

## CHAPTER 3

### THE CHURCH AND THE POOR: HISTORIC OVERVIEW

#### 3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter we were presented with the grim picture of the plight of the poor in the biblical times. In nearly 2000- year history of the Christian church there have been many fruitful missionary periods, for example, the age of the first apostles, the journey of the medieval monks, the era of the padres who accompanied the 16<sup>th</sup> century explorers and conquistadors, and the beginning of Protestant evangelical missions in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. These are only a few instances of committed individual Christians and groups who crossed frontiers in often dangerous and heroic efforts to reach previously un-evangelized territories.

However, this chapter is not a purely historical study, I did not attempt to study poverty in the history of the church in great depth. I used especially the missiology books of B.J Nichols, De Santa Ana and other sources.

Throughout history, churches have had a deep concern for the poor and oppressed. They have been involved in evangelism and Christian social concern. They could not do otherwise but had to maintain their faith in Jesus Christ who came “*to preach good news to the poor and set liberty the oppressed*”. Evangelism and social concern was both seen as two sides of the same coin. If one side of the coin is missing, that coin has lost its

value. Jesus combined evangelism and social involvement in His life and ministry. His ministry was characterized by both proclamation (Kerygma) and service (diakonia). His words and deeds were expressions of compassions for persons.

By focusing on the history of the church throughout the centuries, will help us to understand that beyond any reasonable doubt that there has been a real concern for the poor among Christians. The church exists in history as a visible reality, where a wide range of cultures has shaped its existence and life. The church never exists in a vacuum. Every ecclesiology, therefore, is developed within a particular cultural context. There is no other way to be the church except within a concrete, historical setting. This means that all 'ecclesiologies' must be seen as functioning relative to their context (Van Gelder 2000:40). In this regard, all thinking about the church, all 'ecclesiologies' reflect to some extent the historical circumstances of the eras in which they were developed.

The reality of poverty as a human condition is evident from the beginning of history. The concept of poverty as a social problem is a relatively recent phenomenon. Christianity has always had a concern for the poor.

Even today, there are so many poor people in the informal settlement community churches, who attend Christian celebrations, some of them

participate in Christian liturgy, and they share their religious concerns with Christian communities. However, the problem for them is not whether they are in the Church or not, but the problem is whether the churches represent the poor, or at least if the churches can become representatives of this kind, standing for the fulfillment of the aspirations and hopes of the poor. If we can understand both the strengths and weaknesses of a variety of historical perspectives on mission, this will help us to develop a comprehensive strategy in which we can be able to help the poor in their communities.

Christian missions have always been a result of renewal movement in the church. Such movements, more often than not, attempted to transform their own societies, or at least to focus on evangelism and service to the poor, the marginalized and the oppressed. Thus, it is natural that the missions coming out of such movements took the same concerns for the poor and these missions was the command of Jesus Christ to go into all the world with the Good News, to call people to faith in him, and to plant the churches. Additionally there was the desire to especially manifest the love of Christ to the needy, the hungry, and the poor. This desire was seen as a valid ministry in itself, but it was seen also as a witness to the greater gift of God- the forgiveness and eternal life which came in Christ (Pierson 1985:8)

A part of great debate over the centuries in the church has been whether it is appropriate for churches as organization to engage in social action. Many of them have been engaged to some extent in social action. Whereas some have been involved in social action. I have selected for this chapter a few historical examples, which may help us to see how the church has heard with both ears. The examples reveal that the church, like individual Christians has sometimes had hearing problems with both ears. In the history of the church we encounter a rich and complex story of how the Spirit of God has created, led and taught the church through the centuries.

### **3.2 The Early Church**

The relationship between evangelism and social responsibility in the early church should be looked at from two perspectives: the Jewish-Roman-Hellenistic context, into which the church was born and grew, and the teachings and impact of the New Testament upon the Christian community.

Almost everybody would agree that the early church was evangelistic. The church combined the evangelism and social ministry in her confession. The earliest creed of the church was the quintessence of the gospel message, which the church proclaimed, but it was also a political term. The early Christians were political enough to remember that politicians

had executed Jesus. As the Apostles' Creed said of Him, "*He was crucified under Pontius Pilate*" (Miles 1986: 39).

A second way in which the early church put evangelism and social involvement together was in her internal fellowship. The church's gospel transformed the internal life of the church into an inclusive fellowship. An inclusive church was a consequence and sign of her internal fellowship by proclamation that Jesus is Lord. Hellenistic Jews were brought into the church along with Palestinian Jews on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). The Eunuch from Ethiopia became a Christian (Acts 8). Samaritans were brought in (Acts 8). Cornelius, a Roman centurion, and his Gentile household were added to the faith (Acts 10 and 11). An evangelistic mission was launched to the Gentiles (Acts 13:44-52). A conference at the mother church in Jerusalem concluded that Gentiles did not have to be circumcised in order to become Christians (Acts 15). The Acts of the Apostles closes with Paul in Rome, the capital of the Roman Empire, "*preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ quite openly and unhindered*" (Acts 28:31) (Miles 1986:40).

The Epistle of the New Testament tells the same story of inclusiveness that we read in Acts. That prophecy of Joel 2 was being fulfilled in the church (Acts 2:16-21). God poured out His Spirit upon all- Jews and Gentiles, men and women, young and old. Those who were far off were brought near

in the blood of Christ: *“For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two”* (Ephesians 2:14-15).

Slaves abounded in the Roman Empire, but converted slaves were considered brothers and sisters in the early church. Paul led Onesimus, a runaway slave, to Christ; but Paul sent Onesimus back to Philemon, his owner, calling him *“no longer a slave but more than a slave, a beloved brother both in the flesh and in the Lord”* (Philemon 1:16).

The same apostle who evangelized Onesimus declared: *“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus”* (Galatians 3:28). Aeneas, who had been bedridden for eight years and was paralyzed, heard Peter say to him: *“Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed”* (Acts 9:34). *“all the residents of Lydia and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord”* (Acts 9:35).

The lame beggar at the Temple in Acts 3 is another example. People had to carry the man about. He had been lame from birth. Peter told him, *“I have no silver and gold, but I give you what I have; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk”* (Acts 3:6). What a marvelous sight that must have been!

Where was the evangelism to accompany the social service of healing? A

crowd assembled quickly. Peter began: *“Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk?”* (Acts 3:12). That was the occasion for a sermon in which Peter called the people to repent of their sins and turn to the One who had healed the lame man.

When the seven were appointed (Acts 6) to serve the tables, Luke summarized: *“And the word of God increased; and the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith”* (Acts 6:7). In that instance, an internal act of service to Hellenist widows was coupled with a powerful evangelistic thrust (Miles 1986:42).

The Christians in the early church represented a very small minority. They were often misunderstood by the Jewish-Roman-Hellenistic world.

Knowing that they were a small minority, the Christians were challenged to grow numerically and spiritually by faithful witness in word and deed.

The Christians suffered persecutions under the Roman emperors. They were tortured and executed mercilessly for their faith. To be a Christian was a matter of life and death (Bong 1985:13-14).

The early church’s tremendous concern for the ‘lost,’ caused it greatly to emphasize evangelism. The early church’s concept of ‘conversion’ was

unique. It demanded a complete break from the past pagan life to a new life in Christ. The early church shared their possessions with the needy. As described in Acts 4, Christians in the Jerusalem Church shared their possessions with each other. Such generosity, motivated by deep love for the Lord, made a profound impact on the early church and on society. This willingness to sacrifice self-interest for the sake of others and for the furtherance of the gospel made it possible for Christians to evangelize the Graeco-Roman world by the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. The sacrificial love of these humble believers was the professed allegiance of the overwhelming majority of the population of the Roman Empire (Bong 1985:14).

There is no way we can escape the fact that, in the early church, the disciples followed in the footsteps of our Lord. They shared the good news as He did. The image of the church as a communion of saints was also rooted in direct biblical language in the word 'koinonia' which can be translated as "communion" or "fellowship". They served others like He had done; and they even suffered as He had. The church of the fourth century viewed itself as being one, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic. It was a unified and visible social community that existed in a relational organizational unity throughout the world, displayed the presence of God, and exercised apostolic authority on his behalf through the office of the bishop (Van Gelder 2000:51)



The image of catholic, apostolic, and the communion of saints also touched on the nature of the church. Catholic refers to the church as being universal; meaning that it also, by nature, is able to be inherently contextual in any setting, Apostolic refers to the church as representing God's authority on earth. It also means that the church was founded on the work of the apostles and prophets. Its inclusion confirmed that the church's authority and teaching were based on the work of the original founders of the church. The apostles' authority and teaching were viewed as continuing in the church through the office of the bishop (Van Gelder 2000:50-51).

### **3.3 The Apostolic Fathers**

The Church of the Apostolic Fathers is the "holy and universal Church sojourning in every place". The earliest notions concerning the nature of the church include some kind of universal or catholic idea. There is not just a Church of one race, one nation, or one language. It is a Church "gathered together from the ends of the earth". This idea of the universality of the Christian Church must be understood as the substance behind the word "catholic", first used by Ignatius (c.35-c.107) in his Epistle to the Smyrnaeans where he made the well known statement, "*Wheresoever the bishop shall appear, there let the people be; even as where Jesus may be, there is the universal Church*" (Van Engen 1981:195)

The Apostolic Fathers had a meaningful experience of Jesus Christ, cherished their salvation, and had a deep desire to obey the Great Commission in the pagan world. Their faith was not expressed in words only. Their faith was translated into actions through love and concern for the needy people around them. Practical social concern was the inevitable result of their spiritual conversion. Clement of Rome explained this intimate relationship between justification and good works by saying:

*‘Let the strong care for the weak and let the weak reverence the strong. Let the rich man bestow help on the poor and let the poor give thanks to God, that He gave him one to supply his needs’.*

The Epistle of Barnabas best explains the way of light by saying:

*‘Thou shall share all things with thy neighbor and shall now say that they are thy own property; for if you are shared in that which is incorruptible, how much more in that which is corruptible?’ (Jefford 1995:1,5)*

The Shepherd of Hermes said:

*‘The rich man, therefore, helps the poor in all things without doubting. But the poor man, being helped by the rich, makes intercession to God, giving him thanks’. (Lage 1966:5-7).*

### **3.4 The First Three Centuries (150-325 A.D)**

During this period the motivation for Christian charity changed during this time. During the period of the Apostolic Fathers, Christian charity was the result of spiritual conversion. Good works were one of the fruits of a believer’s new life in Christ. But during the period of the Old Catholic

Church, one of the motives for Christian charity became the hope of future reward. During this period, an organized structure was developed to take care of Christians' social activities on a large scale. Although Christians confined their charity largely to their own community, they also supported the unemployed, orphans, widows, the injured, the sick, and travelers. Churches sent relief goods to other churches during famines and other calamities. Christians were encouraged to fast to help the poor (Bong 1985:16)

#### **3.4.1 Tertulian**

Tertulian encouraged each Christian to deposit a small amount on a certain day of the month according to his or her ability to help the needy (Dowley 1986: 111). Tertulian further said:

“The money therefore is spent not for banquets or drinking parties or good-for-nothing eating houses, but for the support and burial of the poor, for children who are without their parents and means of subsistence, foraged men who are confined to the house; likewise, for shipwrecked sailors, and for any in the mines, on islands or in prisons” (Luthardt 1889:47,50)

#### **3.4.2 Clement of Alexandria (c150-215)**

Clement of Alexandria found himself in a church that included many wealthy and influential members and he wrote a commentary on the story of the rich young ruler (Mark 10:17-31). According to Clement, Jesus did not want the rich young man to get rid of his wealth, but to get rid of his

anxiety about his wealth. It is not wealth itself that is problematic, but our attitude to wealth said Clement. This interpretation was well received by Clement's members and by wealthy Christians ever since, Other Christians. However, have disagreed with Clement's interpretation of this gospel story. To be fair to Clement, he did stress that people did not experience happiness by holding on to their wealth, but by using it for the benefit of others. " *It is not he who has and keeps, but he who gives away, that is rich*" said Clement (White 1981:55).

### **3.5 Post- Constantine Era (313-590 A.D)**

During this era the close co-operation between the church and state became a very powerful institution. Both evangelism and social concern became a joint endeavor of the church and state. Christianity became the official state religion through the edicts of 380 and 381. The continual hope of early Christians for freedom from official persecution and social contempt became through the Edict of Milan 313 (A.D.), of the Emperor Constantine. Theodosius I through the Edict of Constantinople (392 A.D.) banned the sacrifices and attendance at pagan temples. (Latourette 1955: 266). The state support meant that now the church had the immense task of evangelizing not only those who were already living in the Roman Empire but also the great masses of Barbarians (Teotonic, Viking, Slav, and Mongol people) who had migrated into Europe from the north and east between 375 and 1066.

In the Byzantine world poverty was above all urban. Concentration of land-owning and sub-divisions of holdings forced smallholders into slavery and migration to the cities, where they formed concentrations on the outskirts, reduced to begging, prostitution and crime. The state tried to find work for the “deserving” poor: those with good health and useful trade, while trying to “cleanse” the cities of the non-deserving (Boff and Pixley 1989:159).

The church took the latter under its wing. An example was St Zotikos: an aristocrat, he defied the imperial edict by building leper hospitals in Constantinople, for which he was condemned to death by being dragged and torn apart by mules. Rehabilitated after his death, he was hailed as a martyr and known as “nourisher” of the poor throughout the empire (Boff and Pixley 1989:159).

### **3.5.1 St. Augustine**

His concern for the poor was expressed well when his congregation sang the Psalm, *‘Blessed is the man who regarded the needs of the poor.’* St Augustine praised the rich who helped the poor, the church and monasteries. St Augustine, like Paul was concerned more with the proper relation between master and slave than he was with abolishing slavery and with reconstructing the social order. Every home had a large number of

slaves and wealthy homes kept hundreds of slaves. Many slaves did not want to be freed because then they had difficulty in finding new jobs.

Although it was considered a ‘good work’ for Christians to liberate slaves, St. Augustine never in his writings advocated the wholesale liberation of slaves. (Bong 1985:18).

St Augustine, in his Commentaries on the Psalms, gives an example of how Latin Fathers, like the Greeks, criticized this abhorrence:

*“All men do whatever good or evil they do to free themselves from the causes of their misfortunes and to acquire happiness, and they always seek to live happily, whether by good or evil. However, not all of them attain what they seek. Everyone wants to be happy, but only those who act justly will be happy. I don’t understand how those who are evil can hope to be happy. How? By owning money, silver and gold, land, houses and slaves, by the pomp of this world and worldly honor which is fickle and transitory. They seek to find happiness by owning things”.* (de Santa 1981:72).

### **3.5.2 St Ambrose**

According to St Ambrose nothing could do more to ensure the community’s appreciation of the priest than his charity towards people in difficulties, especially the needy, he was to ensure that they had enough food to keep them from starvation. Moreover the Bishop of Milan calls attention to the need to give special priority to what he calls “the poor who are ashamed”, that is, those who were rich but had been ruined by socio-

economic changes which often occurred in the Lower Empire, forcing them into misery and deprivation where once they had lived in comfort. These people, who were ashamed of their poverty and tried to hide it, should be helped as far as possible, said St Ambrose. But the priest's charitable work should not be limited to these "poor who are ashamed": it must also extend to prisoners and all those who might fear the powerful, for example, those condemned to death, in whose defense should be ready to plead (de Santa 1981:66)

Apart from generosity, St Ambrose also emphasized that charity should be practiced with discernment. We must not confuse generosity with prodigality. The priest must be able to judge how to be liberal without exhausting the reserves on one case, but sharing them among all in need. The search for vainglory must never replace the search for justice! If this happens, he will easily fall victim to importers and swindlers who are legion. Many pretend to be poor. They come asking for alms, which they do not need, just so they can walk the streets and do nothing. They wear ragged clothes. They disguise their true age so as to receive more. They pretend to be in debt, or claim to have been robbed. All this must carefully checked, so that the poor man's money shall not end up in the swindler's pocket. In a word, the priest's generosity must lay exactly half way between thoughtless prodigality and meanness which might lead him to give the money of the faithful to the undeserving."

Elsewhere, the Bishop of Milan insisted on the need to ignore social differences in the Church, since God's justice makes no distinction between rich and poor. Herein lies the particular emphasis of St Ambrose concerning the problem of the poor and wealth: the determining element is God's justice as we know it in the Scriptures, and principally in Jesus Christ; hence the following quotation which is clearly an echo of the parables of the foolish rich man, and the rich man and Lazarus, in the Gospel:

*“A narrow piece of ground is sufficient at the moment of burial, for the poor as well as for the rich, and the earth which was never enough to satisfy the ambition of the rich now covers him completely. Nature makes no distinction between men, either in birth or in death. It creates both alike and receives them in the same way in the tomb. Who can establish classes among the dead? Dig up a grave and see if you can tell who is the rich man. Then dig up another tomb and see if you can recognize the rotted around the rich man”.*

These quotation from the Latin Father clearly reveal the two lines: the organization of charity by the ministers of the Church, and the confirmation of the Gospel's demands concerning the justice of God and the importance of caring for the poor (de Santa 1981:66-67).

The Bishop of Milan was wealthy; he gave away all his reaches and property to the poor and the church. His office was always open to the



poor and the oppressed” (Boer 1978: 148)

### **3.5.3 St Basil**

He was known as the “Great” Bishop of Cappadocia. He believed the bishop should have ultimate authority over monastery. At the same time, monasteries started to become more outward- looking. Basil’s monastery provided medical treatment for the sick and relief for the poor, and also did some work in education (Dowley 1985: 207).

He saw in his time a tremendous gap between the rich and the poor. The poor were so destitute that many sold their children into slavery in order to support their family. St Basil condemned irresponsible wealthy people as ‘thieves and robbers’. In his ‘Ta Ethika’ he instructed Christians to use any possessions beyond their basic necessities to help needy people. He created, no doubt very largely from his own resources, a whole complex of charitable welfare institutions. There arose a ‘whole new city’ grouped around the church and monastery, consisting of hostels, almshouse, and hospitals for infectious disease, and the bishop himself took up residence there.

The foundation was imitated and much admired, and also criticized. It was regarded as the threat to the State administration, an objection which Basil himself refused to accept. The spirit that inspired these works of

charity was more monastic than political and hierarchic. Basil sermons were full of practical exhortations and examples, stimulating to acts of Christian love and practical virtue. Especially the great famine of the year 368, he proved his mettle in impressive sermons against the profiteers and the indifferent rich. He himself organized free meals for the people, which were also available to immigrant foreigners, pagans, and infidel children of Israel (de Santa Ana 1981:67-68).

In the first place he saw wealth as “a good to be administered, and not a source of enjoyment”. St. Basil also criticized irresponsible economic growth. On the basis of the parable of the foolish rich man (Luke 12:16-21), St Basil equates economic growth whose aim is the accumulation of wealth with human wickedness (de Santa Ana 1981:68). St Basil emphasizes that the rich must repent, for the greater a man’s wealth, the less perfect his charity, even though his behavior may seem very worthy: All this indicates that the Fathers of the church during the empire of Constantine insisted, as do the Gospels, that the Christian must share what he has for, in so doing, he bears witness to the injustice of God. The man of faith responds to the challenge of the poor in such a way that he shows himself to be a disciple of Jesus, the true “poor of Yahweh”. The message of the Fathers to the faithful of the time indicates, among other things, that a person is never less valuable than his wealth, and that solely the goods he possesses cannot judge a human being.

The requirement to practice charity is understood by these Fathers in terms almost as radical as those of Jesus' teachings in the Gospel: one must give what one has, and not what one has left over. *"That is not almsgiving. Almsgiving is the action of the widow in the Gospel, who gave up all she had to live on"* (Mark 12:44).

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The Fathers' message to the Christian community can be summarized as a call to practical solidarity and, here again, they concur with the demands of the Gospel, inspired by the book of Acts' accounts of the Jerusalem community. This is their way of putting into practice Christ's mandate concerning brotherly love and the way He was to be served by helping the needy.

### **3.6 The Early Mediaeval Church (590-1300 A.D.)**

Christian social concern in the medieval church was strongly influenced by the concept of the 'Corpus Christianum'. Advocates of this concept

believed in a universal Christian state in which both church and state are God's instruments to achieve God's purpose for man. It was, therefore, the responsibility of both the church and state to promote evangelism and social responsibility. It was the duty of popes, councils, monks, and clerks in the medieval church to regulate feudalism, protect laborers, and establish educational and charitable institutions. And it was the duty of the state to support these programs. This close co-operation of the church and state provides us with a perfect example of the 'identification model' in church-state relations. Evangelism in this period was interpreted as not only bringing people to Christ but also bringing them to the church. Since Salvation rests only within the church, the role of parish priests became very important.

During this period the poor were regarded as being victims of natural disasters: plague, earthquake and the like. These were also seen as punishment for sin, as shown by the procession against the plague organized by Pope Gregory the Great in the year 590.

The "structural poor" were in effect the "rustics" –that is, free agricultural laborers; but they were free only to an extent, since they were strictly bound by feudal oaths. Unlike in the East, poverty in the west was mainly a rural concern. The misfortunes of the poor were misfortunes of the poor were multiple. Churches put out marble vessels in which abandoned

babies were placed. Some of these grew up saints, at least in popular legend, such as St Vincentian and St Odilia. The greatest of these was St Martin of Tours, the son of a Roman officer, who became known as the patron saint of the poor because he divided his cloak in two to share it with a poor man. Another example was St Sigiramus (Cyran), Archdeacon of Tours, who opted for a poor and contemplative life, and is supposed to have gone to live amongst poor agricultural laborers (Boff & Pixley 1989:160)

### **3.6.1 Francis of Assisi**

Among the medieval church fathers, one of the best fleshed out examples of evangelism and Christian charity was St. Francis of Assisi (1182-1226), founder of the Franciscan Order. He was the youth who led a carefree life, was destined for a career as a knight, until converted through illness, a pilgrimage to Rome, a vision and the words of Jesus in Mathew 10:7-10. He was the son of a wealthy Italian cloth merchant, and his father was angry because Francis interpreted the gospel to mean that goods should be freely given to the poor. Leaving home in a ragged cloak and a rope-belt taken from a scarecrow, he wandered the countryside with a few followers, begging from the rich, giving to the poor and preaching. His charm, humility, and kindly manner attracted many followers (Dowley 1986:264)

He is called the 'Apostle of Love', because of his God given generosity. He

became known throughout the medieval and modern world for his love for the poor as expressed in his desire to marry ‘the noblest, richest, and most beautiful girl’ who he called ‘Lady Poverty’- a symbol for his commitment to the needy. (Bong 1985:21).

### **3.6.2 Peter Valdez**

He claimed to stand in the tradition of the mission given by Jesus to the seventy (Luke 10). Poverty becomes a condition for liberty; only the Lord of the Gospel, as Jesus was poor, in a position to be free and to pledge their whole being to the mission entrusts the poor, to them. Valdes did not see the fulfillment of mission only as being able to preach the Word with freedom. It was much more than this. Mission leads to service to the poor, for this is the means of expressing the “sequela Christi”, of being faithful to the Lord (de Santa Ana 1981: 85)

### **3.7 The Carolingian Period: The “Economic Councils”**

A great contrast in this period (ninth and tenth centuries) was between paupers and potens (poor and feudal lord). The Second Council of Aachen in 836 made a distinction between the “indigent” (those living below subsistence level) and the “poor” (freedmen of the countryside, though subject to feudal oath).

The kings, and bishops in particular, appeared as “protectors of the poor,”

meaning of the weak of all kinds. In the early ninth century, several councils took the defense of the *paupers* against the *potentes*. They denounced the frequent dragging of the poor before courts of law, fiscal exploitations of the poor, unfair pricing and trading methods, raising prices by hoarding in periods of famine, low prices paid for agricultural produce.

Such measures, however, had little effect. Even saints and wise men, in the ninth century, failed to see structural implications of land ownership. They therefore tried to correct inequalities rather than eliminate them. They encouraged the myths of the “good king” and “rich administrator” of goods to the benefit of the community. So they were left dealing with the results of basic injustice. The great Bishop Hinkmar of Rheims wrote to his suffragan, Bishop of Beauvais: “It is the Episcopal duty of the utmost importance to receive the poor and pilgrims in suitable hospices.” Count Geroud had always been a *potens*, who never had to work with his hands, only to manage the family estates. But he took real care of the poor, distributing a ninth share (more than a tith<sup>1</sup>) of his income to them, and judging their suits with strict justice (blinding thieves, for example!). The people canonized him, long before the first worker was canonized, which happened only at the end of the twelfth century (Boff & Pixley 1989:161).

### **3.8 The Bishop and the Poor: An Old Alliance**

Numerous meetings of the Bishops before the ninth and tenth centuries resolved round the social problems of the poor. Bishops were seen as “*procurator et dispensator pauperum*” (advocate and provider for the poor). The Council of Macon in 585 declared that the Bishop’s house was the house of the poor. One quarter of ecclesiastical goods was distributed to the poor, a custom that originated in Gaul in the fifth century and spread to the whole of Europe (Boff & Pixley 1989:162)

The teaching of the Fathers had been enriched by the contributions, especially, of St Gregory and St Isidore. It now comprised four main affirmations:

- (i) Any surplus belongs to the poor by right;
- (ii) Possession means management for the good of all;
- (iii) Almsgiving obtains pardon for sins;
- (iv) Christ is in the poor.

The Gallic Councils excommunicated those who withheld goods from the poor- even the Bishops themselves. This shows the extent to which actual, practical love of the poor was considered essential to church communion. It was not for nothing that gifts for the poor were accepted in the context of the Eucharist/ sacrament communion. For the same reason, the church of the Fathers refused gifts from those who exploited the poor (Boff & Pixley



1989:163).

### **3.9 The Twelfth Century**

#### **3.9.1 Monks**

The late third and early fourth centuries saw the beginnings of monastic asceticism in Christianity. The monks aimed to live the Christian life to the full, and felt that continued residence in the 'world' hindered this. They tried to achieve a pure Christianity and a deep communion with God, which they considered unattainable in the existing churches (Dowley 1986:205)

Nearly all Christians from the fourth to the eighteenth centuries were monks. There were four main traditions at the time: the Benedictines, the Nestorians, the Orthodox and the Celts. These communities of monks functioned as ambassadors of the faith, moving into areas where the Christian faith had not yet penetrated, forming their communities and establishing alternative societies in areas which were either victims of constant warfare or chaos as older societies broke down (Pierson 1985:8-9)

The original intent of monasticism was to encourage men to develop lives of discipline and prayer away from the concerns of normal life. But the monasteries, and the soon-to- follow women's houses, which arose, became self-sustaining communities organized around rules for daily life,

rules that pertained to work as well as prayers. This concept was revolutionary in the ancient world, where manual work was seen as fit only for slaves. (Pierson 1985:9)

When the focus of poverty shifted from the cities to the countryside, monasteries became the main centers of help given to the poor, taking over from Episcopal sees. Aid was now institutionalized, adopting “matriculations” and building hospices. Each Abbey supported an arranged number of poor people, devoting the tenth part of its resources to this. In the Abbeys, the liturgy of service prevented the bureaucratization of charity. The poor, in fact, were welcomed with the ceremony of the *mandatum*, the washing of feet. This was particularly solemn on Good Friday, when each monk would file out to stand in front of a poor person. At a sign from the abbot, they “bowed, adored Christ in his poor,” then blessing and promising to serve them (Boff & Pixley 1989:164).

The monks were encouraged to become scholars. Thus, for the first time the practical and theoretical were embodied in the same individuals. The monks were the first intellectuals to get dirt under their fingernails. This combination helped create an atmosphere favorable to scientific development, including both workshops and libraries. The monasteries became centers of Christian faith, learning and technical progress as they expanded into northern Europe (Pierson 1985:9).

### **3.9.2 Theologians**

Theology up to the thirteenth century maintained the tradition of the Fathers, but with one new element: frequent reference to the fifth chapter of the Letter of James- the warning to the rich. This theology appreciated the importance of the poor as those by their work maintained the fabric of society. So it saw the poor as *workers*. It defended strict equality between rich and poor and sharing of goods as a natural right. It also recognized the rights of the poor, particularly that of “theft arising from necessity.” This was proclaimed in the context of famines and plagues of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, which forced the poor to steal in order to survive (Boff & Pixley 1989:165)

### **3.9.3 Hermits**

The Hermits adopted the way of life of the poor, in dress and work. They sought the company of manual workers, farm laborers, lepers and prostitutes. This also led to a growing cult of St Mary Magdelin. The “*liberalitas erga paupere*” of the rich changed into the “*conversatio inter paupers*” of the impoverished hermits. This marked the start of the prophetic challenge directed at the church to adopt an effective form of evangelical poverty.

The hermits changed the social image of the poor; they began to be seen from the standpoint of the poor themselves. So one of the hermits, Peter of

Bois, said: “It is the poor and the weak who will possess the kingdom of God and the Holy Land, the two Jerusalem earthly and heavenly. But it was above all St Francis, followed by St Dominic, who took a new look at the ever-ambiguous phenomenon of poverty, and caused the church to do the same. They accomplished this through their radical choice of life like and with the poor of the city outskirts (Boff and Pixley 1989:166)

#### **3.9.4 Apocalyptic Messiahs**

Famines were endemic in the twelfth century, which led to outbreaks of rebellion amongst the poor. These had two main characteristics:

- Messianism: an apocalyptic prophet usually led the rebellion;
- Milleniarism: people hoped in the miraculous advent of an era of plenty.
- These sudden outbreaks of anger amongst the poor led to arson, stoning and various other forms of revolt.
- The Aeon of the Star, in Brittany: the prophet demanded the purification of the church, leading a mass of poor people who were put down mercilessly
- Gillaumme Longebarbe in 1196: the “Savior” claimed for himself the title reserved to bishops- “protector of the poor”. He preached equality and moral conversion. He was hanged and the people attributed miracles to him and venerated him virtually as a saint
- Then there was Foulque de Neuilly, who went about shouting: “Feed

those who are dying of hunger, because if you don't, you're a murderer!" He attracted a lot of disciples. But in the end he "quietened down" somewhat, accepting favors from the rich, and so ending up largely discredited. (Boff and Pixley 1989:166-167).

### **3.9.5 Canons and Laity**

While the bishops defended the poor, the monks fed them. Those who thought about their problems (theologians), those who lived among them (hermits) and those who fought for them (messianic leaders), there were also those who actually worked for them. These were those who devoted themselves to "works of mercy" in the twelfth century.

In the first place were the canons, secular clerics who created or restored hospices for pilgrims and the poor, mainly along roads, in woods and hills. Monasteries were no longer able to cope with the ever-increasing numbers of poor people. In particular, a new class of poor was emerging, consisting of outcasts of all sorts: prostitutes, beggars, vagabonds, petty criminals and the like. This situation was brought about by social changes- the growth of populations, cities, wealth, and aggravated by natural disasters,

Then were groups of lay people, who did most of all, caring directly for the poor, without delegating this task any longer to monks or clerics. They built bridges over the rivers (pontifices); they founded confraternities of

charity, such as the Hospitallers (Boff and Pixley 167-168).

### **3.10 The Renaissance and the Reformation (1300-1600 A.D.)**

#### **3.10.1 Late Medieval Church (1300-1500)**

The political, social-economic, and religious climate changed during the Late Medieval Age (1300-1500). Feudalism began to decline and strong central monarchical governments were established in Europe.

Economically, the continual development of trade and industry encouraged a capitalistic economy and changed the social structure. Large influxes of migrant peoples into towns for jobs brought economic impoverishment to large sections of society, especially peasants and country gentry.

From fourteenth century onwards the peasants onwards were often restless because they suffered from growing economic pressures from landlords whose land was declining in value and who demanded more remuneration because of increase in the costs of the life style of the nobility. Suffering from these injustices and burdens of famine, pestilence (such as the Black Death from 1348-49), and war (such as the One Hundred Years war from 1337-1453), the peasants revolted against both secular and religious rulers. They forced the ruling classes to make economic reforms. Christ's example of poverty, the monastic emphasis on

poverty, and asceticism in some segments of the medieval church were not enough to suppress the aspirations of the town population for freedom from the oppression of the church and state. The town populations demanded even more radical changes in the social structure (Bong 1985:22).

### **3.10.2 Protestant Reformation**

The Reformation was a religious and political movement of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Europe. It began as an attempt to reform the Roman Catholic Church and resulted in the establishment of the Protestant churches. The term “Reformed” is used to distinguish the Calvinistic from the Lutheran and Anabaptist traditions.

The Protestant Reformation occurred largely as a reaction to spiritual apathy and corruption in certain sectors of the Roman Catholic Church. Its leaders were “protesting” against what they saw as misunderstandings and misuses of the Christian faith.

The reformers doctrines of ‘Sola gratia, sola fide, sola scripture and soli deo gloria’ challenged the church every major tenet of the Roman Catholic Church. For the reformers, evangelism meant the restoration of the erring church to the Scripture’s teaching. Their doctrine of justification by faith downgraded the medieval concept of meritorial works to obtain salvation

through the sacramental system of the church. Sola gratia simplified the complicated Roman Catholic soteriological system, and 'sola scriptura' denied the concept of the 'Corpus Christianum' and shattered the entire monolithic structure of the Roman Catholic Church. Yet even though the Protestant reformers were sufficiently radical in the sixteenth century to make many needed reforms, they still retained many medieval traditions (Bong 1985:22)

The reformers were really concerned about the poor; they taught the people that they were responsible for the poor. The reformers were all convinced that the re-appropriation of the gospel and a renewed sense of accountability to God would issue in new concern for the neighbor in need. But each of these Reformers places an emphasis on a different aspect of Trinitarian faith, an emphasis that shapes his response to poverty.

### **3.10.2.1 Martin Luther**

The core of Luther's protest was not economic but spiritual. It was however, connected to material life in a number of ways. The medieval church, like every institution, required financing, and practices such as the sale of indulgences were the surface manifestation of a number of attempts to preserve an elaborate edifice of priestly organization to mediate sacerdotal grace to temporal humanity. It was assumed that the spiritual estates had special access to divine grace and that it was their vocation to



mediate that grace to the people. The temporal estates, in turn, had access to material resources; it was their vocation to offer them up to God by giving them to the church (Neuhaus 1988:6)

In order to understand Luther's views on evangelism and social responsibility, one has to grasp his concept of two kingdoms-the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world. The Christian as a child of God, belongs to the former, and as a citizen of this world belongs to the latter. He, therefore, is responsible to God as well to the civil authority. (Forell 1971:157)

Since God is in control of both kingdoms, Luther believes that God does not want the Christian to compartmentalize his life into sacred and secular categories. The Christian is to live his life in this world in order to show forth the love of the kingdom of God. Luther had a deep concern for evangelism. Most of his letters carried this phrase: 'By grace of God, Evangelist at Wittenberg'. Luther's preaching on the 'Law and Gospel' explained clearly the way of salvation to the people of the sixteenth century. (Bong 1985:22-23).

In regard to social responsibility Luther taught two important truths. First, he rejected the medieval notion that good works bring pardon for sins. In his *Ninety five Thesis* (1517) Luther declared:

1. *Christians are to be taught that he who gives to the poor or lends to the needy does a better work than buying pardons.*
2. *Christians are to be taught that he who sees a man in need, and passes him by, and gives (his money) for pardons, purchases not the indulgences of the pope, but the indignation of God.*

Luther was quite concerned about poverty and its effects, and this concern moves in several directions of considerable importance to subsequent Christianity and history. For one thing, he gave work a new dignity. He overturned the view that physical labor was subordinate in value to spiritual labor: slopping the hogs, brewing the beer, and changing the baby's diaper are quite as spiritual as the work of cardinals and abbots. He transformed the ascetic injunction of the monastic, '*Ora et Labore*', to a new asceticism in the heart of each worker: '*Labore est Orare*', if done in the right spirit (Neuhaus 1988:8).

Yet was by no means an advocate of free trade in any sense. He shared with the medieval period a deep suspicion of trade, commerce, and finance of all kinds and thought that they should be politically regulated. His peasant experience supported with the rather elaborate body of medieval teaching that only the earth was fecund, and that manufacture and exchange, investment and interest, corporations and banks- indeed any economic gains made outside the direct control of family and government-

were nothing more than sophisticated forms of stealing by artifice.

Allowing such practices simply gave license to greed (Neuhaus 1988:9).

At local as well as the national level, Luther was deeply concerned with the problem of poverty. Like the early Reformers, he viewed it as having a double nature. On the other hand, begging had been institutionalized as an acceptable practice for priests, monks, and nuns for several centuries. Luther had little patience for voluntary or 'evangelical' poverty of this sort; he believed that it resulted from a misunderstanding of the gospel and that those who practiced it were leeches on others. In his "Ordinance of a Common Chest" Luther once said:

*"No monk, or church beggar shall be permitted or allowed to beg or have others beg for him in our parish, city or villages, indeed anyone not incapacitated by reason of age or illness shall work or, with the aid of the authorities, be expelled from the parish, the city, and the villages"* (Neuhaus 1988:10).

On the other hand, as a pastor Luther recognized that some individuals were impoverished by age, illness, or other circumstances, and that these needed the support of others. To this end, he advocated the founding and careful administration of a common chest by trustees elected from the parish.

### **3.10.2.2 John Calvin (1509-1564)**

Calvin took much of what he believed directly from Luther, but a fundamentally different understanding of the relationship of law and gospel modified all his social views, and he read his Bible less through the lenses of the neo-Platonic hierarchies of medieval thought than through the cosmopolitan.

Calvin believed that Christians constitute a small society inside the larger corrupt society. The church 'is the embryo of an entirely new world where the once perverted social relations find anew their original nature'. Calvin was not satisfied with the medieval ecclesiastical attempt to solve social problems through an extensive system of almsgiving for ecclesiastical merits and through the example of mendicant priest (Bong 1985:24).

Calvin was committed to equality, but it was equality based also on a radical sense of the objectivity of sin and a saving God: all are equally sinners and all equally in need of salvation. The principle that we are justified by grace through faith implies a need for transformed patterns of thought and life. First of all, it demands an obedient regard for the justice and truth of the one true God, but the social corollary of this view is that the "natural" structure of the common life are rooted in corruption, and so they have to be reordered according to godly principles (Neuhaus 1988:11).

Calvin "*desacralized poverty*" more radically than perhaps any of other

Reformers; and he “*resacralized*” concern for organized benevolence and welfare by making diaconal service to the poor a central office for laity in the church and the city. But it was not only care for the poor that he “*resacralized,*” it was also care for those who labor. In the Social Humanism Calvin says: “God assigns an earthly goal to his creature. Man is created to work. The blessing of the Lord is on the hands of him who works. Certainly God curses laziness and loafing” (Neuhaus 1988:14)

Calvin sanctifies work in precisely those areas where Luther found severe moral temptation. Commerce, trade, manufacture, and banking are proper arenas of sanctified labor in Calvin’s eyes; indeed, they are essential to the common life, for material exchange shows the interdependence of individuals in society and of societies in the international context. Calvin rejected the conviction that money is not fecund and that all proper production is related to the fecundity of land. He understood the nature the nature of money and usury in a new way. He remained aware of the danger of worshiping Mammon, but he asserted that the circulation of money through commerce, investments, and working capital could also be redemptive. It can bind together in common interests people not previously connected, it can produce more wealth for the relief of need and for the benefit of all, and it can free us from pagan loyalties to a “tribal brotherhood” (Neuhaus 1988:15).

Further Calvin maintains that the quest for reasonable gain from commerce, trade, and investment-profit-ought not to be motivated by greed. He recognized avarice, hoarding, and the ostentatious display of wealth as perennial temptations. But he distinguished reasonable profit from these. Jesus Christ had himself approved of return on wise and prudential investment in the parable of the talents, said Calvin. What is gained fairly in diligent stewardship under the mandate of the righteous God is to be honored? It should be invested quickly that it might not be hoarded and that the unemployed might be given work, to the benefit of the whole human community. It should be supervised by both the church and state authorities, who are appointed agents of the sovereign God, so that the radical sinfulness of humanity will not destroy the fragile bonds of mutuality and trust that business both requires and so easily subverts in the human commonwealth (Neuhaus 1988:16).

### **3.10.2.3 Ulrich Zwingli**

Zwingli made an attempt to reform society through the Little and Great Councils. The Great Council abolished street begging in 1524 and transformed the preachers' monastery into a 'poor house' where food was served each morning for the poor. The council also converted monasteries and convents into schools, hospitals, and orphanages and established a charity bureau to distribute food for sick, and pregnant women (Bong 1985:24-25).

#### **3.10.2.4 Anabaptists**

Anabaptists believed in strict separation between the spiritual and temporal powers. They believed that there was an absolute antithesis between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of the world. Although they emphasized a life separated from this world, they also believed that the state was ordained of God and that Christians obey the civil law as long as it did not contradict God's commandments. Because Anabaptists were the victims of persecutions by the state, they withdrew support from the state.

Anabaptists were certain that the task of evangelism and social concern did not depend on the combined authority of church and state. Rather, the task depended on the obedience of individual believers. Their concept of a 'brotherhood of believers' was very strong, and in this brotherhood, they cared for each other (Bong 1985:25).

#### **3.11 The Evangelical Revival Movement**

Many Christian organizations for social reform were born out of the momentum created by Pietism, the Wesleyan Revival in England, the First and Second Great Awakenings in North America. These revivals in the church created major, lasting changes in the societies of Europe and North America.

In the early stages of the Industrial Revolution, workers labored long hours for low wages and lived in urban slums worse than their rural homes. Children and women worked long hours for lower wages than men. The mechanization of noise of assembly lines robbed workers of a sense of meaningful community, personal significance, and tranquility, which they had enjoyed in rural society (Bong 1985: 26).

### **3.11.1 The Pietistic Movement**

Towards the end of the seventeenth century a protest arose in Protestant circles against dead orthodoxy and ecclesiastical conservatism. It was centered in lay movements nourished by the study of the scriptures. In Germany it was called “Pietism”. The Pietistic movement started with Phillip Spener (1635-1705), a German Lutheran, who had been influenced by reading Puritan authors such as Baxter, initiated the movement which was called Pietism, and his disciple (1663-1727) August Francke (Van Engen 1981:259; Pierson 1989:12).

Spener initiated private meetings for the edification with a few parishioners. He published *Pia Desideria* in 1675 with suggestions for the renewal of the church. The included a more extensive use of the Word of God among the people, the establishment and diligent exercise of the spiritual priesthood and the recognition that it was not enough to have



knowledge of the Christian faith because Christianity consists rather of *practice*. Thus, Christians were to demonstrate to non-believers that they were considered to be their neighbors, as the Samaritan was a neighbor in Luke 10. Christians were called to love others as they loved themselves (Pierson 1989:120)

The small groups of believers or associations of piety (*collegia pietatis*) stressed Christian perfection because they believed that a Christian's justification is fulfilled by means of sanctification. By sanctification the Pietists did not mean sinlessness; rather they believed in definite progress in the Christian life. Reacting to the emphasis on theological scholasticism in the Protestant churches, the Pietists emphasized the living presence of the Holy Spirit in the believer (Bong 1985:26)

The Pietists believed in changing society through changing individuals, particularly leaders, by the power of the gospel. They understood the doctrine of perfection to mean that a Christian should not just give intellectual assent to justification but he should also practice his faith by loving others as himself.

They believed that when the inner personal conviction to care for the poor as a mark of true piety is not cultivated, the social will to provide such care evaporates among the people, and the governments are unlikely to

take on h task either. What social services are provided are often given grudgingly, coldly, and simply as a matter of state interest. Diaconal service to the dispossessed through hospitals for the sick, schools for the simple, soup for the hungry, and homes for widows and orphans has been understood as a major mark of the presence of the Spirit (Neuhaus 1988:19-20)

### **3.11.2 Moravians**

The most distinctive strategy developed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was that of the Moravian Church developed under the direction of Count Zinzendorf and Bishop Spangenberg. The Moravians who grew out of German Pietism and pre-Reformation movements constituted one of the most remarkable missionary movements in all history.

The Moravian missionaries beginning in 1734 were purposely sent to the most despised and neglected people. They were to be self-supportive. Known for their one hundred year prayer watch in which members of the community were praying around the clock for that period, they were a highly disciplined, monastic like community of married men and women devoted to world mission. During their early years, one in every fourteen members became a missionary to some far corner of the world. They were intensely evangelistic with “souls for the Lamb” their primary goal, but their work among the Indian tribes along the western frontier of North

America is an indication of their holistic approach to mission (Pierson 1989:14)

The developed industries and business concerns which not only supported the work, but brought the missionaries into intimate contact with the people. The profits supported the missionaries. Moravian missionaries were told not to apply “the Herrnhut yardstick” (i.e., German home base standards) to other peoples and to be alert to the recognition of the God-given distinctive traits, characteristics and strong points of those people. Furthermore the missionaries were to regard themselves as assistants to the Holy Spirit. They were to be primary messengers, evangelists, preachers, who were not to stress heavy theological doctrines but rather tell the simple gospel story of God’s loving act of reconciliation of men to Himself in Christ our Savior, who lived and died for all men. In God’s providence the time would come when the Holy Spirit would bring converts into the church in large numbers. Meanwhile the missionary messengers would rather gather the first fruits. If there should be no response, they were to go elsewhere. Actually, the missionaries left only when persecuted and driven out. They were remarkably patient and did not give up readily (Beaver 1992:246)

### **3.11.3 The Wesleyan Revival in England**

It is impossible to overestimate the spiritual and social impact of John Wesley, Charles Wesley, and George Whitfield, evangelists in England in the eighteenth century. The Wesleyan movement in the eighteenth century called attention to Christ to Christ's teachings and actions as a model for ministry to the deprived in contemporary society. The combination of serious stewardship and personal concern of the poor, became a hallmark of the Methodist movement. Not surprisingly, the Wesleyan revival movement attracted a large following from the ranks of those who might be considered poor.

According to Hulley,

*“Wesley introduced a number of programs to alleviate the worst effects of poverty. He started a school for the children of poor parents and for adult education; he set up a home to house destitute widows and established a medical free medical dispensary. He was concerned about unemployment. To finance his assistance programs he collected money from wealthy friends and sometimes walked from house to house-soliciting funds. These funds were strictly accounted for, whether they were employed as a loan fund to help the needy people or to provide food, clothing and heating for the destitute”* (Hulley 1983:156)

In their assisting the poor he advised the stewards in his London society to treat the poor graciously even if they were unable to provide assistance.

*“Put yourselves in the place of every poor man; and deal with him as you would God should deal with you”* was the principle he advised him to apply

(Hulley 1983:157)

The Wesley brothers started with a small group known as 'Holy Club of Oxford' in 1729 and other brothers brought a spiritual revival to England. John Wesley often preached at 5:00 am so that people could hear the gospel before they went to work in mines and factories. He also preached in midmorning and midday in markets so that the crowds there would have opportunity to hear the gospel. His passion to help the poor did not, however, stop with preaching. (Bong 1985:27)

Wesley himself did more than just talk about social reform. Among other things, he agitated for prison, liquor and labor reforms; set up loan funds for the poor; campaigned against the slave trade and smuggling; opened a dispensary and gave medicines to the poor; worked to solve unemployment; and personally gave away considerable sums of money to persons in need. Even before they experienced the assurance of salvation, the Wesleyans and the Holy Club at Oxford showed concern for the poor and prisoners along with the spiritual disciplines that earned them the name "Methodists" (Pierson 1985:14). The early Methodists of the eighteenth century gathered clothes and send to the poor; opened free medical clinics to draw in the sick from the streets; and stood on street corners and begged for the poor (Heitzenrater 2002:15)

In his early years at Oxford, Wesley demonstrated a concern for the widows, orphans, and prisoners in the city. He contributed to the Grey-Coat School in town (a charity school). He helped provide a teacher for poor children in a school that William Morgan had started, by which the Methodists taught at least twenty poor children. He gave money to debtors in the Castle prison and Bocardo jail. He gave of his resources to many in Oxford who lacked the necessities of life (Heitzenrater 2002:25).

Wesley often furnished more than just money. In some instances, he bought flax for children in the workhouses to use, and he gave food to families for their health and strength. He was convinced that he should not enjoy the comforts of life if others did not have the necessities.

John Wesley raised money and collected resources of all kinds from those who could help. He privately 'begged' from the rich, many times soliciting known benefactors door to door. It might seem ironic to be collecting money from the poor for the poor. But as early as 1742, Methodist people were expected to give a penny a week to their class leader in support of the beneficent programs of the connection. The Methodist program of assistance to the poor was, first and foremost, a way to help those in their own societies who had special needs (Heitzenrater 2001:31-32).

The impact of the Wesleyan movement on various movements for social

reforms in England is well known. Robert Raikes started Sunday School in order to give moral and religious instruction to the poor children on the one day of the week they were not working. This involved teaching many of them to read. He organized schools among neglected miners and colliers. John Howard tirelessly worked for the reform of the appalling conditions in prisoners locally, and then moved Parliament to act to improve prison condition conditions throughout the nation (Pierson 1985:14).

Wesley did not consider the poor to be lazy and indolent, as did many of the upper class and some of the lawmakers. He worked very hard to counteract that view, which was contained in much of the literature of his day, especially as voiced by critics of the Poor Laws. From his extensive traveling about the country, Wesley concluded that poor government policy, economic management, and societal choices, seen especially in three areas, caused the problems of hunger and unemployment: distilling, taxes, and luxury. For instance, he pointed out that too much grain had been used for distilling liquor, leaving a shortage of grain to make bread, which drove the price up and especially hurt the poor. From his point of view, most everyone who was able to work was, in fact, working, and yet many were still hungry. In one sermon, Wesley lambastes those who quote classical poet who said that “poverty brings no unhappiness worse than this: it exposes men to ridicule (Heitzenrater 2002:33)

In his attitudes toward and programs for those in need, John Wesley was a man of his time. He followed models that were available to him from scripture, government, church and society. Wesley continually developed programs to deal with a variety of problems faced by his people:

- First, to relieve the helpless (the impotent poor), he took nourishing food to the hungry, collected decent clothes for the threadbare, and furnished adequate housing for widows and orphans.
- Second, to assist those who were unfortunate (the able poor), he boosted their employment by sending the weavers yarn from their looms and establishing a loan program to distribute seed money to struggling merchants or manufacturers.
- Third, for the children, Wesley established schools to train the minds, bodies and spirits of young boys and girls.
- Fourth, for the literate but uneducated adults, Wesley established a prolific publishing program that provided important literature for his people- much of which produced inexpensively- to be given away to those who could not afford to purchase it.
- Fifth, to assist the sick and infirm, Wesley hired apothecaries and doctors to staff free medical clinics in his programs lay a desire to encourage industry, thrift, learning, health, and godliness (Heitzenrater 2002:34).

Wesley's views of providence also led him occasionally to see poverty as



God's punishment to bring people to an awareness of their sins. On the other hand, it is interesting to note that Wesley did pinpoint some of the systemic causes of the problem in the structures and attitudes evident in government and society. He did occasionally connect poverty with human oppression. On one occasion, he also used the language of justice in relation to the need to free the poor from their plight. (Heitzenrater 2002:35)

#### **3.11.4 The Clapham Sect**

The Clapham Sect was an evangelical group of aristocratic politicians, bankers, and Anglican clerics of Clapham and Cambridge who worked for reform from within the church establishment. They frequently gathered in the home of William Wilberforce, one of their leaders who lived in a suburb of London known as Clapham. That is how these evangelical philanthropists became known as the Clapham Sect. They were not a formal religious party. All of them were members of the Church of England, though they were frequently denounced by High Anglican Tories as Methodists (Miles 1986: 47).

These men were products of the evangelical awakenings in both England and America. Particularly were they indebted to the earlier work of John Wesley and George Whitefield. Though they were connected with the establishment, their primary business was with personal salvation and

moral reforms with individuals as opposed to corporate religion. Mostly they were a group of Christian laymen in the London area dedicated to applying Christian principles in public life (Miles 1986:47).

Two of the prominent members of the Clapham Sect were William Wilberforce (1759-1833) and the seventh Lord Shaftesbury, Anthony Ashley Cooper (1801-1885). Let us look briefly at the work of these two men. Wilberforce conversion began in 1785, his conversion altered the lives of multitudes of persons whom he never saw because he was largely responsible for the abolition of slavery in the British empire. When converted, Wilberforce was already a Member of Parliament. His intention was to become a vocational Christian minister John Newton persuaded him instead to serve the Lord in the House of Commons. Wilberforce determined to champion the cause of abolishing the slave traffic and slavery itself. Wilberforce kept hammering away against slavery and after 30 years slave trade was abolished. The Parliament voted the money to indemnify the slaveholders and free some 800,00 slaves throughout British dominions (Miles 1986:48)

Lord Shaftesbury, another member of the Clapham Sect, did much to Christianize the socioeconomic structures of Great Britain in the nineteenth century. He attacked the chimney- sweep scandal, child labor in factories, female labor in mines, the overlong working hours, lack of

safety and medical protection, and unhealthy working conditions (Miles 1986:49).

### **3.11.5 The First Great Awakening in North America**

Jonathan Edward started the first Great Awakening, he preached on justification by faith. His concern for social justice was linked with the establishment of the Kingdom of God. In *Pressing into the Kingdom of God*, Edwards encouraged every Christian to 'press into the Kingdom of God', firmly believing that the Kingdom of God could be established on the earth with the transforming power of the gospel. Edwards also wrote in his *Obligations to Charity* 'that it is the absolute and indispensable duty of the people of God to give bountifully and willingly for supplying the wants of the needy (Bong 1985:28-29).

### **3.11.6 The Second Great Awakening**

The name of Charles Grandison Finney (1792-1875) is almost synonymous with the Second Great Awakening. Finney introduced new measures into revivals, such as holding protracted meetings in cities for four consecutive days and nights, calling penitents to make an immediate decision to come forward in the service during the public invitation to an inquiry room for counseling, and letting women pray publicly in mixed gatherings (Miles 1986:49).

Finney is the foremost promoter of revivals and social reformation in the nineteenth century. Among the benevolent works, he specified good government, Christian education, temperance reform, the abolition of slavery, and relief of the poor. Long before the advent of liberation theology, Finney recognized that God has a preference for the poor, not because He is prejudiced but because He is the God of justice. Finney insisted on a system of free pews in churches. In Finney's day, many churches used rentals to raise construction and maintenance costs. Prices actually varied like in a theater where the best seats cost the most (Mile 1986:50).

A practical result of pew rental was often that church seating reflected social and economic class. The poor were relegated either to the few, rugged, free pews in the balcony or in the back of the church house; or, more tragic still, they were altogether excluded from the churches. Finney and his friends found that this abominable system of church financing a direct contradiction to a gospel freely offered to all. They built "Free Churches" open to all.

### **3.12 The Protestant Missionary Movement**

William Carey is rightly called "the Father of Protestant Missions". In 1792 he formed the Baptist Missionary Society; the following year he sailed to India.

His primary goal was to lead people to personal faith in Jesus Christ and eternal salvation; however he saw no conflict between that goal and his other activities in education, agriculture, and botany.

Carey labored widely to withstand social evils and bring change in Asia. He was better known as a horticulturist around the world than as a missionary. He fought valiantly against the practice of infanticide, the burning of widows, the inhuman treatment of lepers (who were often buried or burned alive), and needless deaths at the great religious pilgrimages of the time (Pierson 1999:265)

### **3.13 Walter Rauschenbusch (1861-1918)**

Another example of a Christian response to issues of wealth and poverty is Walter Rauschenbusch. After his theological training Rauschenbusch was sent as a pastor to a German-speaking Baptist church in New York City in USA. Confronted with poverty, malnutrition, poor housing and general misery of the inhabitants of “Hell’s Kitchen” near the church, Rauschenbusch’s social conscience was awakened. He realized that sin was not only a personal issue, it had massive social ramifications. He later became a social prophet in the mould of the Old Testament prophet, Amos, and was intensely critical in his writings and preaching of the materialism and capitalism of his generation. For him, as for many others in the

Christian tradition, one could not separate one's Christian faith from the social issues of his day. It was morally wrong for Christians to pursue "the profit motive" while ignoring the needs of the poor (Kretzschmar 2000: 141)

### **3.14 Missionary strategy of the 19<sup>TH</sup> /20<sup>th</sup> Century**

Missionary Strategy of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (down to Edinburg 1910), aimed at individual conversions, church planting, and social transformation through three main types of action, which became known as evangelism, education, and medicine. Evangelism included preaching in all its forms, the organizing and fostering of churches, Bible translation, literature production, and the distribution of Bibles and literature (Beaver 1999:249-250)

In the realm of education, industrial schools were stressed in earlier times, but generally abandoned because of the desire for an academic education.

By the end of the century, a vast educational system was in existence, ranging from kindergarten to college, and including medical schools and theological schools. The first doctors took care of the families of the missionaries, but it was soon discovered that medical service to the general populace brought good will and provided an evangelistic opportunity. It was not only in the middle of the twentieth century that it came to be realized that health services in the name of the spirit of the Great Physician are in themselves a dramatic form of the preaching of the gospel.

It was the same spirit of general helpfulness and cultivation of good will, as well as out of a desire to improve the economic base of the church, that missionaries introduced improved poultry and livestock and better seeds along with new crops. When women came into the church, their children followed them (Beaver 1999:250).

As the 20<sup>th</sup> century opened, with the rapid expansion of Christian missionary movement from the West, the gospel was being preached and Christian churches planted in all the continents and in virtually every open country of the globe as never before, societies and new missionary organizations by the thousands were organized but there was very little done to communicate the gospel to the informal settlement communities (Ntshumayelo 2001)

### **3.15 Liberal and Orthodox Polarization of the Church**

The seeds for major theological polarization in Protestantism were sown in the mid-nineteenth century with the rise of biblical criticism. The humanism and rationalism, which predominated in the twentieth century had their roots in the Age of Reason in mid-seventeenth century.

#### **3.15.1 From Social Gospel to Salvation Today (1970-present)**

Mission and evangelism have been a primary concern of the 20<sup>th</sup> century ecumenical movement. This movement is generally reckoned to have begun at the World Missionary Conference at Edinburg in 1910, it decided as follows.

*“The church must find its way to the places where men really live. It must penetrate the alienated world from within, and make the minds of men familiar with the elementary realities of God, of sin and of purpose in life. This can be done partly through new ventures of self-identification by Christians with the life of that world, partly through Christians making the word of the Gospel heard in the places where decisions are made that affect the lives of men. It can be done fully only if, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Church recovers the spirit of prophecy to discern the signs of the times, to see the purpose of God working in the immense movements and revolutions of the present age, and again to speak to the nations the word of God with authority” (Van der Bent 1986:15)*

The World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1910 was a watershed event, which climaxed decades of regional missionary cooperation. Edinburgh 1910 brought the movement to evangelize the world to a heightened state of global awareness and planning. Edinburgh was a conference to design the strategy for a final campaign by the concerted forces of the kingdom of God as they assayed what was needed to complete the “unfinished task”. Delegates of the Edinburg conference were impelled to missionary activity by such motives as God’s love for the whole creation, compassion for the lost, Christ command to preach the



gospel, pity for the dying, expectation of the Lord's early return, and a grateful sense of stewardship (Scherer 1987:15)

The increase industrialization of Europe and North America, massive immigration from southern and eastern Europe to America, problems of urbanization, recurrent depressions, social tensions, and many other factors aroused the consciences of many Christians to various social issues.

The whole emphasis in evangelism was shifting from the traditional eschatological understanding of the kingdom to a horizontal earthly kingdom attainable here and now through purely secular means. In order to establish this kingdom, Rauschenbusch advocated political democracy, government control, mild socialism, and unions. He condemned the laissez-faire system of capitalism. His social gospel became the major thrust of the Federal Council of Churches (Bong 1985:31).

The world find the church where it is, right out in front of it in the community, in the wider, public, community of which the church is part. The world is a complex reality and the church's performance in it is hinged to its willingness to get its hand dirty and put in the hard work of social analysis required to discover it. The church is called not only to live in the world but also to live for it. This is implied in the meaning of "royal

priesthood,” As members of Christ priesthood, Christians are intercessors for the world, representing God to human kind and humankind to God (Snyder 2001:90-91).

### **3.15.2 Liberation movement**

A movement known as “Liberation Theology” sprang up during the second half of the twentieth century in Latin America and spread over much of the world. Liberation Theology was mainly concerned about the poor and was weak in the areas of religious conversion and personal salvation (Greenway 1999:124)

Preaching the gospel (“word”) and helping the poor and oppressed (“deed”) were done together throughout most of Christian history. Early in the twentieth century, however, liberal theology entered many churches. They denied the basic teaching of the Bible, such as the virgin birth of Christ, the atonement, and the physical resurrection of Christ. Liberation theology promoted what was called the “Social Gospel” in mission (Greenway 1999:124).

Liberation Theology focused on oppression and the political and economic causes of poverty. The solution that it promoted contained strong elements of Marxism. Marxism was discredited by the end of the century, and Liberation theologians were left without the answer that they thought they

had found. Liberation Theology tried to solve the problem of oppression and injustice, but the biblical gospel of the kingdom of God offers the only genuine solution (Greenway 1999:125)

Liberation Theology is based on the Christian theory of Jesus' primary importance as the "Liberator", personifying the poor and devoted to freeing them from oppression (Mathew 19:21; 25:35,40). It was initiated by the Peruvian priest Gustavo Gutierrez in the theology of liberation (1969). Mbiti (1998:141-158) tells the story of African liberation theology as follows:

*"Since 1970's. theological discussion in southern Africa has focused mainly on the Theology of Liberation. This was a living issue for Christians there while African peoples suffered the painful experience of oppression by the European settlers, were denied basic human rights, and had little or no say in matters of their own destiny. Further, they were unjustly exploited economically. So, for them, the gospel was the good news of liberation "because its message brings a new light to dehumanized and oppressed people".*

### **3.15.3 A new Global context for mission**

Mission Theology in the late 1980s has entered a period of reconstruction and consensus building. We now shall survey common issues that are likely to challenge all Christian communities as they carry out their mission in the future. The era of the 'new mission' will look remarkably different from the relatively peaceful and stable colonial context of the late

19<sup>th</sup> century. Here is the scenario of the present situation:

1. Widespread poverty and starvation characterizes much of the poor areas. The gap between the rich and the poor widens. Chronic poverty, underdevelopment, inflation, and low productivity will make it difficult for churches in the poorest communities to achieve self-reliance.
2. Political instability and authoritarian political systems on both the right and the left will plague nations of the poor communities.
3. Despite these inhibiting factors, the Christian community in the informal settlements will continue to grow both in numbers and maturity. By virtue of severe testing and missionary engagement, the quality and vigor of the faith of these Christians is likely to surpass that of Christians in the suburbs.
4. Massive demographic changes will mark the new missionary area with the population of the poor rising on daily basis. These trends justify mission planning and strategy systematically directed toward the un-evangelized segments of the world's population (Scherer 1987:46).

A new urban style of mission along with requisite training for Christian survival in the informal settlement community is highly demanded. On the one hand the informal settlement communities with their anonymity and secular atmosphere will offer nearly impenetrable barriers to mission

activities.

### **3.16 Conclusion**

The evidence that God has a bias toward the poor, runs throughout the biblical narrative. The election of Abraham, the liberation of Israel from the bondage of the Egyptians, the prophetic insistence on justice for the poor, and the teachings and ministry of Jesus all point to God's particular concern for the poor. From the very beginning to the present, the history of the church has manifested a continuing care for the poor, sick, and homeless.

Virtually, all missionary movements during the history of the church have been concerned about and involved in what is called comprehensive ministry for the poor. They have seen it as a part of their ministry of communicating the gospel. Further more, they demonstrated a remarkable degree of consistency through history with their focus on education, health care, agriculture, and various kinds of social uplift for neglected or oppressed members of society.

But the central thrust of Christians concern for the poor follows as a response to the love shown toward humans by God in the salvation event of Jesus Christ. In the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ a particular kind of love –agape- reaches out to reconcile a fallen humanity.

So the Christian confession goes.

This redeeming love, received in faith, is to become active in service to and care for the neighbor. Christians are to love others as Christ loved them: that is the new commandment. The qualities of agape shown by God toward humanity are to be reflected in some way in the Christian life. Such a calling is the center in terms of motivation and vision, of the Christian concern for the poor.

The social involvement of the churches implies being aligned with the poor in their struggle. When the church is aligned with the poor, therefore, and shares their concerns and struggles, the proclamation of the Gospel is substantiated by its being rooted in the praxis of liberation which opens up the way in history for a new, more just and more participatory society

Throughout history, concern for the poor has been constant in the church. The spirit of an “option for the poor” has a long history and is ultimately rooted in the gospel itself. And demand for this option has grown whenever individual Christians or groups of Christians have made the gospel their own. It is equally impressive to see how the whole history of the church is studded with shining examples of Christians from all walks of life who practiced love of the poor to a heroic degree

The contribution made by the hermits and mendicants to changing the image of the poor within the church must be given its due. By going to live with and like the poor and no longer just for them, they helped foster a better appreciation of the state in which the poor lived and the need to rescue them from it. Another great step in the affirmation of the poor was taken by messianic and apocalyptic leaders, who, not content with living with and like the poor, put themselves at their head in a process of struggle, thereby moving from a mysticism of poverty to a politics of poverty

There has always been a notable ambiguity affecting both the image of the poor and of poverty (swinging between rejection and veneration), and of the actual struggles of the poor (with social movements strongly marked by alienation, ineffective strategies and unreliable leaders). This ambiguity is linked to the actual historical settings in which the thinking and practice of the church moved.

The church made a tremendous effort to “solve” the problem of the poor, but failed to see what we can see today: that all this generosity, effective, and affective, produced for the poor mere “crumbs” of society’s total production. Economic and mechanisms and social systems worked in favour of small minorities- among which we have to include the hierarchy of the church. During the Middle Ages, people did not- and could not- see

poverty as a structural programme. They were tied to the idea of society as a static system: people could change their status within this, but what made up the different levels of status—the social system—could not be changed. So the history of the church up to the close of the Middle Ages is the history of the poor Lazarus and the good rich man.

Probably the greatest contribution the church made to the liberation of the poor was in educating the conscience of men and women; it made them sensitive to the state in which the poor lived, awakening feelings of mercy and generosity to, and solidarity with, the poor. In this sense the Christian mysticism that saw the poor as the image and incarnation of Christ had an immense influence. Its effects, however, remained on the personal (saints) or institutional (works of charity) level, without ever penetrating to a truly structural level.

The process of secularization of charity, moving from the official church to the laity and finally to the state (and now to the poor classes struggling for their own liberation), can be seen not as a perversion of Christianity or even as a breaking away from the church, but as logical development of Christianity in the historical world.

When one sees how far the church has been involved in social and political questions, it seems strange that we should have to justify such presence



and intervention theologically today. It is symptomatic that we have to speak of “political” or faith and politics- something that in the past went without question and so without the need for a specific theology to thought strange and unsuitable for the church to engage in least in part to the politically revolutionary stance taken by the church on some questions.

This historic pilgrimage from the old to the new missionary order would not be complete without a reminder that global mission, in the final analysis, is not simply the church’s task but is God’s own cause. The church is in mission because “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son so that who ever believes in Him should not perish but have an everlasting life (John 3:16). The church continues its mission into the new era because it is from start to finish God’s own mission.

The Christian Church was socially the most mobile of communities in the world and that people could expect to find social equality within the Church if not outside it. The church’s work among the poor was not unique, of course. There were many well-placed and well disposed pagans who also worked among the poor and were generous to those less fortunate than themselves.

As we have seen already, this commitment to the poor, *mutatis mutandis*, in one way or another, has continued in the history of the Church, even

though there have been many in the Church who have actually oppressed the poor. The commitment continued, for example, in the provision of medical care or of universal education in which we find that Christian churches have played a major role.

Throughout history, Christians have been active in helping the poor and disadvantaged. Both universal education and medical treatment for all may be traced back to Christian initiatives. Christians have been heavily involved in the campaign for the abolition of slavery, in improvements in the conditions of life for workingmen and women and in the struggle for equal rights for women. It is true that from time to time Christians and Churches have not been faithful to the gospel and have compromised with those who have oppressed the poor.