothes and pay visits to entertain and play with the children. They also invite them to attend church services, after which they would be provided with lunch.
- One of their new projects is a Bursary Fund that is just three years old. It was started to support students from a disadvantaged background to further their studies. These students have the potential to advance their education but their own

families are unable to pay for it. At the moment, they have started with few students, their intake will escalate as and when their funding grows.

They hope to achieve the following objectives:

- To project the caring heart of Jesus to the poor. They believe that people will never know Christ's love for them, unless the church demonstrates it.
- To say to the poor people, "Once you have been helped by either the church or an individual in the church, you then have to help the next person yourself". It must be a legacy, once a person is helped, he in turn must help others.

They feel they have not adequately responded to the challenges of poverty in their context. Poverty is widespread in the community and they have limited resources that cannot address all the needs of the people. The needs are so overwhelming, since they are compounded by the increasing HIV/Aids pandemic. Therefore, the impact of their ministry on the lives of the poor is not at the level they would have liked it to be. Nevertheless, out of their ministry to the disadvantaged, they still have some success stories. They have received a number of inspiring testimonies from people whose lives have become different through the ministry of their church. Some have become economically empowered through the assistance of the church when they were once living in poverty. Some, testify how applying teachings received from the church has helped them to be promoted in their workplace. Therefore, with better benefits at work, the quality of life has improved significantly – theirs and families' too. Many of those who are economically viable and who have left the township, have kept their membership with their township church. Despite having made progress to live in suburbs where they can afford to live an affluent life, they still want to identify with a poor church. This is a demonstration of the impact that the church has in these Christians lives.

#### **6.3.1.4 The Relationship Between Poverty and the Work of the Church**

The church's ministry initiatives involve church members, who give their resources and skills to help others who are destitute. Some congregants have developed in their witness to the extent that they have initiated their own community outreach projects. They balance the participation of skilled and unskilled members of the church in ministry to the poor.

They have been evaluating their witness amongst the deprived and have noted areas that call for improvement. They hope to improve their preaching, to be more practical when responding to the challenges in their community, like, the response of the youth in showing love, by helping to tidy the homes of the senior citizens. The deeds of the youth make sure that the elderly will not feel neglected in the community. Projects such as of those reaching out to the poor people in winter, with soup kitchens can be a practical means to assist the poor. They realize that if they do not engage in practical ministry they are only going to be reaching out to intellectuals. Poor people will only be impacted if the church responds to them in practical ways that are in line with the spirit of the gospel. Running support programmes to tutor high school students to master certain school subjects is one idea. There are Christians in their congregation who help the poor with medicine (that has not expired) to treat their ailments.

#### **6.3.1.5 General**

At the moment, the Zoë Bible Church spends five percent of its income, on addressing the needs of the poor. The truth is, being a self-funding church; their financial resources are greatly limited.

#### **6.3.2 Pastor Don Phillips, Umtata Christian Centre**

Pastor Don Phillips is the senior Pastor of Umtata Christian Centre that is situated in the Eastern Cape, in the city of Umtata. This church is also one of the fastest growing of the

largest churches in the region. The church ministers to both the urban and rural communities in the vicinity.

### **6.3.2.1 The Experience of Poverty**

Poverty in their community is affecting approximately 35 % of the people. Those who are poor are unemployed and have no steady source of income. This means that materially they are not coping well. At face value one would note the material signs of deprivation when observing the community. Yet, looking deeper, one of the recognizable indicators is the high level of hopelessness amongst those who are affected by poverty. Therefore, as a church, they see it as their role, amongst others, to help people to regain hope. The message of hope is the one they carry to those who are experiencing poverty.

Umtata is a typical cosmopolitan city, populated by people representing both extremes in economic status. Its residents are both the affluent and the extremely poor, living in the same city. These are the prevalent problems amongst the poor:

- The inadequate provision of shelter or housing.
- The high incidence of alcohol abuse, which could be linked to hopelessness.
- It is the loitering of able-bodied people. These are people you should expect to be working, but are jobless.
- The groups of street children, roaming the streets at all hours of the day when they should be at school or at home with responsible parents and guardians. These street children's problem of a rough life on the streets is compounded by the lure of drug abuse, petty crime and prostitution.
- Mothers with children on their back whilst trying to help people carry their luggage to their mode of transport in exchange for a tip, are a common sight.
- The problem of laziness, with some people suffering this self-defeating habit that is created by negative personal attitudes and other societal factors.

### **6.3.2.2 Theology/Teachings in Relation to Poverty**

In Pastor Don Phillip's opinion and observation poverty is a dehumanising phenomenon. It reduces people to a terrible state. They find themselves leading a deplorable existence that is plagued by lack of meaning, hopelessness and loss of dignity. Meanwhile, Christ's mission was to give people meaning in life and to restore their dignity. Poverty has a psychological, crippling effect on people, in that it neutralizes their potential. Deprivation has an undulating effect; it moves from the parents and becomes a stigma that affects their children. In experiences whilst doing prison ministry, they have dealt with cases of children who have been raised on the streets and have ended up in prison.

Their approach to the poor is to treat them with dignity and great respect. They do not allow any impartiality between people, even when they have both the affluent and poor in their church, they are particular about treating everyone equally. In the provision of services to people, they seek to give their best, notwithstanding the person's status. This is done to enable the disadvantaged to regain their hope and heal their marred dignity. They are aware that some of their members do not have running water or access to electricity, and even walk long distances when they come to church. People, when they come from such backgrounds, in the church, could be sitting next to a judge of the Supreme Court, but they should not feel inferior to such a fellow Christian, since they all have the same dignity.

### **6.3.2.3 Response to Poverty**

Ministering to the poor is on the main agenda of the church. It is their responsibility as the church to support the deprived. In helping the poor, they are careful not to create a culture of dependency. They work with them, assisting them to discover their potential and resources, which are very instrumental in their empowerment. This is helpful when it comes to them exploring job-creation opportunities. In their church, they have set up help desks to assist people to investigate employment opportunities through the networks created within the church and the business community in their area. Other disadvantaged

people receive aid, in the form of training to start small businesses. Church leaders encourage wealthier individuals to use their private initiatives to teach the marginalized how to generate their own income. They have also partnered with the local authorities in supporting their job creation initiatives, to benefit the poorest of the poor in the community. They have initiated various workshops to promote skills development, focusing on hospitality skills like cooking, baking and helping those who are underemployed like domestic workers. Some of their members who employ helpers in their homes are encouraged to come with them to church, rather than leaving them at home on Sundays. Domestic workers are struggling to survive on their wages. For them, the church offers programmes that help them to acquire catering skills that they can also use in their current employment. Some of them develop to ultimately run their own businesses. Furthermore, they help the poor to have access to funding from certain bankers in order to launch their own enterprises; and they support some disadvantaged learners to complete their schooling. In addition to this, they are running a school, since they have a passion to educate the nation.

They have ventured recently into a small agricultural pilot project. They have cultivated vegetable gardens on six hectares of land, which the church has earmarked as site for the sanctuary and other ministry facilities. They enable unemployed people acquire agricultural and business skills, through this vegetable farming project. This project gives them a chance to learn how to produce and how to sell their products on the local market. They have successfully harvested some crops, which they have sold profitably. This project has snowballed into one of the villages where more poor people are being given an opportunity for empowerment. Other ministry programmes to the community include the following:

- Distribution of food parcel to desperate families
- Partnership with business in their city on the in-service training project of personnel.
- Contributing to the care of the environment in their area.



- Provision of primary health care. Volunteer health practitioners like nurses, through the churches help desk offer auxiliary services in the provision of basic health to the disadvantaged.

#### **6.3.2.4 The Relationship Between Poverty and the Work of the Church**

Ministering to the poor is a very critical aspect of their mission. When you read Luke 4 you discover that this was at the centre of Christ's mission. Also when reading the Gospel according to John, you realize that Jesus came to deal with all aspects of life. He touched our well being, personhood, and freedom. Jesus did not come to address one aspect of human life. If that were the case, it would create an imbalanced community, strong in that aspect, falling short in other dimensions. He addressed life in its totality. Therefore, it has been their practice as witnesses to the gospel to minister to people holistically. If their people have educational needs, that is the need they will have to address. They have a testimony from someone with a Doctorate in Mathematics, who has previously benefited from the poverty alleviation programmes of the church. Another testimony is from a youth who was hopelessly devastated by poverty, but who wanted to further his studies. The church assisted him to complete his high school education. In the same way the put six young people who had no one else to help them, through University.

In serving the poor the church, is also being influenced in that encounter, in a manner that shapes their witness. These are some of the lessons they have learnt, out of their ministry amongst the disadvantaged:

1. To exercise the greatest sensitivity when serving the poor. The poor deserve respect and they should be treated with dignity without any reservations. There is a perception that the Umtata Christian Centre is a wealthy church, thus perceived to be elite. But, they make a point of treating the poor compassionately as their equals even when they do not expect that from them.
2. To believe in the poor. The deprived are people with amazing potential, who if given a chance, could improve the quality of their lives tremendously. In his involvement in prison ministry over a few years, Pastor Phillips has seen some

prison inmates transform their lives positively when someone showed faith in them. About thirty-five prison inmates from a Maximum C section who participated in their intervention programme managed to complete their diplomas with Damelin. This gave them a qualification that could make them employable once they leave prison. They have also set up a computer centre in that prison. This will enable the prison inmates to leave prison with some form of computer literacy that would assist them later in life. In addition, they have set up a preschool in the female section of one of the prison in the city. The church is funding the salaries of the pre-school staff and supplying them with the necessary stationery and literature that they might need to educate children. This is done to give hope to those who have wronged society, so that they could also be rehabilitated and forgiven by society. If you do not treat the poor with contempt, breakthroughs in ministry seem to follow.

According to Pastor Phillips, his church hopes to achieve the following objectives as they serve the poor according to the Scriptures:

1. To revive their hope.
2. To help repair that damaged self-concept. Poor people need to recover their lost dignity and identity.
3. To support the disadvantaged in opening and accessing doors of opportunity and empowerment.
4. To implement their vision to serve the poor, to influence and penetrate them with the gospel.

In their self-evaluation they conclude that they have not done enough to serve the poor. But, they are hopeful that they are gaining pace, and will soon do more in partnership with their disadvantaged community. Yet, their contributions have had some notable impact on improving the undesirable circumstances of some members of the community.

### **6.3.2.5 General**

The financial resources they use come from members of the church and the community. Some essential services that they offer when helping the poor are not paid for since they use the expertise of the congregants.

## **6.4 A Comparative Analysis of the Position of the Leaders in Local Churches in Various Regions**

In this discourse I shall just briefly analyse and compare their positions, looking for points of convergence and divergence.

### **Experience of Poverty**

These leaders have a common starting point in the joint acknowledgement of poverty as a multilevel problem within their respective communities. Their experiences differ from one another because of their unique personal, family, regional or provincial, rural and urban backgrounds. According to Pastor's Botwana, Sono, and Phillips:

“Poverty is a painful experience, especially because it hinders and dehumanises people. It distorts your ‘self’ or personhood and creates loss of identity... Poverty can turn people into monsters... People’s self-esteem becomes affected negatively as a result of being marginalized... It reduces people into a terrible state. They find themselves leading a deplorable existence that is plagued by lack of meaning, hopelessness and loss of dignity.”

Some leaders have individual and personal experiences of poverty. There are those like Bishop Zondo who have been homeless and known life on the streets, growing up in the townships of the Vaal. There are those like Pastor Makhubu who is presently staying in an RDP house. He knows at first hand the inconveniences of overcrowding, just like the rest of the members of his church and community. There are those like Pastor Monosi, whose community lives in informal settlements and RDP houses. Their Churches are just large shacks or, in the case of Pastor Makhubu, a roof without walls. A roof without walls is also the experience of Pastor Mosa Sono’s church. They used this construction for 17

years, until they built their church in 2002. Others are not necessarily poor themselves, but serve in rural and urban communities that are disadvantaged. Meanwhile, some leaders have churches in relatively affluent suburbs, where there is no sign of an informal settlement or squalor. But, they attract the poor from surrounding townships and rural areas to the church worship services. All these leaders face poverty in all its manifestations, either at a personal, community, or distant level.

The differences in the extent to which the local churches experience poverty, are very pronounced. Let us look at the table below:

**Table 3: The Extent of the Experience of Poverty by Local Church Leaders**

<b>LEADER</b>	<b>REGION</b>	<b>TYPE LOCALITY</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE</b>
Rev Poswa	<i>Eastern Cape</i>	Peri-Urban	80
Pastor Don Phillips	<i>Eastern Cape</i>	City	35
Pastor T Ntongana	<i>Eastern Cape</i>	Peri-Urban	80
Pastor Makhubu	<i>North West</i>	Rural Town	80
Pastor Molutsi	<i>Limpopo</i>	Township, Villages	60
Pastor Monosi	<i>Free State</i>	Township/Informal	70
Pastor Selepe	<i>Limpopo</i>	Village/Township	80
Pastor G Schroeder	<i>KZN</i>	Suburb	30 – 40
Bishop Zondo	<i>Gauteng</i>	Township	60
Bishop Botwana	Gauteng	Township	50

The highest incidence of poverty is found in the poorest provinces of South Africa, in terms of their contribution to GDP. Eastern Cape, according to the national census, has the highest incidence of poverty. Local churches that are situated in previously disadvantaged communities, either in a township, village or rural areas also experience very high levels of poverty. On the other hand, a city or suburban church, would have the lowest levels of poverty in comparison to churches in different settings.

The leaders agree in their profiling of those who are poor. It is a profile that is similar to that cited by national leaders. Their descriptions of the common needs that are prevalent in their constituencies also concur with the assessment of national leaders. These local leaders use similar criteria to identify the needs of the impoverished. Common indicators are:

- Individuals and families' ability to meet their basic needs. Therefore they will assess the quality of food, clothing and shelter that people have access to, if they are fortunate to access any in whatever state.
- The income of the church per member.
- A person's ability to fulfil his obligations to the ministry.
- The frequency in which they approach the church for assistance.
- State of their self-esteem, whether people have a persistent and unhealthy perception of themselves.
- The level of motivation. Some have a tendency to be overwhelmed by hopelessness and seem to have a resigned and dull expression on their face.
- Likelihood of people being employed in terms of their skills and job opportunities in the area.
- Tendencies of substance abuse.

These are the usual pointers that these local church leaders generally apply in discovering the disadvantaged that they should help in the church and community.

### **Theology/Teaching in Relation to Poverty**

There are five areas of convergence in the teachings and theology of these local church leaders in the context of poverty. *Firstly*, they use Luke 4:18f as a key text to define their mission when dealing with the poor. Bishop Gladstone Botswana says, "According to Luke 4:18 the good news is that the poor should not continue to be poor anymore. In the gospels Christ affirms the fact that poverty should not be a permanent state." This text highlights the role of the Holy Spirit in enabling Christ to minister in a way that is sensitive to the struggles of the poor. For many them the Holy Spirit is the power of God that is working through Christ to destroy the enslaving influences of deprivation.

*Secondly*, they teach people to use their faith in God as the basis for their struggle against poverty. They should learn to trust in God who is on their side, against their marginalization. The church and the poor should not be resigned to poverty and accept the situation as their predetermined fate. Instead they should mobilize to eradicate it in their lives and the community. *Thirdly*, they attempt to awaken the poor with the gospel, to enable them to recognize and appreciate their potential. In their teaching they seek to make them realize that God has richly endowed them with talents. Therefore they encourage the poor to discover, develop and use their God-given abilities to improve the quality of their lives. *Fourthly*, they inspire the poor to revive their dreams. Many of the leaders agree that poverty disturbs the positive outlook and vision that the disadvantaged need to acquire a better life than their present squalid existence. Their wretched conditions are poisonous and detrimental to the psyche of the poor and sow attitudes of negativity and hopelessness. Thus their message is one of hope for the deprived as they seek to rise from deprivation. *Finally*, they agree that their teaching should build the identity of the poor in such way that they will value themselves as humans. Those who live in poverty are exposed to conditions that are hostile to their human dignity. Their self-concept becomes a casualty to marginalization. Poverty subjects people to a stigma that prompts others to undermine them. Thus the church should proclaim the gospel of Christ to the poor in a manner that affirms their human rights and dignity as those who are bearers of God's image.

The leaders agree about the objectives of their ministry in the situation of poverty. This is how they have defined these aims:

- To concretise God's love for the poor.
- To renew the disadvantaged mindset that has been acclimatized and accepted poverty as the normal way of life, whereas it is denounced by the gospel.
- To participate in God's empowerment mission for the disadvantaged.
- To bring hope in any situation of poverty
- To help to repair the damaged self-esteem of the poor.

The difference is in how they prioritise and implement these objectives in terms of their ministry programme. Some leaders express these noble goals but they do not necessarily have a programme of action to actualise them.

Furthermore, they have points of convergence concerning the lessons that they have learned in their interaction with poor. The poor are also making a difference in their journey in God's service. These are the common lessons that they cite:

- The poor have a qualitative commitment to God despite their apparent miseries.
- The leaders have discovered the richness of the life of the disadvantaged in terms of their culture, tradition, spirituality and community life.
- The leaders have experienced fulfilment in sharing and serving those who are desperate.
- They have recognized that the poor have something to offer; they are not only recipients of charity.
- They have been impressed by the humility and simplicity with which people accomplish extraordinary things for God and help others with less in terms of resources.

Some of the leaders mention additional lessons that they, in their unique circumstances have learned. Varying experiences teach people different things, according to their level of development and exposure. Below are some of the insights that are unique to individual leaders:

- The toxic effects of the previous apartheid system, which created damaging and persistent realities, are still complicating the lives and future of the poor, who continue to live in hardships.
- Poverty can turn some people into monsters. It can make people lose faith in taking legitimate means and opportunities to empower themselves. Rather it can lure them into resorting to illicit ways of keeping their heads above the boisterous waters of deprivation. If you are not religious and you have not been raised in a principled manner, the lures of criminality may be hard to resist. The means you might adopt in desperation may be at the expense of the next person. Apart from

the fact that we have a sinful nature, the environment of poverty has potential to turn some people into monsters.

- It is essential to recognize one's prejudices and apply subliminal cautiousness not to exclude the poor from the life of the church. Otherwise the church would be dominated by the life orientation and values of the middle class and celebrities. People who do not have the means are often excluded from our society. The poor are too easily ostracized and forgotten.

These experiences as reported by the leaders, indicate their growing insight into the quality and depth of their witness in the context of poverty. There is strong evidence that the particular leaders' horizons are being broadened for the good of the church and the community.

### **Response to Poverty**

The local church leaders we interviewed are involved in ministry activities in their churches and they are making contributions in the following areas:

- Self-help schemes like vegetable gardens
- Skills development and job creation initiatives
- HIV-Aids education and support programmes
- Relief programmes – food distribution, and provision shelter.
- Education to create awareness of opportunities and places where people can get assistance in their empowerment.
- Healing and rebuilding of families.
- Initiation of group saving clubs
- Provision of primary health care, and trauma counselling.
- Funding for education – bursaries
- Prison ministry to offer intervention necessary for the rehabilitation of the convicted offenders.
- Moral regeneration initiatives

The respective leaders have played a significant role in the initiation of these responses together with other stakeholders in their community. Just to cite Pastor Don Phillips who



said, “Ministering to the poor is on the main agenda of the Church. It is their responsibility to support the deprived. In helping the poor they are careful not to create a culture of dependency. They assist them in assessing the potential and resources they have so that these things could be considered when serving them.” Yet, these programmes are pursued at different levels of commitment by particular leaders and their local churches. Some of the programmes are advanced and well coordinated while others are still rudimentary and loosely coordinated. Therefore they differ in impact. Some contribute significantly to the quality of life of people, while others have but a minimal effect, and are still at an elementary level. The latter must not be dismissed as irrelevant since they are programmes launched by leaders who are still learning the ropes of effective ministry amongst the poor. Let us consider these simple and uncoordinated programmes to be like a baby’s first steps. It is by trying that these churches are learning valuable lessons for improved ministry response. Many of the churches were only established in the past two to six years. You cannot compare them with Ecumenicals that are veterans of witnessing in the context of poverty and injustice.

### **Relationship Between Poverty And The Work Of The Church**

The majority of the local church leaders concur that poverty alleviation ministry is a very significant component of the whole mission of the church. Ministry to the poor is part of Christ’s broad commission for his church to the world. According to Pastor Makhubu, “Caring for the poor is part of their mandate, included in the Great Commission. It is this ministry that gives Christians an opportunity to give, not only materially, but also their knowledge, skills, time and other essential resources. Part of the Christians responsibility is not only to preach to the poor but also to share his resources to address their needs.”

Therefore we cannot exclude ministry to the poor from the mission of a local congregation. It is an essential ingredient of the vision that the church should fulfil, on expression of its Christian witness. Therefore the church seeks to present a holistic gospel that addresses all the human needs that are relevant in a situation of deprivation. There is an important relationship between poverty eradication initiatives and the work of the church. Poverty eradication ministry is more than just the work of the church, it is the

very life of the church in its allegiance to Christ. Jesus Christ himself put the poor at the centre of his life and ministry. The poor were a Kingdom priority for Christ to the extent that He even labelled his gospel the gospel to the poor. They were the primary audience to the good news of which He was the herald. Ministry to the poor should be the core function of the church, and should never be neglected.

In theory the leaders of the local churches all agree – at least theologically – about the importance of reaching out to the poor. But in practice the churches differ. Not all of them really regard their ministry to the poor as a priority or run programmes that would practically and convincingly match their statements. The personnel and resources allocated to these ministry initiatives do not make them premier projects of the church. The mean contributions of these local churches towards ministry to the poor are approximately 5%. “Sadly many of our poorer churches have a ghetto mentality, absorbed in self-preservation and in not wanting to share the fruits of their mission heritage or their social gains. Christ calls us to repent and live by the Cross”(Nicholls and Wood 1996:10). The majority of the local churches have no specific budget for poverty relief.

There is consensus amongst the leaders that they involve both their congregants and the community as key stakeholders in their poverty alleviation ministry. In some local churches people participate at two levels:

- Donors, making contributions, financially and in kind.
- Volunteers, responsible for the operational aspects of this ministry.

The laity has, as a rule, not as yet been invited to participate in the strategic aspects of ministry to the poor since it is the preserve of the local church hierarchy. In exceptional cases local churches do involve laity at leadership level. Also, many of these local leaders have not fully mastered the strategy of assisting the local community. Some of the local church-based programmes are mainly dealing with internal poverty needs due to limited resources and capacity. Many local churches are still flexing their muscles, slowly developing their capacity to expand their ministry into the community. They also need to

augment their pool of resources so that they will be able to sustain a broader community vision of ministry to the poor.

Local leaders differ about the impact of their ministry on their community. The size of a church and the competence and experience of different leaders determine how they deal with issues of poverty. Some local churches are still inexperienced in ministry to the poor. The quality of their ministry is not the same as those who have been running such a ministry for longer periods and have improved in time. Some of the churches only embarked on this ministry in the last three years, and have not fully mastered all the dynamics of ministry to the poor. Others only deal with the needs of the poor within their local church. In such cases the impact of their service to the poor is in-house, and their influence in the broader community is negligible. In contrast, there are some local churches that involve the poor to participate as serious partners in their own development. They avoid doing things for the poor, but rather work with them in dealing with their needs. The poor become problem-solvers, not only beneficiaries. Some impact has been made in the following areas:

- Dealing with immediate and urgent needs, like feeding the hungry, and providing shelter, clothing the naked and care for the frail and sick.
- Providing comfort, counselling and support for those facing trauma.
- Education and guidance – for career, health and social development.
- Skills development – job and business opportunities.
- Self-help food-growing programmes.

The levels of effectiveness of these ministry initiatives differ from one local church to another.

Many of the local church leaders agree that there are areas in their ministry to the poor that need to be improved. They have targeted the following:

- Leadership and management
- Increasing resources
- Expanding ministry to the greater community, beyond the local churches' borders
- Community awareness and partnership for their ministry

## **General**

There is consensus that the local churches use all the resources and the infrastructure at their disposal. Many of the local churches' initiatives to serve the poor are sustained through self-funding. The churches donate the funds to start and maintain their programmes. A few have managed to obtain other resources from the business sector and NGO's through their fundraising schemes. Almost all of them need to strengthen their partnership with the Department of Social Welfare Development to gain access to the public funding that is available. The infrastructures that the local churches use in their witness range from basic to very sophisticated. Some churches have an informal infrastructure suited to informal settlement or 'ghetto' surroundings that are the reality of their ministry, whilst others have first world structures befitting the developed areas where they are situated. But whatever the state of the infrastructure of a particular church, it serves a noble cause. Local churches mainly use their church building for the programmes except in cases where teams travel to homes, prisons, schools and hospitals. Local churches are accessible since people have already established patterns of utilizing them.

### **6.4 A Critique of the Charismatic Leaders' Response to Poverty**

*Firstly*, many of their responses to poverty are relief initiatives. They focus on helping people to deal with day-to-day survival needs without dealing with the underlying social problems that created their poverty. Many of the above-mentioned churches have programmes like feeding schemes, provision of temporary shelter, and disbursement of clothes amongst the poor. These programmes although necessary just deal with immediate needs on a short-term basis. They just help people to cope with the situation of poverty without uprooting the underlying causes of their poverty.

*Secondly*, very few of these programmes are developmental or transformational. Some of the above-mentioned churches are making progress in moving away from relief-

orientated programmes to programmes that are more developmental or transformational. Some of their poverty alleviation initiatives seek to deal with issues of skills development, job creation, entrepreneurship, literacy, and leadership development. There is a growing awareness amongst them that some of their previous relief programmes were insufficient to address this endemic problem of poverty. Such initiatives help poor people to survive for a few days but unfortunately in a short while, they return to their original plight of deprivation. Also those relief initiatives were not empowering the poor, but rather perpetuating their dependency. Charismatic leaders are learning from their progressive shift from relief and developmental strategies to more transformational and sustainable strategies, that poverty alleviation is a complex phenomenon. It requires partnership with various stakeholders at various levels of society such as other non-governmental organizations, denominations, business, government and other relevant specialized institutions. The poverty that they are tackling although it is more visible in local communities, it is a national problem.

*Thirdly*, most of the leaders are facing the challenge of sustainability. The issue of sustainability plagued many of their poverty eradication initiatives, which were relief-orientated, developmental or transformational in focus. Initially, most of them struggled with the issue of resources, in terms of funding, personnel and capacity to administer those poverty eradication projects. Many of these churches depended on donors as well as resources generated from their own poor communities, which were not sufficient to address their needs adequately in order to empower those communities. Some of the above-mentioned communities are residing in obscure rural areas, which are underdeveloped and escape the attention of possible investors such as the government or other transformational agencies. Therefore, some of their poverty alleviation programmes have not been run consistently for at least five years without disruption. Some programmes folded within two years of being started due to limited access to the required resources to keep them operational.

*Fourthly*, some of the programmes started in good faith were not really programmes for the empowerment of communities but means to enhance evangelism mainly. Ministry to

the poor was pursued in generosity, but with the motive of saving sinners who in this case were disadvantaged. According to Bosch (1980:33),

“There are, however, also those Evangelicals who regard such ‘services’ not as the logical consequence of evangelism but rather as aids to evangelism. Schools, hospitals, orphanages and the like are primarily seen as instruments affording pupils, patients and orphans the opportunity of hearing the gospel. By attending to man’s body (for instance in the hospital) or mind (in the mission school), they are preparing him for the gospel. The success of mission schools and hospitals is often judged according to the number of converts they produce.”

It is important that Charismatic Evangelicals should shed the tendency to look at ministry to the poor in a narrow sense of using poverty alleviation initiatives merely to win the lost souls. Even though the poor are sinners who need to be reconciled to God, the church should not reduce poverty alleviation ministry to be an appendage of evangelism. A Church that mainly promotes evangelism should not consider poverty alleviation a minor task of their ministry.

*Finally*, a laudable thing about the Charismatic Evangelical response to the poor is their concern for the poor. They are making many attempts to reach out to the poor. Many of their efforts are geared at meeting the needs of communities that are suffering. Bosch (1980:33) observed that, “Evangelicals often reveal greater sacrificial involvement with the existential needs of the victims of society – drug addicts, refugees, the exploited poor, the sick, and so forth – than many Ecumenicals who malign them for their lack of social concern.” The Charismatic Evangelicals have been striving to connect with people and to minister to their real needs in their communities. Many of the Charismatic leaders that I interviewed showed tremendous insight into the issues and challenges of people in their community.

## **6.5 Conclusion**

This discourse focused on the positions of national and local church leaders on the witness of the church in the context of poverty. It investigated the actual state of affairs in

the churches they are leading, how they are experiencing poverty, their theological and practical response to poverty, and the significance of their ministry to the poor in terms of their mission. It has been established from interviews with leaders at local level as well as national level of the Charismatic Evangelical leadership that poverty is a phenomenon that affects this church and the community most severely. The church leadership examined the theological and biblical implications of this problem, and responded according to the background and denominational position of the respective leaders. The various leaders reported on an array of practical poverty alleviation programmes that their respective churches initiated in response to the context of poverty in their backyards. These practical ministry responses to the poor ranged from small-scale and basic to elaborate and large-scale projects. The nature of these ministry initiatives was influenced by the nature of the vision, access to resources, and capacity of the respective leaders and churches. Therefore the impact of their witness, by their own account, varied from being merely local to being widespread. The leadership of the churches, learned valuable lessons that improved the quality of their witness in their ministry to the poor. Many of the leaders from local to national level in the hierarchy of the Charismatic Evangelical church admitted that their witness in the face poverty was far from perfect in their own assessment. They cited numerous areas that need to be enhanced. They are evidently growing in their capacity to deal with the complexities of poverty, and the challenges of limited resources. Yet, despite these hurdles they are striving to fulfil their ministry mandate, which is the task they were commissioned to do by Jesus Christ. Christ himself modelled this ministry to the poor through His life and mission on earth. The Charismatic Church hierarchy and their constituency have availed some resources to address the needs of the poor. Ministering to the poor is an integral part of the mission of this church as it proclaims the full gospel of the Kingdom of God.

## 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.

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## APPENDIX

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR LEADERS AND FIELDWORK

#### SECTION A. The Experience of Poverty [the big issue]

Q 1. What percentage of your congregation's membership is affected by poverty?

Notes: To solicit information that will indicate if their church can relate to the poor to appeal to them to attend it.

Q 2. What is the profile of those who are poor in your context?

Q 3. How do you measure poverty amongst people?

Notes: Get an idea about the indicators they use to assess the level of poverty.

Q4. What are areas of known human need in your community?

#### SECTION B. Theology/Teaching in Relation to Poverty

Q 1: What is your [churches/denomination] opinion about poverty?

Q 2: What is the message that the church communicates in its vision in the context of poverty?

Q 3: What are the poverty issues that you address through teaching/preaching or liturgy?

Q 4: What are the lessons that you're learning in your Christian witness amongst the poor?

Note: To get the information about their theological view about poverty.

#### SECTION C. Response to Poverty

Notes: To determine if there is prior thought or planning about these projects.

Q 1: What programs do run to assist the poor?

Notes: To determine the type of projects there are having whether it is relief or developmental programs?

Q 2: What are the objectives of those programs?

Notes: To assess if they clearly spelled their goals for their programs and whether they have determined what they seek to achieve?

Q 3: Since when were these programs initiated?

Notes: To determine track record of involvement in poverty issues?

Q 4: Who is been targeted with these programs?

Notes: to check who are the actual beneficiaries to this program whether it is members of the community or the church members only?

What is the number of people benefiting from poverty alleviation programs?

Q 5: In your opinion, has your church adequately responded to poverty?

#### **SECTION D. The Relationship Between Poverty and the Work of the Church**

Q 1: How significant are these programs to the mission of you church?

Q 2: How do link your development initiatives to your Christian witness?

Q 3: What is the involvement of your congregation in your poverty alleviation programs?

Notes: To determine the role of their congregants in these projects

Q 4: To what extent do your poverty alleviation projects involve the poor?

Notes: Determine the level of community participation.

Q 5: What do you think is the impact of these projects?

Notes: To check is there is a constant evaluation of these projects and the results.

Q 6: What are things that you wish you could improve in your initiatives to assist the poor?

Notes: Get an idea of a critical assessment of themselves about their ministry activities/

### **SECTION E. General**

Q 1: What is your annual budget for these poverty alleviation programs?

Notes: To get an idea about the size of their expenditure in terms of these projects.

Q 2: Where do you get your funding?

Q 3: In your opinion, does your community know about your poverty alleviation programs?

Notes: Get an idea about the visibility of this program in the community as a place where they could get assistance.

Q 4: What kind of infrastructure is there to deal with projects that minister to the poor?

Q 5: Where is the location of these facilities in relation to the people it is intended to serve?

Q 6: Who facilitated these programs?

Q7: What is the frequency of these programs?

Q 8: What is the personal story of those who are benefiting from this witness?

Q 9: What is the impact of this witness?

**ANNEXURE TO CHAPTER 6: CHARISMATIC EVANGELICAL RESPONSE  
TO POVERTY IN SA**

**Report On Interviews With Leading Figures In Regional/Local Churches  
In the Charismatic Pentecostal Evangelical Churches**

This is a report on interviews with key leaders of local churches within the Charismatic Pentecostal Evangelical Church, with a reflection on an interpretation of their experience of poverty, their theology or teachings in relation to their response to poverty and the relationship between the work of the church and poverty.

**4. Pastor Glen Schroedder – Christian Revival Centre**

This church is part of the IFCC and is situated in a Durban North suburb. It is a multiracial church with people from different backgrounds.

**The Experience of Poverty**

Pastor Schroeder estimates that 30 to 40 % of his congregation is affected by poverty. The rest of them are either middle class or relatively wealthy. Most of those who are poor have been assimilated into the church through outreach programmes that the church initiated in Kwa-Mashu Township, a previously disadvantaged area. They believe that the poor and the rich need each other as members of the church of Christ. The rich and the poor can assist each other in being empowered by using their respective gifts and resources. Therefore they should exist harmoniously in society.

Poverty in their context normally manifests through lack of finances, food and access to essential services like ablutions. Although money can help deal with other survival needs it cannot give people respect and help them find dignity. What accompanies this

deprivation is the people's need to have their rights and dignity as human beings respected. Other needs that are commonly faced by the underprivileged, include:

- Empowerment for work, so that people can access job opportunities that would give them a better future and greater hope than their current situation in abject poverty.
- Dealing with the repercussions of the Aids pandemic such as Aids orphans. Thus they want to build an orphanage.
- Restoration of people's dignity that culminates in a change of attitudes and mindset. They need to know how to catch a fish for themselves instead of just getting a fish always.

Poverty is part of their life as a church and they have to deal with it in their ministry.

### **Theology/Teachings of the Church in Relation to Poverty**

In their teachings they propagate the gospel, which, in Pastor Schroedder's view is relevant to people in their situation. Their teachings have a two-fold perspective or approach. Firstly, they believe that one earns the right to speak into people's lives. Secondly, their mission must inspire people. The hungry were Christ's biggest constituency. Therefore they seek to give hope and faith that is practical to the deprived. They look at practical means to respond to the needs of the poor in application of the various teachings of Jesus that were pro-poor.

They have been open to learn from the poor in a manner that has enriched their faith. One of the lessons they have learnt in ministry to the poor is:

- The extent of damage that poisonous cultures wreak on people. The apartheid regime affected both the poor and the rich negatively – spiritually, psychologically and socially.

### **Response to Poverty**

They have also adopted the concept of *Vukuzenzele* [meaning do it for yourself, in Zulu] in their approach to ministry in the situation of poverty. These are the things they do:

- They inspire people to grab their opportunity for development. This can only happen when they help them to see those opportunities for development that are available in society.
- They assist people in acquiring basic education, to be literate and to function in a modern society.
- They feed the desperate to give them strength so that they may continue to work on their dreams of self-reliance.

In retrospect, they are not satisfied that they have done enough in their witness to the disadvantaged. They feel they can still do more themselves, and also draw more people from across the spectrum of their multiracial church to participate in the ministry to the poor.

### **The Relationship Between Poverty and the Work of the Church**

As a young church they feel they still have to develop their strategies and programmes and increase their resources. They realized that poverty is an inescapable reality in their community. It is increasingly becoming a focal point in their ministry. This ministry cannot be separated from the mission of the church, since the church is sent into a society that is grappling with issues of destitution.

#### **5. Pastor Johannes Monosi – Healing Mission Centre**

This is a congregation in Turflaagte in Mangaung – Bloemfontein, in the Free State Province. This congregation is in an area where there are informal settlements and low cost [RDP] housing. The actual church building is a shack made out of corrugated iron sheeting. The Pastor is Johannes Monosi. This is an independent Charismatic Church.

### **The Experience of Poverty**

He estimates that 70% of his congregation is affected by poverty. The majority live in squatter camps and their church is in an area of government-provided RDP houses. Poverty in this area hits families hard. All the members of the family are affected adversely by deprivation. It becomes obvious amongst children and youth when one notices their appearance. They are mostly emaciated for lack of good nutrition and have no decent clothing appropriate to the weather, particularly in wintertime. The church has been measuring the levels of poverty by looking at the following indicators:

- The types of clothing people wear. The clothes that I observed were very old and worn out.
- The conditions of the areas of residence. The majority of their members live in informal settlements and low cost housing.
- The contributions / offerings people bring to the church. These have been minimal, reflecting their abject poverty.

His community is really struggling to live a decent life due to impoverishment. These are the current problems that they have identified in their community:

- Lack of employment, there is large-scale unemployment in the area.
- Lack of interest in education, especially after the youths have been to an initiation school for rites of passage into adulthood [lebollo].
- Poor road infrastructure.
- Limited access to and unaffordability of electricity.
- Lack of proper housing, many people are shanty dwellers.

### **Theology/Teachings in Relation to Poverty**

For Pastor Monosi poverty is very bad condition for any human being to cope with. It sometimes affects people's ability and motivation to take responsibility for their lives. It damages people in the following areas:

- Their minds



- It creates low or lack of self-esteem.
- It affects concentration and motivation to be engaged in meaningful learning.

Therefore they believe that the church should be involved in ministry that assists the poor in their desperation. As a church they have a vision to run the following:

- Job creation initiatives, which has stalled due to lack of capacity and resources.
- Education – thus they are at the moment running a crèche.

As a church they prefer a practical message. They proclaim the gospel to equip their members to deal with the challenges of impoverishment that they are facing daily. Their teachings encapsulate the following aspects:

- Teaching people to have hope. They encourage people to trust in God in appalling conditions of poverty.
- Giving and sharing. They encourage a spirit in which people will continue to share the resources they have when they have been fortunate to receive something.
- They encourage the poor to use the available legitimate opportunities that they have to empower themselves.

Ministering to the poor has been both a painful and a value-adding experience. It has been disturbing to interact with people who are just desperately battling to survive due to poverty. But, it has also been enlightening to learn from them in their journey of faith despite their numerous trials and tribulations. These are the lessons that Pastor Monosi has learnt from the poor:

- a. Humbleness, the genuineness of faith and the simplicity of ordinary people as they go about their lives.
- b. Dedication, hard work and gratitude of the poor. When given an opportunity to work, they show wholehearted commitment.

As a church they are inspired by those lessons; therefore they try to make a difference and, within their available means, to serve the needy. They realize that they can still do more.

## **Response to Poverty**

In this situation affected by poverty, this is how the Healing Mission Centre responded:

1. They have put their trust in the Lord to see them through their struggles against poverty. For them it is a matter of exercising their faith in God to help them get out of this desperate situation.
2. They are running a crèche to assist parents by providing child-minding services as the parents seek to make a living in their odd jobs. This project, however, is challenged in terms of funding since they depend on irregular and meagre contributions from disadvantaged parents.
3. They are running a small-scale programme of home-based care for frail people. Due to lack of funding this scheme could not be expanded.
4. Distribution of food parcels to a few families that are the most desperate.

The objectives of the abovementioned ministry initiatives are:

- To provide relief to families in distress by assisting them with their immediate needs.
- Job creation to enable people to be self-employed in order for them to be able to be self-supporting.

In their self-examination of their witness amongst the disadvantaged, they feel they have not done enough due to their limited resources. The prevalent needs of the community are too complex for them to handle alone. They do not think they have made great inroads in dealing with these enormous social problems haunting their community.

## **The Relationship Between Poverty and the Work of the Church**

Ministering to the poor is part of the broad commission given by God to the church, to go into the world. Therefore they cannot exclude it from their mission as a local congregation. They draw their inspiration from Jesus. He preached to everyone, but also fed those who were poor. You can never preach effectively to someone who is hungry.

Before you can proclaim the gospel to the famished you need to deal adequately with their need. Jesus did the same. He never neglected the needs of the poor in his ministry. In ministering to the poor, they seek to involve the members of the congregation and the community. They have found this to be beneficial due to the fact that they have found people in the community who have skills that church members do not possess. They find it necessary to train the people who get involved, to ensure the sustainability of the projects. In the crèche project, for instance, they had to expose personnel to appropriate training so that they can add value to the undertaking.

They report that their witness has had some modest impact on their community. The notable difference is in training. Although a person probably receives just a stipend for the kind of services that he provides, the skills and experience acquired through participation in projects are proving to be valuable. They open doors to better opportunities of employment in private sector or self-employment. Their community development initiatives have been limited in the following areas that should be improved significantly:

- Efficient management of current and future ministry projects.
- Increasing resources. This could be done, by networking with strategic organizations or structures.

## **General**

Their funding is not very consistent since it comes from the same impoverished community they serve. At the moment they spend 30 to 40 % of their income on relief programmes for families and orphans. They support three families. The rest they have assisted to obtain social grants through government foster care programmes. Some of their donors are other NGO's, which in turn depend on other donors. When contributions dry up, there is little they can do. Yet, despite these stumbling blocks they still seek to care for the poor. Therefore, there is a high level of awareness in the community that they are a caring church. The community is developing trust for them as a ministry.

## **6. Bishop Zondo – Rivers of Living Waters Ministries**

Rivers of living Water Ministries is situated in the township of Evaton, in the Vaal Triangle, Gauteng.

### **The Experience of Poverty**

According to Bishop Zondo, almost 60 % of his congregation and community are affected by poverty. Poverty is real challenge facing his people. These are the needs that they have identified amongst the poor:

- Education
- Skills development – for people to be self-employed.
- Combating child abuse

In profiling the poor they have discovered that poverty affects children the most.

They use a system of ‘cell groups’ to identify the needs of the poor. People fellowship through the cell groups. Through the cells system people are known by name, also where they live and the quality of their lives.

### **Theology/Teachings in Relation to Poverty**

For him poverty is a state of mind. If people can change their thinking they can change their environment. People’s mentality becomes affected negatively in a self-limiting way by the conditions of impoverishment. Thus in their message they seek to change people’s mindset if it has been impaired by poverty. Therefore they use the gospel to change people’s behaviour, lifestyle and relationship with Christ. The good news to the poor is that the gospel has come to transform their lives. They also use success stories as testimonies to inspire people in their struggle to defeat their impoverishment. The Bishop also tells his own story to his constituency for that purpose. As a street kid, he could not tolerate the conditions of poverty. But transformation in his life only began with the transformation of his mindset after being motivated by successful people who had

previously been poor. He came to believe that if others could extricate themselves from poverty with the help of God and friends – so could he.

Their Christian witness in the context of poverty has contributed towards their overall growth as a church. These are some of the lessons that they have learnt in their ministry amongst the poor:

1. Poor people have something to offer. If they could be trained and given the opportunity they would probably be able to help themselves. Some are just lazy, but there are those who just need training and an opportunity to implement their ideas towards self-sufficiency.
2. Ministering in the situation of poverty has helped Bishop Zondo to realize that he can be a beacon of hope to his people. This has enriched his life.

### **Response to Poverty**

The Rivers of Living Waters Ministries have embarked on various programmes to assist the poor. Below are some of their initiatives:

- Tutoring of school-going learners to help them master certain subjects that are problematic to them.
- Coaching people in business skills to enable them to become entrepreneurs.
- *Stokvel* type, saving initiatives, with people pooling their resources to enable contributing members to start their own business ventures. They have their own business forum which was started early in 2004 to help people to network and support one another in their business endeavours.
- Developing personal financial skills – budgeting etc. This is to boost people's financial literacy, which is essential for their survival. They also aspire to produce millionaires from the grassroots.
- Running a feeding scheme. Since 1996 they have provided Sunday meals for disadvantaged people. The church has made a commitment to feed the hungry within their community in the Vaal Triangle and around SA. Apart from donating to community development organizations, they make sure that every Sunday after

- the church service, they give food to those who don't have any. People who have been on the feeding scheme have been absorbed into their business forum so that they may be empowered to fend for themselves.
- Distribution of clothing. They have made an undertaking to clothe those without clothes.

### **The Relationship Between Poverty and the Work of the Church**

Ministering to the poor is so important to the Rivers of Living Waters Ministries, that they have included it in their mission statement, which defines their objectives as follows:

- To preach God's Word to all people at all costs
- To preach good news to the poor
- To clothe the naked
- To give hope to the hopeless
- To give love to the unloved
- To give a warm welcome to those who visit.

Therefore programmes to minister to the poor are not just incidental, but part of their mission of their vision as a church. They embark on these projects to realize their ministry vision. A passage from Scripture, 3 John 2, is their inspiration in their response to poverty. Their dream is to assist people to live life to the fullest, to be healthy, and prosperous in all areas of their lives. These initiatives to reach out to the poor are not just side activities they add to their ministry, but part of their total ministry as a church that is indivisible. They have one ministry as a church that has different projects and activities that are linked to each other. When they feed a person who is hungry, it is part of their witness. Between their Sunday services they feed 300 people. This is in addition to the families that are on their monthly nutritional programme and who are supplied with groceries. Their modus operandi is to put poor families into a nutritional programme for two years. In the course of the two years, these people are taught to use faith and are provided with the skills they require to become employed. Their target is that in two

years or less those who have been supported should be self-sufficient. Their view is that they help the poor to stand up, but subsequently they should be able to walk on their own.

They insist on involving the poor in their own empowerment. Their approach is not to do things for the poor but to do things with them. They propagate partnership with them, doing things together. This approach has enabled them to see progress in their initiatives. They selected two people and trained them in agriculture. These people have progressed to being trainers of others to pass on the skills that they have acquired. When people use those agricultural skills successfully they are helping themselves.

Despite these achievements, Bishop Zondo's church still wishes to improve. Increasing their resources is a priority. This is achieved in part by helping their own people to become givers, so that they in turn can help others who are distressed. They insist on involving their church members in their ministry activities. It is their usual practice to have meetings with people to discuss ministry issues, and give feedback, so that supporters may buy into the vision of the church. The surrounding community has a high level of awareness of their community programmes and are encouraged by the church's deeds of compassion among the poor and victims of crime. Dealing with issues of crime and poverty ultimately benefits everybody.

## **General**

Rivers of Living Waters Ministry use 5% of their total income to minister to the poor. They are a self-funding church.

### **7. Pastor Buti David Molutsi – God's Tabernacle Christian Family Church**

This is an independent Charismatic Church, which was started in 1994. It is situated in the township of Seshego, in Polokwane, Limpopo.

### **The Experience of Poverty**

Pastor Molutsi estimates that about 60 % of their church membership is affected by poverty. Many of them come from the Township of Seshego and the surrounding villages in the greater Polokwane area. Women are the ones who feel the heat of poverty the most since their husbands are migrant workers in Gauteng and other areas in South Africa. These women depend on their husbands who to send them money to support them and their children. School-going kids are also severely affected by poverty, followed by young pregnant girls. It seems that some fall pregnant just to access the social grant that young mothers get from government. Below is the criterion they apply to measure poverty in their situation:

- Assess people's ability to acquire means to live. When they do not have the means to buy enough food and clothing and cannot afford to buy or build a proper shelter, they would be regarded as poor.

### **Theology/Teachings in Relation to Poverty**

From the Bible they deduce that Jesus' mission was to relieve the poor from their poverty. They believe that it is God's will to deliver people from impoverishment. This is why Jesus addressed the needs of the disadvantaged when they came to Him. They read from the Scriptures, 3 John 2 that says, "Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers." According to Pastor Molutsi, the text addresses three issues: the physical aspect and the issue of health, the spiritual aspect with reference to the soul and the material aspect with reference to prospering in all things. It is his conviction that God wants people's essential needs to be satisfied. Therefore in their church they preach that God desires to meet all the fundamental needs of people. If they apply certain biblical principles they should expect God to do a miracle in their lives. They should not lose hope and think that their lives will never change for the better. The church gives the poor hope in their despair and urges them to look up to God who wants to meet their needs and deliver them from poverty. They do not only



focus on their immediate needs, they believe that God can also break the shackles of dependency so that they may live better lives. They should not remain victims of destitution who have to believe for their daily miracle in order to survive, but should rather be self-reliant and confident of meeting their basic needs themselves.

This is how they have conceptualised their position on their witness in the situation of poverty in their mission statements. They describe their vision as follows:

1. To touch the deprived by giving them hope.
2. To look at the status of their immediate needs whether they have shelter, food and clothing, and then to address those immediate needs.
3. To assess the people's talents so that they may use what they have to improve their situation. They would run programmes aimed at job creation or youth empowerment to help young people to start businesses. These programmes would teach among other things, how to draw up a business, sales and marketing plan. They would conduct workshops with the support of experts in various fields. These projects would be geared for the youth but would be open to adults who are keen to participate. In helping people to start their own business, the objective is to assist them to be self-reliant.

The poor are not the only ones who have benefited from their witness. The church leaders themselves learned important lessons from their interaction with the poor. These are some of the lessons learnt in ministry amongst the poor, namely:

- They had become aware of the vulnerability of the poor. They will accept anything, just because they are starving. The task of the Christian is to help the poor not to be abused in their defencelessness, and to reach out to them lovingly without exploiting their susceptibility as an opportunity to convert them into Christianity. They should reflect Jesus' kindness, and his desire that they should be freed from poverty.
- They have experienced a unique fulfilment in their efforts to help the disadvantaged. Service to the poor gives church leaders an opportunity to share

with them what God has provided. Taking part in this kind of ministry is what brings contentment.

### **Response to Poverty**

These are the projects they have initiated in ministry amongst the poor:

1. They seek to address people's needs through the small groups that people are allocated to in the church. Those who have jobs or are self-employed are encouraged to be on the look out for employment opportunities for group members who are unemployed. This kind of networking works very well. It opens opportunities for employment and empowering business deals.
2. They run workshops for aspirant business people who are disadvantaged. The intention is to build their capacity and to provide the relevant business skills they need to start and run their own viable businesses.
3. They encourage people to make contributions to stock up their church food and clothes bank with non-perishable food, and clothes that are still in a good condition. These are collected and distributed to the disadvantaged.

The Christian Centre has been running poverty alleviation programmes as their witness to the gospel of Christ since 1998.

Their church has been constantly evaluating its ministry initiatives. According to their own assessment of their ministry to the poor they have not implemented all their programmes as they had envisaged. They still want to do more. Thus they have future programmes that they would seek to pursue, such as:

- Relaunching their vegetable garden project with the intention of making it sustainable.
- Starting an orphanage for children whose parents died due to HIV/Aids infection.

The final goal of these projects is to empower persons or groups to achieve success and then to continue to multiply their initiatives to touch other members of the community.

## **The Relationship Between Poverty and the Work of the Church**

Their understanding of the mission of their church is summarized as follows:

1. To lead people to experience God
2. To remove obstacles that are in the way of people trying to reach God. One of these hindrances is poverty. This is their reason for being involved in poverty alleviation initiatives.

Their church approaches ministry as a common witness in which the entire congregation participates. People are involved as volunteers in programmes where they can use their expertise. They are involved at various stages and levels of the ministry to the poor according to their knowledge, skill and experience. Their youth development programme is solely run by the youth, for instance. They are responsible for its leadership, programming and research to acquire essential data that is critical for their programmes. They take care of everything, even to the extent of liaising with external organizations and government structures like the National Youth Commission. In terms of their programmes the youth leadership would invite relevant facilitators to run their workshops, and obtain pertinent information about career development from tertiary institutions like UNISA. This information is distributed amongst the youth.

In their witness to the deprived they have seen some noticeable encouraging results. They have noticed tremendous improvements in the life of the people they have assisted. In many cases the poor now have food, shelter and clothing that have made a difference to the quality of their lives. There are those who have made better decisions concerning their career options, and are now enrolled in various tertiary institutions, acquiring professional qualifications. Some enterprises have been started by entrepreneurs who were once unemployed, while some of their peers through the church's grape vine have been assisted to find employment. Their testimony is that, because of the great improvement in their own circumstances, they have managed to assist others who are still struggling.

But this church is striving to become even more effective in their witness amongst the impoverished. These are proposed areas of improvement in their ministry to the poor:

- They seek to move away from concentrating only on members of their church to attending also to the poor outside their local church. They hope to extend these services to benefit the broader community beyond the walls of the church. They want to reach out to the community with no strings attached to their witness. They would not require people to join the church in order to have access to any assistance or programmes of development.
- They would like to consistently make donations to NGO's whose cause is the poor, like those assisting victims in times of floods. They have previously been giving donations of cash, and clothing to a government fund that assists people during disasters, and would now liked to resume their support. They intend to be more involved as a church in situations like these to bring relief to the traumatized victims of disasters.

## **General**

They allocate 10 % of their annual income to assisting the disadvantaged. This funding comes from the members of their local congregation. Their members believe in the vision of the church and in its quest to help the poor; therefore they give generously towards that cause. The church has a challenge to open its doors to more needy people from the community. Members of the broader community are not fully aware of the fact that they could turn to the church for assistance in times of dire need. Church leaders certainly would like to improve this situation so that more people could be brought into the relief net of the congregation. They are planning to use their under-utilised infrastructure more effectively to expand their ministry into the community. The following projects have been proposed:

- Use of land. A plot has been donated to the church where they hope to build an orphanage. They also plan to utilize the open space on the premises of the church for a vegetable garden project.

- They are in the process of buying a house to provide temporary shelter for orphans.

The Christian Centre has vowed to continue to be a church that is sensitive to the needs of the poor.

## **8. Pastor Blessing Selepe – Family Support Ministries**

The Family Support Ministries is an independent Charismatic Church that was started by Pastor Selepe, in Polokwane, Limpopo.

### **The Experience of Poverty**

In their setting in Polokwane they are experiencing extreme levels of poverty, which they estimate to be 80 % of their church membership. This is followed by a high incidence of HIV/Aids infection within their constituency. The profile of those who are poor is as follows:

- Women – many have a rural background with little or no education.
- Single parents [divorcees, widows and those who never married]
- The unemployed, especially women.
- Pastors and their families. When a pastor dies his children and wife are normally evicted from the mission house to make way for the newly appointed pastor. The pastors are so poor that they leave no inheritance to secure the future of their family – who are left destitute, like the widow in Elijah's story.

They use common indicators that put a spotlight on basic needs to assess the levels of impoverishment in their community. In their interaction with people, they take notice of the:

- Type of clothing
- Quality of food
- Kind of shelter.

Many of the poor wear substandard clothing, and make do with food and shelter, which are not suitable for any human being. Below is a list of the common problems that they have positioned themselves as a congregation to deal with in their community:

- Family instability and disintegration. Help to stabilize the family and manage relationships that might have been destabilized by divorce.
- Support families to eradicate domestic violence [Abuse of wives and children occurs regularly, with a small incidence of husband abuse – which is all the more devastating for its secrecy and silence].
- Unemployment.
- Reach out to children, who have left school without skills to participate actively as productive citizens.
- Address the issues of suicides. It seems there is progressive increase in suicide attempts amongst some of the poor.

### **Theology/Teachings Relation to Poverty**

The Scriptures influence the church's view of poverty. In reading the Scriptures they are inspired by Luke 4:18, which portrays the centrality of the poor in the mission of Christ, orchestrated by the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God introduced a new order in which the liberation of the poor was promulgated as part of the new covenant that Christ had inaugurated through his life and ministry on earth. This new order heralded a dispensation in which God himself through Christ declared the freedom of the disadvantaged from any form of bondage, oppression and marginalization. Therefore, the poor have a right to be free from any form of deprivation and live in dignity, being well supplied as children of God, with them being properly integrated as productive members of the community, making a meaningful contribution to their society with their God-given talents.

In their view poverty ruins the dreams of the poor. It is not good news to be poor, it is a nightmare. Many of the poor are borrowers who are trapped in debts. They are victims of loan sharks who are plundering their livelihood and property by charging exorbitant

interest rates. They are like the widow in Elijah's times, who was pauperised by moneylenders who demanded settlement of their debts at the death of her husband (c.f. 2Kin 4). Many of the poor, including the pastors' wives and families are as vulnerable, having no secure source of revenue. They also realize that poverty results in the exclusion of the poor from significant sectors of the community. The poor are usually undesirable guests in some places of worship, educational institutions, and socio-economic institutions. Poverty disadvantages the poor because it disrupts meaningful relationships and isolates them to powerlessness in obscurity. They are people who are just seen, but ignored and never taken seriously because they do not have wealth. Even the Scriptures say in Proverbs. 19:4, "Wealth makes many friends, but the poor is separated from his friends." The pain of deprivation is not only to lack basics but also to be cut off from humanity because you are devalued as a result of your poverty. Your material status makes others to be ashamed to associate with you.

They are teaching and working with the poor to reveal their potential. They teach them to accept the fact that they cannot change their sad past, since it is gone. Yet, they must not allow their dreams to die with their gloomy past. Rather, they should realize they were born with a purpose. The evidence of their purpose is in the abilities they possess. It is the church's role to motivate them to explore their potential, to provide them with knowledge and skills and to guide them in the direction of opportunities for empowerment. It should try to open doors for them, through using their gifts, so that they may be employed in some productive activity that would become their source of income. The poor should not be left to waste away in negativity and lack and thus neglect their abilities, whereas they can be employed, rise from poverty and use these assets.

With hindsight they think that ministering to the poor has brought life-changing experiences. They have learned important lessons, including the following:

1. To correct their own stereotypical reactions to the poor. Ministering to the poor has uncovered the wrong perceptions that they had of them.
2. The poor have a rich culture and tradition that need to be considered when we do ministry amongst them. This is critical in their empowerment because

development must take cognisance of their culture and traditions, which are part of their setting.

3. Treat them with respect and encourage them to speak and participate in their own development.

### **Response to Poverty**

From 1998 to 2003 the Family Support Ministries have experimented with various poverty alleviation projects, which are described below.

- They supplied between 150 and 200 families with mealie meal. They had an agreement with a milling company to supply mealie meal at a discounted price. The beneficiaries of this feeding scheme were people infected and affected by HIV/AIDS, desperate or needy families. But they discovered that in the long-term giving food to people was not sustainable. Now they have changed their strategy. They are buying mealie meal to sell it to the community. The poor are enlisted to sell the mealie meal, earning their own supply by working for it.
- They train people to provide home-based care for the frail in the community.
- They assist people who were victims of sexual molestation – often perpetrated by false prophets masquerading as ‘preachers.’
- They are running a resource centre to disseminate important information to unemployed youth and the poor about where they could find help to start a business - since they noticed low levels of awareness about available opportunities for empowerment. Some help is available through government-created enterprise development agencies like Khula Trust, Umsombovu Fund and Seta learnerships for sector-based skills development.

From February 2004 they have initiated the following programmes in ministry to the poor:

- Partnerships NICRO AND SAPS – CPF initiatives dealing with issues of development and health as a way of preventing crime.



- Empowerment of church leaders who are struggling to maintain themselves and their families. They conduct weekly workshops with the help of established local entrepreneurs to help these leaders to start businesses or provide a service that can be used for income generation. This project was launched with five pastors. The model of the Apostle Paul who used his tent-making trade to support himself inspires it. Initially it was a struggle for ministers to embrace this concept since they never thought about earning their livelihood in this manner. But their attitudes about making money are changing whilst they continue to do ministry. Leaders should be helped, since they are tempted to keep the goods that are supposed to be disbursed to the poor for themselves.

Through the years of their ministry they have been seeking to achieve two objectives, namely:

- To contribute to the establishment of healthy, godly and nurturing families in the community.
- To inform and educate the poor about various available options for self-improvement and empowerment

They have been focusing on achieving these aims whilst making continuous adjustments to their ministry strategies in their witness to the poor. These are some of the areas that they seek to improve:

- They need to assist more families of church leaders to improve the quality of their lives by supporting the prophets of God to acquire skills through which they could be making a living whilst they continue to serve the poor.
- They should double their efforts and pace in assisting people in job creation.

### **General**

They work with a very limited budget. Their funding is mainly derived from their own congregation, friends, government and families impacted by their ministry.

## **9. Pastor Dublin Poswa – Full Gospel Church**

Pastor Poswa is the pastor of the local Full Gospel Church (Pentecostal) that is located in Southern Umtata, in the Eastern Cape.

### **The Experience of Poverty**

About 20 % of Pastor Dublin Poswa's present congregation is employed the rest is unemployed. This means about 80 % of the church membership is not engaged in any serious productive activity and income generation endeavour. It is this great number of people that are affected by poverty. Yet being employed per se does not necessarily mean they all work under desirable employment conditions. Even those who are employed may earn low wages. Poverty is a social problem in this church and the community. They use these indicators to detect poverty:

- Observing people's appearance in terms of clothing and wellness of their bodies.
- Assessing the kind of shelter they live in with their families.
- Whether they have the ability to fulfil their obligations to the ministry as church members, in making contributions.

In most cases those who are impoverished wear shabby clothes, and have emaciated bodies due to lack of proper nutrition. They live in substandard shelters and are unable to make contributions to the church coffers. Church leaders have identified the following common problems in this community:

- Lack of good nutrition
- Joblessness
- Poor clothing.

Poverty is widespread in their community and it devastates families.

### **Theology/Teachings in Relation to Poverty**

Poverty is a scourge that must be fought; therefore they must create resources for people to continue to live a respectable life. Their message is that the poor should not resign themselves to the conditions of poverty and passively succumb to misery. God never

created poverty; therefore nobody must ever be content within deprivation that is the legacy of injustice. The authentic good news should address their needs and never preach contentment with the situation of marginalisation. The church should seek all possible means to encourage self-employment in order for the poor to be self-sufficient. With formal employment being scarce, the unemployed should be supported to run their own enterprises.

Their teachings as a church have been tested in living their Christian life within the communities of the poor. This is the lesson that has been derived from life in that context:

- The poor have a very deep dedication to God. They give themselves unreservedly to the Lord; therefore they are closer to God, despite their sufferings. It seems they have this profound belief that God would provide for them. Thus poverty has made them strong in their faith. They have the advantage of being nearer to God.

### **Response to Poverty**

These are some of the programmes the Full Gospel Church has launched as part of their witness to the poor:

- Distribution of clothing
- Giving of foodstuffs.

The church welfare committee facilitates these initiatives as part of their service to the community. They are the ones who look into the needs of the people in the church and respond to any situation that has been identified. In cases of children who have needs in areas of education, members of the congregation are enlisted to support those children. Their programmes have been running for the past three years. But with the enormity of the community needs exceeding their capacity, they have not coped in their witness to address all of them. In their opinion they have not responded adequately to the challenges of poverty. The major stumbling block in certain instances was the selfishness of those who were hesitant to help those who were disadvantaged.

### **The Relationship Between Poverty and the Work of the Church**

They have found it necessary to network with organizations that help the poor. Just because they have limited resources, it does not mean that they neglect their ministry to the destitute. This ministry is an integral part of their mission as church in this world. But they prefer to assign church members who have passion for this ministry to the poor to lead this process. Meanwhile they also involve church members broadly in various activities of this ministry. But the latter do not have a sense of ownership like those who are in the forefront. There is no direct involvement of poor community members as stakeholders in these ministry initiatives that assist them. The church's community development ministry has had limited scope. The impact of poverty alleviation initiatives has been assessed, by looking at how it has changed the lives of a few people. This is not measured in whether they ultimately join the church or not. The church has continued to channel part of its resources to the poor. Their poverty alleviation projects are funded through gifts from church members and donations from other NGO's that are involved in development. From their own church coffers they have dedicated just below 10 % of their annual income in their budget to issues of poverty.

#### **10. Pastor Thembinkosi Ntongana – Africa Evangelical Church**

Pastor Ntongana is the pastor of the Africa Evangelical Church, in Umtata, in the Eastern Cape. This is a local church that is part of the Africa Evangelical Church denomination.

##### **The Experience of Poverty**

In Pastor Ntongana's view about 80 % of the congregation is affected by poverty. This poverty is having an impact largely on families. These are families of former migrant workers who have lost jobs through retrenchments. Many mines and companies that were downsizing had to lay off many workers. Some of those workers came from his area; and their families have lost their stable disposable income. These breadwinners are currently at home, jobless. The retrenchment packages paid to these workers have been depleted since they were used for survival rather than for income generation initiatives. Women

suffer the most because many of them were not employed before their spouses were retrenched.

They measure the prevalence of poverty, by looking at the following indicators:

- The general progress of the church in its ministry. In their case they have experienced slow progress in the growth of their overall ministry due to prevalent poverty. They lack the means to implement their ecclesiastical programmes; therefore they are struggling to meet their own needs as a church. Their members are unable to make contributions to the church.
- People's ability to afford to pay for their living expenses. Some cannot pay their landlords for their rented accommodation.
- People's employability. A number of matriculants have completed their high school but for several years they have been at home, unemployed and unable to access opportunities for further education. Such people turn to the church to assist them in surviving.

The common needs in their community are as follows:

- Education; especially the need for further education of the matriculating youth and development of other members of the population to be skilled and re-skilled for employability and entrepreneurship. There is a need for self-employment training that would foster sustainability, such as in catering services.
- Encouragement. People need to be stimulated to use their talents in areas such as music, for development purposes. It is important that our people be motivated to use their different talents to earn their livelihood, and to use the same zeal for church activities in the community.

### **Theology/Teachings in Relation to Poverty**

Jesus challenged us to be the salt and the light in our community. The Christian's task therefore is to take responsibility for bringing a positive influence into a situation of poverty. Pastor Ntongana's church feels challenged to take concrete action to deal with

issues of poverty in their community. They have already started a project to work with taxi operators in their community, helping them to run a viable business. These taxi operations, are evolving from just being a survival enterprise to being more profitable.

In trying times their message is that:

- People should learn to trust in God, depend on God as their source. People should be socialized to know that they couldn't live a fulfilling life outside the Lord.
- Trusting God should enable them to find their purpose and generate ideas that can transform their lives productively. Each person needs to discover his or her calling, which will orchestrate a process of development and prosperity in that person's life.

In their witness to the poor, church leaders have also been influenced by those disadvantaged members of the community. These are the lessons that they have picked up in ministering amongst the poor:

- They need to take responsibility and fulfil their role as Christians in a community that is disadvantaged. They cannot opt to be bystanders when there is a call for community transformation that they should support. They have learned that they should harness their strength in searching for novel solutions to tackle the giant of poverty and other related issues in the community.
- It is important to train people to have the life skills and other vital skills they need to be self-sufficient. They cannot just teach the gospel of God's kingdom without addressing the mundane needs of the poor.

### **Response to Poverty**

In responding to the challenges of poverty these are some of the initiatives they took:

- Vegetable gardens
- Helping people start their own businesses so that they should not have to depend on formal employment provided by organizations and business.

At the moment they have just implemented about 2 % of their intended poverty alleviation programmes. The majority of their programmes have not run effectively because of lack of funds.

### **The Relation Between Poverty and the Work of the Church**

Ministering to the poor is high on the agenda of the African Evangelical Church. It cannot be separated from the mission of the church, since the church itself is overwhelmed by deprivation. As a leader, Pastor Ntongana could not be insensitive to the prevalence of poverty in society, because it is a reality he sees in his own church. He realizes that before they could even reach out to the poor outside the church, they will have to attend to the very poor in their church. For this reason they have launched few initiatives to assist the broader community. Therefore, in ministering to the impoverished, they have not broadly involved members of their church in any community projects. They have, however, networked with established NGO's hoping to acquire skills to strengthen their witness in the community that is beleaguered by poverty. They have identified the following areas in which they want to improve their witness:

- Ministering to people with needs created by HIV-AIDS.
- Providing the poor with basic necessities.

The African Evangelical Church has come to realize that they still need to grow in their capacity and involvement in poverty alleviation activities.

### **General**

The church is struggling to maintain a steady and positive cash flow. They have an impoverished support base that is their only source of income as a congregation. Thus the pastor has to work part-time or become involved in secular enterprises to support his livelihood.

## **11. Pastor Thomas Makhubu, Arise Bible Church.**

Pastor Makhubu is the pastor Arise Bible Church, which is an independent Charismatic local Church located in Taung, in the North West.

### **The Experience of Poverty**

Pastor Makhubu estimates that over 80 % of his congregation is affected by poverty. Many members of his church, like others in the community are unemployed. Those who are fortunate to be employed earn low wages. In their area it is common for a breadwinner who is employed to earn around R500 a month. This is not enough to support a family of up to eight members. Therefore the standard of living of the poor is very low. Men are affected by poverty, but women and children are affected even more. In some families women are the breadwinners. Church officials monitor people's standard of living to assess their level of poverty. These are the indicators that they use:

- Type of housing – their church is situated in an area where the majority of dwellings are low cost houses [government-provided RDP houses] or shacks. Even the quality of furniture inside their houses is poor.
- The clothes that people wear, especially children.
- The quality of the food they eat.

One of the greatest needs they identified is:

- Education and training in the skills required for relevant employment/self-employment. The education policies of the previous dispensation have created a generation of job seekers who have suppressed their creativity to do something different for a livelihood. The career options of graduating matriculants are limited. Job opportunities even in the police force and teaching professions are oversubscribed. Young people fail to look beyond such obstacles, even when they have potential. Unemployment consequently remains a major problem in the community.



### **Theology/Teachings in Relation to Poverty**

Pastor Makhubu's teachings are meant to encourage people to have faith in God. He highlights the message of Christ who was partial to the poor. When Jesus came to them He sought to address both their physical and spiritual needs. Therefore the church needs to first understand the poor and assist them in their struggles. Furthermore, their message seeks to address the ignorance of people in the community about various opportunities available to them for empowerment. The church tries to provide the matriculating youth with proper career guidance so that they may be productive. They seek to broaden people's horizons and increase their awareness of other streams of professional development. They hope to enhance their exposure to other available avenues of growth, in order to increase their options for self-actualisation. Pastor Makhubu cited the example of a job opportunity for a manager for technical services in their municipality, which remained vacant for some time since there was no suitable candidate in their precinct. Someone had to be brought in from a different region and province to fill that post. Vacancies in their region in the health sector are advertised but remain vacant. Thus there is a drive to encourage people, especially the youth, to take their education seriously and to pursue careers that may lead to employment in the community. They recommend fields such as the natural sciences and engineering, since bursaries are available in these disciplines for people who were previously disadvantaged. Such qualifications would render them employable since there is a high demand for such skills.

Serving the poor has taught the church some valuable lessons, such as the ones below:

- It has increased their understanding of poverty in terms of Luke 4:18f. It has also challenged them to broaden their know-how in ministering to the poor.
- They have learned to give and help others who are desperate.

## **Response to Poverty**

The infrastructure and capacity of Pastor Makhubu's church are inadequate to respond to the material needs of people who are poor in their community. Many of their elaborate programmes to minister to the poor are still in their conceptual stage. They are conducting their ministry activities under a roof that is just a canopy to provide shelter from the sun but not from rain, winds and cold. They lack resources to respond to the poor. At the moment they are striving to network with well-resourced churches, non-profit organizations and corporate partners to get support for their ministry to the poor. Whenever they do get donations of food and clothing they distribute them to the community to give relief to those who are desperate. The projects they run are seasonal since they are viable only when they receive external support. They have had the most success with their supportive services offering career advice to school-going children. They have testimonies of individuals who are on the right career path in the legal and engineering fields as a result of timely counselling by the church. Thus the simple counselling and advice offered by the church is making some difference in the lives of young people.

Also, through their sermons they seek to provide spiritual and psychological support to the poor who have to cope with adverse conditions of poverty. The appalling conditions of deprivation in the community plant hopelessness, low morale and a negative outlook on life. This leads to problems of alcohol abuse in the general population and high rates of teen pregnancies amongst the youth. The church uses its teachings to enable people to see their potential despite being surrounded by a depressing environment.

## **The Relationship Between Poverty and the Work of the Church**

Caring for the poor is part of their mandate, included in the great commission. It is this ministry that gives Christians an opportunity to give, not only materially, but also their knowledge, skill, time and other essential resources. Part of the Christian's responsibility is not only to preach to the poor but also to share his resources with them in order to

address their needs. But Pastor Makhubu's church also has to tap into other community resources in order to bolster their response to poverty. Therefore, in ministering to the poor, they strive to involve their community, especially when they work on projects that are done in partnership with government. This is possible because government-sponsored projects are huge and they have structures that promote maximum community participation. Meanwhile the church cannot as yet involve the poor community in their programmes since their meagre budget has prevented them from embarking on any ambitious initiatives.

Pastor Makhubu thinks that their programmes had some impact, but on a small scale, since they are disadvantaged too as ministries. Progress can be tracked in their initiatives but it is happening at a slow pace. They are facing an uphill battle having to work with people who are inclined to depend on others rather than making personal effort. The pastor's aim is to influence their psyche, with a view to turning them into job creators, not job seekers. They do, however, have some success stories of people who are on a promising career path on professions through their support. While some of their peers three years after completing high school, have still not made any progress into starting a career or run their own enterprise. Their ministry has been encouraging those who are poor to live righteously. Just because they are poor and unemployed is not an excuse for them to resort to crime, substance abuse or any hedonistic other behaviour. Rather they should continue to be optimistic that their prospects would change for the better with time. They should not give up on their dreams and succumb to self-destructive behaviour that would ultimately disrupt their lives and those of the community.

Furthermore, they wish to spend more time in their interaction with young people since they have noted that the morale is very low and there is little commitment to sound moral values. The youth are surrounded by and accustomed to seeing and hearing negativity. Consequently, they are perceived to have no interest in education, to lack ethical behaviour and to like loitering. The pastor thinks that the youth are misunderstood in their community and that very few people seek to understand their life world, needs and challenges. Therefore, there is an opportunity to influence young people positively,

despite their background of poverty. Even in their present unfavourable circumstances there is still potential for things to change for the better. The area is rich in mineral resources like diamonds, spring and mineral water, marble and other stones that are used to produce floor tiles. Also there are potential opportunities for tourism. But people in their area are not aware of these opportunities because they are listening to the many negative reports about their area. The church wishes to accelerate its efforts in raising people's awareness about the potential in their area for empowerment so that they could be self-supporting.

Their ministry is open to the community and the community knows that they could turn to them in times of need. This applies especially to those who are in the immediate vicinity of their church. Also, those who have been helped continue to spread the news about the help they have received in times of distress. The community has even invited them to assist in the administration of sports clubs. The church has volunteered its services as part of the leadership team that runs one of their soccer clubs. It is their dream to make a contribution towards the social development of society.

## **Conclusion**

I have reported and interpreted the stories of a few local church leaders within the Charismatic Pentecostal Evangelical movement. They have enabled me to gather valuable data about their Christian witness in a situation of poverty. They have revealed to their different views and points of convergence in ministering to poor. Some of the responses to poverty are sophisticated and well structured, whilst others are just in their rudimentary stage. But the bottom line is that the leaders and their churches are involved in ministries that seek to address the needs of the marginalized. They have chosen not to be passive, but to use the resources at their disposal to fight poverty as part of their mission and work as Christians. They speak with appreciation about the valuable lessons they have derived from their experience ministering to the poor.