

**A THEORETICAL REFLECTION ON CONCEPTS OF POVERTY:
TOWARDS AN APPROPRIATE DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK
FOR THE CHURCH IN ITS DEVELOPMENT MINISTRY AMONG
THE POOR**

S.O. DEAN JR.

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THE POOR**

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**THIS THESIS IS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE
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DEDICATION

I humbly dedicate this work to my mother, Amanda and my uncle, Micah W. Wright whose encouragement, support and understanding made it possible for me to be away from them during my entire time of study at the University of Natal.

DECLARATION

This research (unless where specifically stated) is my original work. It has not been submitted to any other university for assessment or for any other purpose. As such, I therefore submit it for the first time at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, as a partial fulfilment for the Master of Theology Degree in Theology and Development.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Dean Jr.', is written over a horizontal line.

SAMUEL OCTAVIOUS DEAN JR

UNIVERSITY OF NATAL PITERMARTZBURG

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that an adequate definition of poverty is necessary for the church if it is to make a positive contribution to poverty alleviation. The definitions of Amartya Sen, Klaus Nurnberger and Bryant Myers are examined in the light of the Biblical witness of the Old and New Testaments. Building on the definition of Myers, the essay then explores some possible strategies for the church in poverty alleviation such as building healthy relationships, using the pulpit, and affirming the poor as agents of their own transformation.

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S.O. DEAN JR.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ABCD	Asset Based Community Development
EATWOT	Economical Association of Third World Theologians
GNP	Gross National Product
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ICSF	International Christian Scholarship Foundation
IDOC	International Documentation on the Contemporary Church
ILO	International Labour Office
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MBC	Maranatha Bible College
UNP	University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg
UNESCO	United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organisation
WTC	World Trade Centre
WB	World Bank
WSSD	World Summit on Sustainable Development

CHAPTER ONE

1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter begins with the problem of poverty and how the Church fits this problem into its development ministry among the poor. Our study proceeds to the background of the problem, which gives rise to the development of this thesis. The motivation and relevance of this study stipulates the author's interest on the subject matter. The hypothesis explains the need for the Church to adopt an appropriate development framework, so as to respond effectively to the needs of the poor. Finally, we reflect on the methods used to produce this work.

1.1. The Problem

Despite a plethora of definitions in the many documents on poverty, the concept of poverty is complicated since it means many different things to many people. Philosophers have wrestled with its definitions, social scientists, economists as well as theologians have struggled to measure poverty and investigate its causes, yet the problem with definition remains an ongoing struggle in the community of academics.

Some questions arising herein include, how do theorists understand poverty? Under what circumstances is one classified as poor? Who is to be blamed for creating a situation of poverty? Where does the Church fit in the midst of this indistinct problem in its development ministry among the poor? How does the Church respond to the challenges and constraints that await her in attempting to transform the deadening condition of the poor? These questions set out the core problem that we set out to address in this essay.

1.2. The Background of the Problem

At the close of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) which took place in Johannesburg from 26 August to 4 September 2002, World leaders came to a concluding point that:

Eradicating poverty is the greatest global challenge facing the world today and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development, particularly for developing countries. Although each country has the primary responsibility for its own sustainable development and poverty eradication and the role of national policies and development strategies cannot be over emphasized, concerted and concrete measures are required at all levels to enable developing countries to achieve their sustainable development goals as related to the internationally agreed poverty-related targets and goals, including those contained in Agenda 21, the relevant outcomes of the United Nations Conferences and the United Nations Millennium Declaration...¹

As such, among the key issues emanating from the conference, poverty eradication was recorded as a major step forward. This gives me the courage to continue my research on this global phenomenon. Poverty is a major problem facing not only the state but the Church as well. The call to participate in the work of development does not only come from God above, it also comes from below, from the very people in the Church. Most of the poor who are struggling to survive are right in the Church and this is true particularly for the Church leaders who work in poor countries.² According to the World Bank (WB) "Poverty is the inability to attain a minimal standard of living in order to meet basic consumption needs and in order to meet the income necessary to satisfy them."³

Poverty is a consistent trajectory throughout the Scriptures. If this claim is true that the scriptures assert that God is on the side of the poor, the Church should make this biblical theme a central part of her teaching. For example in the Exodus narrative (Chapters 5-12), God displays his power in order to free the oppressed.⁴

¹Key Commitments set out in the Johannesburg plan of implementation. For full text visit the official website: www.Johannesburgsummit.org (Johannesburg: 2002) p2

² De Gruchy, S. *A Spirituality for Development* at <http://www.hs.unp.ac.za/theology/article01.htm>.2001.

³ Marcus, T. et al. *Sociology of development in South Africa*. Department of Social Science. Unpublished text (University of Natal) p12

⁴ Sider, R.J. *Rich Christians in an age of hunger: A Biblical Study* (London: Holder and Stoughton, 1971) p54.

Much of the prophets' message had to do with how the economic realities of the day affected the lives of the poor of the state⁵. The World economic situation with its asymmetrical trade, the use of biotechnology and genetic engineering by giant Multinational Companies to exploit the poor, enormous debt, war, poverty and neo-colonialism is not only an economic and development problem, but also an ethical one. Therefore, the Church has a role to play in response to this problem, because it has a prophetic concern about justice and development and about the economic and political life of the nations of the world.⁶ In the same line of thought Nyerere asserts:

I am suggesting that, unless we participate actively in the rebellion against those social structures and economic organizations which condemn people to poverty, humiliation and degradation, then the church, will become irrelevant to people and the Christian religion will degenerate into a set of superstitions accepted by the fearful.⁷

1.3 Motivation and relevance of the study

The motivation to write this subject originates from a historical event from my childhood experience as well as my experience in the pastoral ministry. Born into the union of a poor black mother and a wealthy white father who did not care, I indeed experience poverty to a certain extent, even in the care of missionaries, in that I was deprived of my individual rights and freedom to attain authentic human development. However, my greatest experience of poverty was birthed after I sensed God's call to the pastoral ministry.

Having been called to love and to have compassion on those living in poverty, to walk in the steps of Christ and to live in solidarity with the poor of our world, I began travelling to various places such as the Ivory Coast, Ghana, Togo and Nigeria. One afternoon on my way back home from the Maranatha Bible College (MBC) I came across a group of

⁵ Owensby, W.L. *Economics for Prophets*
(Michigan: William B.E. Eerdmans, 1988) p.x.

⁶ De Gruchy, S. "A Spirituality for Development"
<http://www.hs.unp.ac.za/theology/article01.htm.2> 2002

⁷ Nyerere, J. K. *Freedom and Development* (Dar Es Salaam: Oxford University Press, 1973) P. 215

beggars, old and young, males and females at Karnishi market. The majority of them were handicapped. Honestly speaking I got on the bus with tears in my eyes. My heart was broken. I wondered, what can I do to help these people? But that was the beginning of my eight years of experience in the ministry. In addition to this fact was my six years of experience in the French Republic of Ivory Coast. In Ivory Coast we started a prison and hospital ministry. I was the youngest among others such as Mother Diggs, a recognized lawyer who left her career in Liberia to honour the call of God, to minister to the poor and those in prisons and hospitals. It was here I saw poor sick prisoners chained to their hospital beds and women with babies in jail.

Nonetheless, my worst experience of poverty came about on February 28, 2002. Since I am always in the Pine Town, Marrianridge areas, the Joy Chapel Ministries in Marrianridge that has become one of my families in South Africa decided to invite me to their Family Day celebration. During this time the pastors and the entire Church hired a bus and spent the day on the beach. The beach normally selected is Queensburg. During this time of celebration, each family will prepare their own food to feed themselves. Sometimes they prepare surplus so that everybody can have. Normally the day begins with a morning devotion followed by baptism. After the baptism everybody is free to have fun.

During this particular Family Day I had an experience that broke me. While we sat under the trees, Pastor Wayne Tring and family and I, I saw two strange boys. They were about eight and ten years old. They stood by the pump and watched other kids from the Church playing and running around. The way they looked explained that they were not part of the children of the Church. They had torn trousers and no shirts on them. They stood trembling from the cold wind that blew on the beach. I told pastor Wayne, "those kids look strange." He said, "that's right Samuel". I got up and went to them. I greeted them and asked, "where are you from?" "Cape Town" they responded. "Where are your parents?" They pointed toward the bush and said "over there." I did not know by then

they were living under the bush. So I called some women of the Church to give them some food. They took the food to their parents.

After couple of minutes a man came out and stood by the pump where his children had been standing with a Bible in his hand. His hair and beard had over grown. I could see he had not eaten since day. I walked to him and talked with him. He told me he lives under the bush with his family and his wife had just given birth to a baby. I just could not believe what he was saying. His wife and a baby under the bush? "But why are you living under the bush with your family?" He told me he had no choice. Being unemployed, he told me he could not afford to pay the rent where he had been living and was asked to vacate the premises. My heart was broken. I could not go to see because such things lead me to tears. So I again called some women to give him more food and go to see his wife and baby. Sister Eleen and others went to see. Surely, they came back broken and said the condition is bad. What more could I do but to pray with him and encourage him to go and look for a job or seek help from the social welfare. I wish I could do more in my capacity to help. By then evening was falling and we had to return home.

As mentioned above, my experience working with refugees and the local poor in other countries had been sad, but I never saw a family living under a bush. I thought to myself, but why is his condition so bad? There must be a reason and the reason he gave was unemployment. Thus unemployment causes the poor to form a world of isolation from the rest of the society. This experience as well as the screaming voices of those sick prisoners chained to their hospital beds will always be part of my life. I can still picture them and will continue to picture them. Based on my experience with the poor, I have come to realise that, while the Church seeks to minister to the needs of the poor and to alleviate poverty from among them, an appropriate development framework in response to poverty is required to safe guide the Church in its development approach to this complex problem.

Emanating from the collage of documents produced by researchers on poverty are various questions, such as:

What is poverty?

What are the causes of poverty?

Who are the poor?

What can the Church do? And so on.

With respect to the above experience, this study is undertaken with the understanding that poverty is a complex problem that requires an adequate approach. And if the Church wishes to be effective in its development ministry to the poor then an appropriate development framework is required. For this reason, the theological and biblical perspectives on poverty are explored in this paper with the mind to develop an appropriate development framework for the Church in response to poverty.

1.4 THE ROLE OF CHRISTIAN FAITH

The role of Christian faith in any life-threatening matter such as poverty, HIV/AIDS or unemployment, which dehumanizes people, is imperative. In my opinion poor people are a by-product of the society in which the church exists and for which it is co-responsible. The poor are marginalized by the socio-political and cultural society in which they live. Gutierrez substantiates this view when he says they are the “exploited, oppressed proletariat, robbed of the fruit of their labour and despoiled of their community.”⁸

Even though, Gutierrez is speaking of the land-less poor farmers on enormous estates in his Latin American context, yet his observation is commensurate with that of the poor in my country Liberia, in that those people are not only victimized by poverty, but also denied their rights to authentic human dignity by the abject poverty in which they exist. As in many parts of the Third World, the majority of the population in the rural sectors in Liberia are deprived of various services in terms of health, social and the economic. In

⁸ Gutierrez, G. *The power of the poor in history* (London: SCM,1983) p. 44ff.

this sense they are not living life holistically or experiencing that which Nurnberger refers to as comprehensive well-being.⁹ In my understanding, the fundamental reason for the lack of services to the poor is injustice. Hence, in Dorr's words:

...an important fact about poverty in today's world- the fact that it is generally not just an unfortunate reality, attributable to the lack of the bounty of nature, or even laziness; it is most likely to be the result of injustice.¹⁰

Dorr's opinion gives reason for Christian intervention. In fact, injustice as a cause of poverty, has been emphasized by theologians from the developing world, who separate poverty from impoverishment, an example of such organization is EATWOT.¹¹ Poverty may be understood as the state or condition, which may be the outcome of misfortune, something that just happen to human beings. It can be natural disasters such as drought. On the other hand, the word impoverishment as understood by the above theologians, carries the meaning of deliberate injustice. In short, to impoverish a country or a group of people means to inflict poverty on them.¹²

It can be seen then that these oppressors enrich themselves by inflicting poverty on the poor because the unjust structure of society permits them the privilege of enjoying the fruit of other people's labor. In the same vein, Dorr alerts us that:

We live in a stratified society where certain economic, political, cultural and religious structures maintain and promote the dominance of the rich and powerful over the mass of ordinary people and peoples. These structures operate through agencies and institutions that are staffed mainly by middle-class people who provide the professional and commercial services of society.¹³

⁹ Nurnberger, K. "The interaction of experienced needs and dominant patterns of thought in the formation of Christian soteriology" in Kinyua, A. M. (ed) *The church against poverty: An assessment of the work of the Christian Community Services (CCS) in the Kirinyaga Anglican Diocese in Kenya* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal, 1999) P.11

¹⁰ Dorr, D. *Option for the poor* (Dublin: Colour Book, 1983) P. 249

¹¹ EATWOT: Economical Association of Third World Theologians, based in Nigeria. In Pitman, L. M. *Buttress's World Guide to abbreviations of organizations* (London: Blackie Academic and professional, 1973) P. 415

¹² Dorr, D. *Option for the poor* (Dublin: Colour Books, 1983) P. 294

¹³ Dorr, D. *Option for the poor* (Dublin: Colour Books, 1983) P.3

This atrocity of economic injustice and the creation of the ever-increasing gap of poverty demands our attention. The fact that injustice and oppression dehumanize people demands justice. The IDOC takes this view further when it asserts:

...do not the present arrangements of world affairs blatantly violate the first command of elementary justice: *that no one may enrich himself at the expense of another?* The question answers itself but poses in turn a far more complex one: *What is to be done about a situation of global injustice?* The bishops of Latin America ...have termed this 'a situation of sin'.¹⁴

Such a situation is what De Gruchy seeks to address when he says the church needs to be concerned about development and be involved in it because it has a prophetic concern about truth and justice.¹⁵ This view will be discussed further in the proceeding section.

The role of Christian faith in development is further discussed in the observation of White and Tiongco. According to their observation there are four stages involved in the process of doing theology and development. These are: (1) the need to encounter the poor; (2) understanding why they are poor; (3) through reflection, making a critical judgement whether or not our interpretation corresponds with reality and lastly (4) planning and implementing the strategies to bring about the required changes.¹⁶ Thus Gutierrez adds, the eradication of poverty is not a generous relief action, but a demand that we go and construct a new social order.¹⁷ In this sense the church has a significant role to play and a task to be fulfilled. It is charged to address, and be addressed by a holistic life. Its task is to stand side by side with those who have been inflicted by poverty at the same time encouraging the rest of the Christian community to relate faith to all aspects of life. Within the community of believers there are those in various social positions such as health, politics, economics, etc. as well as those with wealth, skills, gifts

¹⁴ IDOC (ed.) International Documentation On the contemporary Church "People and power: Seeking justice, shaping their world" in *Poverty, Environment and Power* (Dallas: IDOC, 1973) P. 3

¹⁵ De Gruchy, S. *A spirituality for development* @ <http://www.hs.unp.ac.za/theology/article01.htm> #2

¹⁶ White, S. & Tiongco, R. "What has theology to do with development, Peace and Reconciliation" in Phire, I. A. et al (eds.) *The role of Christianity in development, peace and reconciliation: Southern perspectives* (Nairobi: AACC, 1996) PP. 11-29

¹⁷ Gutierrez, G. *The power of the poor in history* (London: SCM, 1983) p. 45

and other capabilities. The combination of these services in the interest of the poor authenticates Christian witness of Christ.¹⁸

Summary

This chapter has laid the platform for our discussion. Here we examined the problem and the background of the problem gives rise to poverty. As a response to the stated problem we proceeded to the role of theology in poverty alleviation. We saw that Christian faith has an authentic role to play in poverty reduction. If this is the role of Christian faith then we need a firm understanding of poverty. Hence, in chapter two, we will look at three theoretical understandings of poverty.

¹⁸ Ibid. P. 45

CHAPTER TWO

A REFLECTION ON VARIOUS THEORETICAL CONCEPTS OF POVERTY

2. INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter we discussed the problem of poverty. We saw that the problem with the definition of poverty remains an ongoing struggle among theorists. Among others, a paramount question raised was where does the Church fit in the midst of this complexity. We went on to look at the background of the problem which gives rise to the development of this research project. Having discussed the problem and background of poverty we then examined the role of Christian faith in poverty alleviation followed by the motivation and relevance of the study.

In this chapter we focus on three theoretical concepts of poverty. Firstly, we investigate Amartya Sen's concept of poverty. Four sub-topics are discussed. *Poverty as capability deprivation; income poverty; capability poverty and unemployment; and capability deprivation*. Secondly, we look at Klaus Nurnberger's concept of poverty. Two areas are observed. *The causes of economic imbalances and types of basic human needs*. And finally, we look at Bryant Myers' holistic concept of poverty. Two sub-topics are discussed. Firstly, *the nature of poverty is fundamentally relational*, and next, *the cause of poverty is fundamentally spiritual*.

2.1 AMARTYA SEN'S CONCEPT OF POVERTY

Sen's concept of poverty is purely based on a quest for justice in the field of development. In our world today, people live longer than before. Because of the dramatic improvement in economic growth, countries are more closely related than ever before. These things have happened on the foundation of democratic and participatory governance through the prevailing ideologies of human rights and political liberty. Yet, in spite of all these things our world is full with deprivation, destitution and oppression. While there are many new problems in the world today, there are also old ones as well, such as poverty and unfulfilled basic needs, famines and hunger, etc. Many of these deprivations can be seen in one form or another in developed and poor countries. How to overcome these problems is a major concern for development.¹⁹

2.1.1 Poverty as capability deprivation

The view of poverty as 'capability deprivation' stands in opposition to the view which sees poverty simply as low income, and which is the traditional indicator of identifying poverty. The crux of this view is that instead of identifying poverty in terms of low-ness of income it must be understood in terms of the deprivation of basic capabilities. While poverty as capability deprivation stands in opposition to the standard criterion of poverty identification it does not deny the fact that low income is one of the major causes of poverty because lack of income can also be an authentic reason for individuals capability deprivation.²⁰

To understand poverty as capability deprivation, Sen draws our attention to three points. Firstly, through common sense, poverty can be identified in terms of capability deprivation. This way of approaching poverty focuses on deprivations that are "intrinsically significant," opposite to low income, which is only instrumentally

¹⁹ Sen, A. *Development as freedom* (New York: Anchor books, 1999) P. xi

important. The second aspect is that there are influences on capability deprivation as well as on real poverty rather than on low income. This means that income is not the only instrument in creating capabilities. The third aspect is that the instrumental link between low income and low capability changes between different context as well as between different families and different people. This means that the income impact on capabilities is accidental and conditional.²¹

In addition, Sen raises another important point, which demands that the state focus on poverty reduction in the context of practical policy making. The first step here is that the link between income and capability would be affected sharply by the individual's age. Say for instance by the particular needs of the elderly and the very young. In terms of gender and social roles, through special obligations of maternity along with determined family obligations. In terms of location, "by proneness to flooding or drought or by fear and violence in some inner cities where people live."

These classifications are considered important in differentiating between population groups, in terms of age, gender, location etc. The second step is that there can be some linking of disadvantages between income deprivation and adversity in converting income into obligations. The reason for this is because conditions such as age, disability and sickness can reduce a person's capacity to earn income. But these conditions also make it difficult to turn income into capability because someone older or more disabled or a seriously sick person would need more income to accomplish the same obligations. This means that in terms of capability deprivation, real poverty is more complex than that which is seen in the income space.²²

Thirdly, is distribution within the family. This aspect raises more difficulties with the income approach to poverty. If the income of the family is used unevenly in the interest of some relatives and not others then the degree of deprivation of the left out relatives

²⁰ Ibid. P. 87

²¹ Ibid. P. 88

²² Ibid. P. 88

may not be correctly reflected in the context of family income. An example to this claim is the practice of boy preference in the family allocation of resources. Girls are considered neglected members. The fourth aspect is that in the context of incomes, relative deprivation can become absolute deprivation in the context of capabilities. If a person is relatively poor in a wealthy country, he or she can be a huge capability handicap, whereas another person's absolute income is high in the context of global standards.²³

The purpose of the capability approach in analysing poverty is to increase the understanding of the nature and causes of poverty and deprivation by applying a paradigm shift of primary attention "from means to ends that people have reason to pursue, and correspondingly, to the freedoms to be able to satisfy these ends...The deprivations are seen at a more fundamental level- one closer to the informal demands of social justice. Hence the relevance of the perspective of capability poverty."²⁴

Sen's capability approach to poverty gives reason for justice in the sense that poverty is not just about high income but also the lack of freedom of choice to explore one's capability. This practice is common in the developing countries where men and women do not share equal rights. Women are not given the opportunity and freedom of choice. In the same vein, Nussbaum observes that:

Women have fewer opportunities than men to live free from fear and to enjoy rewarding types of love- especially when, as often happens, they are married without choice in childhood and have no resources from bad marriages. In all these ways, unequal social and political circumstances give women unequal human capabilities.²⁵

This view substantiates Sen's poverty as capability deprivation. When people are not free to choose and to do what they wish to do to improve their livelihood they are deprived.

²³ Ibid. P. 90

²⁴ Ibid. P. 90

²⁵ Nussbaum, C. M. *Women and human development: the capabilities approach* (Chicago: Cambridge University Press, 2000) P. 1

In line with Nussbaum's argument, if women are ever given the freedom of choice, those who control them influence their choices. Take for example a wife that is considered a property is influenced by the preference of her husband. In this sense she is not really free to choose because in the first place she is a property. Surely this is poverty as capability deprivation.²⁶

2.1.1.1 Income Poverty

As seen above, income poverty is described in terms of lowness of income. While Sen seeks to separate between the two concepts of income poverty and capability poverty, it must be kept in mind that he is also aware that the two concepts are related in that income is an important means to capabilities. The basic argument here is that there are causes of income poverty and these include lack of better education and health care. Sen observes that basic education and health care improve the quality of life people live. In addition they also enhance a person's ability to earn an income and to be free of income poverty. This means if the poor have basic education and health care they would have a better chance of defeating income poverty.²⁷

This observation can be seen in the context of the Asian economies beginning with Japan through East Asia and Southeast Asia. The rationale behind the success of the Asian economies is that "they shared the economic opportunities by means of effective support of social background, including high levels of literacy, numeracy, basic education, good general health care, completed land reforms..."²⁸. Say for instance in the Indian case study, having relied greatly on spreading basic education, health care and equitable land redistribution as a response in the reduction of poverty income, Kerala is seen as the only state in India with the fastest rate of reduction in poverty income. On the other side, some states for example, Punjab used high economic growth to reduce income poverty. This

²⁶ Ibid. P. 167

²⁷ Ibid. p. 90ff.

²⁸ Sen, A. *Development as freedom* (New York: Anchor books, 1999) P. 91.

means the factors listed above are useful tools in the reduction of income poverty but not the ultimate solution.²⁹

2.1.1.2 Capability Poverty

As stated earlier on in this paper, capability poverty can be understood in terms of deprivation and injustice. When a people are deprived of their rights and freedom of choices to explore their capacity to lead a better life that is injustice. It is around a similar idea that Martha Nussbaum developed her concept on women and human development and the capability approach. That which I regard as the crux of her work is women's experience in the developing countries. Her quest is that the principles of justice must be embedded in the constitution of the state. The bottom line of the whole debate is that governments should provide their citizens with equal opportunities to improve their living condition without being forced. For example, a woman must be given the opportunity to go to school but not forced to attend school.³⁰

It is believed that when a person's capability is increased that person is able to live a better life because it increases their ability to be more useful and productive which result in high income. This means that the more a person's capability is improved the more income they are able to generate. In other words, when the capabilities of the poor are enhanced they become productive people. And the more they become productive the more deprivations and poverty can reduce.

2.2.1.3 Unemployment and capability deprivation

Unemployment is a real problem that challenges all of us today. The problem of unemployment is reported day after day in the media. Newspaper headlines are filled

²⁹ Ibid. P 92

³⁰ Nussbaum, M. C. *Women and human development: the capabilities approach* (Chicago: Cambridge University press, 2000) P. 5

with the retrenchment of thousands of people every day. This problem is right at our door-step. Currently in South Africa there are thousands of unemployed people who go to sleep in anticipatory anxiety, hoping against hope that the next day they will get jobs to take care of their families. The underlying cause for this massive unemployment crisis is what Sen attempts to address. While we anticipate Sen's explanation this is what Gerrard has to say: "the single most important task facing economic theory is to explain the causes of mass unemployment."³¹

Is there really a difficulty in explaining the causes of unemployment? The problem of unemployment is more than just a loss of income. For the matter of fact if income loss was the real problem involved in unemployment then the solution is simple for the people affected by it. One of the ways the problem can be solved is by setting up income support action and unemployment benefits. But if the problem of unemployment is more than income loss, that is it has other negative impacts leading to deprivation of other issues, then to a certain extent income support is not the absolute solution to this effect. The negative impact of unemployment is enormous. Apart from income loss other negative effects include "psychological harm, loss of work motivation, skill and self-confidence, increase in ailments and morbidity...disruption of family relations and social life, hardening of social exclusion and accentuation of racial tensions and gender asymmetries."³²

Observing the American and European case studies, Sen says if we focus on income inequality only as the reason for the vast scale of unemployment then we are misled. But if unemployment is a force against the well being of human beings then the analysis of economic inequality must address it. However, the underlying rationale here is a difference in behavioural approaches toward social and personal responsibilities.³³

³¹ Gerrard, B. *Theory of the capitalist economic: Towards a post-classical synthesis* (New York: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1989) P. 35

³² Sen, A. *Development as freedom* (New York: Anchor books, 1999) P. 94

Summary

Sen's concept of poverty is enlightening. As discussed above he approaches poverty reduction from the perspective of capacity building. Sen sees education or training as an important step in reducing poverty among the poor. In conclusion to his concept Sen sees the poor as people with internal capacity but lack the opportunity to explore that capacity. As such his observation is that the "... role of the individual as a member of the public and as a participant in economic, social and political actions..." empowered him or her to live a poverty free life.³⁴ In essence Sen's opinion is that the internal capacity of the poor plus external opportunity results to freedom, which in turn produces capability. For example capability needs both a personal ability and a social arrangement to exercise that ability. This is why he attempts to convince governments of the world to include the principles of justice in their constitutions so as to provide opportunity for the poor to explore their capacity. Thus the title of his book *Development as freedom*.³⁵

2.2 KLAUS NURNBERGER'S CONCEPT OF POVERTY

Nurnberger approaches poverty from a socio-economic perspective. Within this context he develops his concept in terms of the centre-periphery interplay. The centre is understood to be the place with a very powerful and mixed economy. Within this economic system, different types of professional companies acknowledge one another. In the periphery it is not so. What is normally found in the periphery is small-scale farming. Those who live there produce just enough to sustain themselves.

³³ Ibid. P. 96

³⁴ Sen, A. *Development as freedom* (New York: Anchor Books, 1999) p. 19

³⁵ Ibid. P.38

In the centre, unless other causes say for instance, HIV/AIDS results in less- workforce, income increases as the workforce increases. In contrast, the periphery offers very low income because the level of productive force is also very low.³⁶

In terms of infrastructures for example transport facilities or electricity the centre is by far more developed than the periphery. On the economic side, the centre has a strong level of economic production because it has basic skills and modern expertise. In the periphery there is little opportunity to explore economic initiatives.

The economy in the periphery is poorly developed. In this sense it needs a strong technology but cannot get it. Also the lack of finance does not allow this. One of the reasons for the flourishing of the economy in the centre is because the inhabitants have the income to buy its commodities. In the periphery the people are spread in small groups across a large land. Each family stays by itself. There is not enough money to go around in the periphery. On this basis the consumer market remains poor. The life-style of people in the centre is by far better than those in the periphery, because they earn better income than those in the periphery. It is quite interesting to know that the centre is not only highly developed in terms of its industrialization and commercial markets, but also in terms of its agriculture production. The rationale behind this concept is that in the peripheries "cities exist to serve the farms, while in centres farms exist to serve the cities. The closer one gets to the city the more incentive and productive agriculture becomes."³⁷

Nurnberger's concept is interesting. This means that urbanization in some way is a good response to poverty, because it provides one with better income to live the better life-style. Is this really the way to alleviating poverty? If the answer is yes then the solution to poverty is to replace it with income.

³⁶ Nurnberger, K. *Prosperity, poverty and pollution: managing the approaching crisis* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publication, 1999) P. 45

³⁷ Ibid. P.47

2.2.1 Causes of economic imbalances

In his understanding of poverty, Nurnberger provides us some causes of economic imbalances, which leads to poverty. I would examine these one by one. The first cause of economic imbalance is the *massive growth of human population*. Because uncontrolled growth can affect the economy, the elite in the centre aimed to maintain a low number in its population growth. This practice is one of the keys to its high economy. In the centre, parents seek to provide higher education for their kids because they want them to excel at least to their own level of wealth and potential, so they invest enormous amount of money on quality education. Due to the high cost of such education, the elite cannot afford too many children. Furthermore, they are fully aware because financial means and self-control provide the way to stop women from getting pregnant.³⁸

The reason for avoiding too many children is because many couples in the centre believe that children are the root cause of frustration because life is full of stress and other issues that lead to success among the elite. To become pregnant or to leave your job and take care of children is a big sacrifice, especially for a career woman. On the other hand, in the periphery this is not the same. The situation is absolutely different. In the past in traditional societies more children were seen to be the source of economic benefit because it provided workforce and warriors as well to protect the clan from external threats. But now things have changed, the case is different in our time and context.³⁹ As such, Nurnberger observes that:

In many instances, rural areas have reached their carrying capacity and population growth leads to increasing poverty. The result is migration to the cities. Under urban-industrial circumstances, large families have become an economic handicap...In marked contrast with the situation in undisturbed traditional cultures, girls become pregnant shortly after puberty and regularly after that. Immature young men abandon their sweethearts once they are with child and feel no obligations. Illegitimate children become the rule rather than the exception. Single parent households headed by grandmothers often perpetuate themselves over generations and constitute the poorest of the poor.⁴⁰

³⁸ Ibid. P. 106

³⁹ Ibid. P. 106

On a wider spectrum of society, overpopulation, environmental destruction and the decrease in food production have made the factor of population growth one of the most serious economic problems in poor countries. Ecological destruction is also the result of population growth, especially in rural areas. Rural people who move to the cities normally live in the slums. Here they become victims of pollution, water, unhealthy environments, noise, crime, etc. Generally speaking, the factor of population growth is a complex problem that the poor themselves find it difficult to solve.⁴¹

The second factor is *social securities*. The people in the centre have much opportunity to relish many benefits and pension fund. This means that people do not have to rely on the income of their extended family members. On the contrary, in poor communities the extended family is obliged to provide economic security for its people because of the lack of funds and strategic programmes to serve such organizations. This practice results in abuse, which becomes commonplace in marginalized and vulnerable society. In such a community, property and security are highly important both psychologically and sociologically.⁴²

Indeed breadwinners do not enjoy the fruit of their labours because of the huge social obligations they have to attend to. Every little income that is generated is immediately used up because of the large needs of the extended family. Based on this, breadwinners lose their interest of being productive. Hence, people who move to the centre to work tend to escape from the large responsibility left back at home. The extended family at home is left to suffer the plight of poverty.⁴³

Thirdly, *biological factors*. Services such as health, recreational facilities and balanced diets are often of quality standards in the centre whereas in the periphery the people do not have access to such services because they are relatively poor. In this community

⁴⁰ Nurnberger, K. *Prosperity, poverty and population: managing the approaching crisis* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publication, 1999) P. 107ff.

⁴¹ Ibid. P. 106

⁴² Ibid. P. 105 (Emphasis added).

⁴³ Ibid. P. 105

children often suffer from ongoing brain damage. The lack of vitamins and proteins can lead to weakness. These weakened people are compelled to cover long distances on foot, transporting heavy goods and performing *corvee*- hard labour in the opened fields. In some countries with tropical weather an unfavourable climate can also add to this effect causing a great disaster for the people. In some areas of the society, large numbers of the population suffer from permanent diseases due to lack of safe drinking water, health services as well as life threatening sicknesses.⁴⁴

I agree with Nurnberger when he speaks of permanent diseases in some of the areas among the population. In many poor countries, particularly in Africa the negative impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic has affected millions of people, among whom, are AIDS orphans left to be cared for. The frustrating effect leads people to alcohol and drugs. In addition to this observation, in his work on population, Malthus attempted to prove “the only effectual mode of improving the condition of the poor.”⁴⁵ He observed that any attempt to enhance something faster than population growth would not succeed, for the matter of fact, the forces of reproduction could always keep track with the supply of goods and services, and there would, of course, be no long period of improvement of those in poverty. The only solution to the problem was to focus on slowing down the population growth, so that there was more for all peoples and this strategy would improve the dehumanized state of the poor. This thought shows that Nurnberger’s view is not eccentric.⁴⁶

2.2.2 Types of basic human needs

The implication of the types of basic human needs as discussed in this project is that a centred and sustained effort is made by governments as well as development institutions to adopt a framework that meets these needs. The aim of this programme is that the basic

⁴⁴ Ibid. P. 105 (Emphasis added. *Corvee* Hebrew word for force labour)

⁴⁵ Malthus, T.R. “Birth, Marriages and Death” in Dauntton (ed) *Progress and poverty: An economic and social history of Britain 1700-1850* (New York: Anchor books, 1995) P. 387

needs be made available to the people who lack them. To convey a comprehensive meaning of basic human needs, I feel obliged to begin with Nurnberger's definition of comprehensive well being as my point of departure. In his work *The interaction of experienced needs and dominant patterns of thought in the formation of Christian soteriology*, Nurnberger says:

Well being is the free unfolding of the life of a creature as it is meant to be. This presupposes both a certain environment and an internal disposition of the creature which are conducive to this unfolding. Well being is not a descriptive but a normative concept in that it indicates reality not as it is but as it is meant to be.⁴⁷

This soteriological concept has profound implications, which further expand soteriological understanding. On the concept of soteriology, Nicolson observes that soteriology is both future and present event.⁴⁸ While Nurnberger agrees with Nicolson on this point he is more interested in the now aspect not denying the eschatological aspect. This is what really matters. Embedded in his pragmatic argument, Nurnberger identifies and analyses six primary elements of a soteriological paradigm in the panorama of the history of the biblical faith. On this understanding he concludes:

It is evident, then that any concept of salvation that restricts God's redemptive concern to particular dimension of need, be it spiritual, intellectual, physical, political, economic, ecological, or whatever, is inappropriate in terms of the biblical faith. Any need is a deficiency in comprehensive well being and as such part of God's concern.⁴⁹

In an attempt to convince his audience, Nurnberger explains his line of thought in an understandable way that gives meaning to the full extent of freedom from poverty. He articulates the human needs in a structural form of hierarchy, which he depicts in three concentric circles representing *basic needs*, *immanent needs* and *transcendent needs*. He

⁴⁶ Ibid. P. 387

⁴⁷ Nurnberger, K. "The interaction of experienced needs and the dominant patterns of thought in the formation of Christian soteriologies, b" in Mandew, MDPA (ed) *War, memory and salvation: The Bulhoek massacre and the construction of a contextual soteriology* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal, 1997) vol.1. p.23

⁴⁸ Nicolson, R. B. "Abelard Resurrected: Soteriology, Praxis and duty" in *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*. Vol. 56 September 1986, pp34-46.

⁴⁹ Nurnberger, K. "The interaction of experienced needs and the dominant patterns of thought in the formation of Christian soteriologies, b" in Mandew, M.D.P.A. (ed) *War, memory and salvation: The Bulhoek massacre and the construction of a contextual soteriology* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal, 1997) vol. 1. P. 23

explains these needs in the following ways: first, *basic needs*, comprise of space, time and energy. These needs do not function separately rather they serve as the foundation of every other need.⁵⁰ Secondly, *immanent needs*. The term immanent refers to that which is “directly accessible to our experience and influence.” These needs can be personal, and include biological (life and health, food and drink, activity and rest, sexuality), psychological (reason, emotions and will), relational (healthy relationships to self, to fellow humans, to non- human entities) and spiritual needs (identity, belonging, reassurance, hope, courage, joy, beauty).⁵¹

Contextual needs, include economic (resources of the individual, the primary group, larger organizations, the society as a whole), social (identity and belonging, statuses, and role, individual and group in transaction, social security and progress), political (including military) and ecological needs.⁵² Lastly, is the circle of *transcendent or religious needs*. These needs encapsulate meaning, acceptance and authority (or empowerment). These are referred to as transcendent needs because “they go beyond the sphere which is directly accessible to our experience and influence and point to transcendent foundations of reality.”⁵³ At this point it is clear that Nurnberger’s profound insight is an attempt to response to the theoretical conceptions listed above. In this attempt he endeavours to response to the whole needs of the whole human person as Claerbaut puts it:

Humans were created to be whole persons, with physical, mental and spiritual dimensions. Deprivation in any of these dimensions has a deadening effect on the others, since all parts are interrelated and interactive... the soul without a body is a ghost, the body without a soul is a corpse. ⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Ibid. p.10

⁵¹ Ibid. P. 10ff.

⁵² Ibid. P. 10

⁵³ Ibid. P. 10

⁵⁴ Claerbaut, D. “Urban ministry” in Perkins (ed) *Beyond charity: The call to Christian Community Development* (Michigan: Baker books, 1993) P. 89

Secondly, while we appreciate Numberberger's observations, there are some unsettled questions in the basic needs approach. This is to raise the awareness that the poor, in spite of their poverty are not objects of development. They are people with wisdom and are able to make decisions too. Some of these unsettled questions are:

- 1) Who is to determine the basic needs? Is it the poor themselves or someone else who may prefer cigarette to bread, television to education, cool drinks and beer to cleaner water and vegetables!
- 2) Basic needs may be interpreted subjectively as the satisfaction of the people as understood by themselves rather than by the development specialists. This interpretation means that people must be given the chance to decide what they need for themselves
- 3) Interventionist interpretation: this view is based on the decisions of those in public offices, their decisions to design services such as water supply, sanitation and education and also to guide private utilization of public considerations for instance, through counterpressures to advertisers or food subsidies and
- 4) Non-economic aspect: this interpretation reflects non-material aspects of human autonomy and accepts a person and group participation in the creation and implementation of projects, and in some cases political gathering.⁵⁵

With the above response, it can be seen that basic needs encompass the idea of subsistence needs and has been used, basically in discussion surrounding poverty in the poor countries. Proponents of this view have contended that it must be placed within the context of a nation's economic and social development.⁵⁶

The basic needs concept comprises of two key factors, insufficient income to keep up subsistence requirements for food, shelter, housing, and certain households needs, and insufficient essential social services in terms of safe drinking water, sanitation, public

⁵⁵ Streeten, P. *Second Carnegie Inquiry into poverty & Development in Southern Africa: Basic needs: Some unsettled questions* (Cape Town: November 1983) Conference Paper vol. 1. Paper No. 8, pp.1-16

⁵⁶ ILO. *Employment, growth & basic needs* (New York: Praeger, 1977) P. 19 ILO-International Labour Office

transport, health services and education.⁵⁷ The approach of basic needs have been applied by several international institutions including the International Labour Office (ILO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) in their efforts to eradicate the plight of poverty.⁵⁸

Summary

In this section Nurnberger has provided us some causes of poverty in society. As discussed above Nurnberger sees economic imbalances as the cause of poverty. People are in poverty because their basic needs are not met and the reason for this is the economic imbalances of society. In addition to this observation Nurnberger adds other causes such as population growth especially among the poor themselves. In a nutshell, Nurnberger sees poverty as unmet needs and the cause is economic imbalance as explained in the context of the centre-periphery interplay. For Nurnberger the solution to this imbalance “relationship” is correcting the imbalance. This concept of poverty leads us to Myers’ understanding of poverty in terms of relationship.

2.3 BRYANT MYERS’ CONCEPT OF POVERTY

Myers’ concept of poverty is enriching to a certain extent. Having studied the traditional view of “poverty as deficit” along with the works of Chambers, Friedman, Christian and Joyakaran, Myers proceeds to develop a holistic understanding of poverty, which provides some insights for a Christian development practitioner like myself. As a Christian development practitioner in an attempt to provide a holistic understanding of poverty that is biblical and inclusive, the author pulls together material from the biblical

⁵⁷ Nurnberger, K. *Making the ends meet: personal money management in a Christian perspective* (Pietermaritzburg: Encounter Publication, 1995) P. 15

⁵⁸ ILO. *Employment, Growth and Basic Needs* (New York: Praeger, 19 77) P. 19

narrative and the materials on poverty and its causes as discussed by the authors listed above. This approach to poverty is similar to what I intend to do in this paper. Having succeeded in his research, Myers interestingly provides us with an understanding of poverty from two perspectives. The first is that the nature of poverty is fundamentally relational, and the second is that the cause of poverty is fundamentally spiritually⁵⁹

2.3.1 The Nature of poverty is Fundamentally relational

Myers' holistic understanding of poverty is primarily an appreciation and combination of the works of the authors listed above (Chambers, Friedman, Christian and Jayakaran). To understand what Myers means by the nature of poverty is fundamentally relational, I would begin by setting up a platform upon which I can articulate my understanding, by reflecting on the views with which he engages.

Firstly, the traditional view that sees poverty as “deficit”. This concept, which defines poverty as a kind of deficit or lack, is tenuous in a sense. It sees the poor as those who do not have sufficient food to eat, shelter or safe drinking water. It sees the poor as those whose land is poor; for whom irrigation is not possible because there is no water, roads are inadequate, and who lack schools for their children. Obviously such view of poverty misleadingly encourages developers to plan to meet the needs or things that are lacking. This view assumes that when the missing things are provided the debate about poverty will be over because poor people will no longer be poor. The traditional view of poverty as “deficit” goes beyond material lack.⁶⁰ It also has to do with the lack of education and training. It assumes that:

Poor people may not understand nutrition, the need to boil water, the importance of child spacing, how to read the instructions on a packet of improved seeds. They don't know about sustainable agriculture, running small business, the importance of saving money.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Myers, B.L. *Walking with the poor: Principles and practices of transformational development* (New York: Orbis, 1999)p86

⁶⁰ Ibid.p65

⁶¹ Ibid. p66.

This concept of poverty believes that the solution to the above debate is to encourage programmes that encapsulate education and training. In other words, if poor people learn enough, poverty will be eliminated because they will no longer be poor. Indeed this view of poverty is plausible to a certain extent, in that poor people do lack things, material and non-material. But to limit a person's perception of poverty to this definition leads to some serious problems, because it sees poverty as the lack of things, as such it sees the solution as providing those things. Such an approach to poverty is misleading. It makes the outsiders or development practitioners to see themselves as people of superior ability to take care of the poor who cannot take care of themselves.⁶² Obviously, people who have such attitudes are politically and culturally dominant and imperialist because they impose their wills and desires on others, normally under the pretence of what is good for them.

This approach to combat poverty devalues the poor who are seen not as subjects of development but as objects of development. The development practitioners see themselves as saviours of the poor, bringing all good things, food, water, education, etc. The poor are seen as incomplete receivers that can be made complete only through the surplus of the developers. This approach to poverty has a psychological impact on the poor. They adopt the view of their developers that they are sub-human and inadequate. It denies them as people made in the image of God. It makes the poor to feel as if only the developers possess gifts and talents and they have none.⁶³ Such an approach enhances the poverty of the poor and makes the developer to play god in the life of the poor as if he or she is their deliverer. Clearly such an attitude is unacceptable. We must recognise the fact that we are all developers, donors and recipients at the same time.⁶⁴

Having critiqued this traditional view, Myers then looks at four important different views.

Firstly, "poverty as entanglement," as analysed by Chambers. This view of poverty uses the household as its starting point. It sees the poor as people living in a cluster of disadvantage. In other words, the household is poor, physically weak, isolated, vulnerable

⁶² Taylor, M. *Not Angels but Agencies: The Ecumenical Response to Poverty* (Geneva: SCM Press, LTD, 1995)p78

⁶³ Myers, L.B. *Walking with the poor*.(New York: Orbis books, 1999)p66.

and powerless. These levels of poverty are described as the systems in which people interact and refer to as the “poverty trap.” This view of poverty provides us with five aspects. Firstly, Material Poverty. This aspect holds the view that the household possesses fewer things. It lacks adequate housing and sanitation. It possesses little or no land, animals or wealth.⁶⁵

This aspect of poverty agrees with the view of poverty as deficit and the solution is to provide the things that are lacking which in the end I said it is unacceptable for the Christian development practitioner. The other aspect is physical weakness. It says that those of the households are weak. The reason for their weakness is because they lack strength due to poor health and inadequate nutrition. The majority of the people in the household are women, children and the aged. The third aspect is isolation. This aspect says that the household has a lack of access to public services and information. The household is often remote, a distance from the main roads, waterlines, as well as electricity. It has no access to markets, capital and credit. Another aspect of this view is vulnerability. This aspect says the household has little security against emergencies or disaster. The family of the house does not have choice. They lack the power to save because they are vulnerable to cultural demands, for instance dowry and feast days that use up all savings. Finally, powerlessness. The household does not have the ability and knowledge to influence the people around it and the community in which it exists.⁶⁶

Similar to the view that sees poverty as deficit or lack, this view of poverty assumes that poverty is a state of “lacking” and assumes the solution is to provide the things that are lacking, but it may be that the poor may have to struggle for themselves. I shall now proceed to what Friedman has to say on “poverty as a lack of access to social power.” Similar to Chamber’s, Friedman envisages the households of the poor as a people cut off and disempowered by the structures of the society. This can be seen within four areas of social practice, namely, the state, political community, civil society and corporate

⁶⁴ Taylor, M. *Not Angels but Agencies* (New York: Orbis book, 1995) p78ff

⁶⁵ Chambers, R. “Poverty as Entanglement” In Myers, B.L.(ed). *Walking with the poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational development*. (New York: Orbis books, 1999). p. 66.

economy. Each of these areas has a different type of power; “state power, political power, social power and economic power”⁶⁷

Within the midst of these forces the poor household struggles to find space, location and influence. This view sees the poor as those who do not have access to social organization and to the political process. It sees poverty as a state of disempowerment. It argues that:

The (dis) empowerment model of poverty is a political variant of the basic needs approach. It is centred on politics rather than planning....The starting point of the model is the assumption that the poor households lack the social power to improve the condition of their members' lives.⁶⁸

In contrast to the view that sees poverty as a lack of access to things or knowledge, this view relates poverty to the lack of access to social power. But does not explain why poor people are excluded from social power.

Thirdly, the view of Christian on “poverty as disempowerment.” This view of poverty is built on the views of Chambers and Friedman but adds the spiritual perspective of poverty. This is the first time we see a spiritual understanding of poverty appear in our discussion. This view of poverty sees poor people as those trapped in the difficult framework of social systems. Embedded in this system are personal systems,⁶⁹ which include psychology, a spiritual or religious system, which is personal, and social and a cultural systems that include worldview.⁷⁰ It is within this system of powerlessness the poor find themselves trapped. Each of these systems has its own way of contributing to the disempowerment of the poor. In this sense, the social structure reinforces the disempowerment process of the poor by excluding them and exploiting them. This view concludes that there is a deeper root for this practice of injustice against the poor. All these dimensions of poverty function within the universe “in which the principalities and

⁶⁶ Ibid. p67ff

⁶⁷ Friedman, J. “Poverty as lack of success to social power” in Myers, B.L.(ed.) *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practice of...*p69

⁶⁸ Ibid.p71

⁶⁹ Christian, J. “Poverty as disempowerment” in Myers, B.L.(ed.) *Walking with the Poor. Principles and Practices.*p72

⁷⁰ Christian, J. “Poverty as disempowerment” In Myers, B.L.(ed) *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational development.*(New York: Orbis book, 1999)p72

powers work out their rebellion against God and God's intentions for human life in creation."⁷¹

Fourthly, is Jayakaran's view of poverty as a lack of freedom to grow. Building on Luke 2:52, this view says the poor are those people who are caught up in the series of restrictions and limitations in the following areas of life: physical, mental, social and spiritual. The physical aspect is based on scarce sources and limited choices. The mental aspect is based on limited perspective and mental blocks of poor self- image. The social side is based on limiting restrictions whereas the spiritual side of poverty reflects fear and bondage.

The force backing each of these bundles of limitations is the powerful belief of the strong or powerful. The terms strong or powerful refer to those individuals who control the system. They are the ones who benefit through the limitations of the poor. The powerful who control the system make sure it remains as it is, that those limitations can never be changed. The strong or powerful whose interests are served in this system are those who make decisions that affect the poor.⁷² This view contributes two important approaches to understanding poverty. First, it sees the causes of poverty in human beings not in ideologies or non-existing things. What makes this important is the fact that people forget this aspect and easily see greed, system, the market, corruption and culture as reasons for poverty. But the fact is that these abstractions cannot be changed. Human beings, both poor and non-poor have to change. The second aspect sees the non-poor as the source of oppression, those who keep the poor in bondage to satisfy their self- interests. In conclusion to this aspect of poverty, Myers sees the cause of poverty within the poor and non-poor. That is all people are sinners.

Indeed this view of poverty is misleading. However the logical outcome of this understanding is the act of aid or charity. It suggests that the non- poor must give to the

⁷¹ Ibid. p73

⁷² Jayakaran, R. "Poverty as a lack of freedom to grow" in Myers, B. L. (ed) *Walking with the poor: principles and practices of transformational development* (New York: Orbis books, 1999) P. 80

poor not enlighten them, so that at the end of the day the rich become the saviour of the poor. But what they forget to know is that this approach often leads to failure. It is top down in itself. The rich see themselves as the saviour of the poor with the power to take care of the poor who cannot take care of themselves.

Based on these different concepts of poverty, Myers seeks to develop a holistic understanding of poverty. Hence, it is clear when he says the nature of poverty is fundamentally relational. In other words, poverty is the result of unsuccessful relationships. This understanding of poverty is the beginning of the whole debate. It is the end of relationships that do not work, that are unjust, that are not for life or enjoyable. With respect to the above definitions, poverty is the lack of *shalom* in all its meanings. Embedded in the definitions provided is the idea of relationships that are broken, dysfunctional or oppressive.

The underlying point here is that poverty is based on relationships that lack *shalom*, work against well-being, work against life and life abundant. This way of understanding poverty agrees with the biblical narrative.⁷³ The practice of sin affects all aspects of these five relationships in which human beings exist. It begins within ourselves, the community follow by those we refer to as other, with the environment, and with God. Each one of these broken relationships is expressed in the ideas of poverty discussed above. Myers' idea of poor people being ignorant of who they are and the reason for which they were put on earth is the heart of poverty as relational. As such, Myers observed that:

When people believe they are less than human, without the brains, strength, and person-hood to contribute to their own well being or that of others, their understanding of who they are is marred. Similarly when the poor do not believe that they have anything to contribute to, or that they cannot be productive, their understanding of their vocation is distorted as well. With marred identities and distorted vocations, the poor cannot play their proper relational role in the world...⁷⁴

⁷³ Myers, B. L. *Walking with the poor: principles and practices of transformational development* (New York: Orbis books, 1999) P. 86ff.

⁷⁴ Ibid. P.88

With respect to the above contention I would suggest that the poor should not be blamed for their poverty because they believe they are sub-humans who lack the capacity to contribute to their own well being and society at large. The belief that the poor are sub-humans who lack the ability to contribute to their own well being and to society is an internalised conviction formulated by existing systems in which they exist. The poor are made to believe and accept their condition as the order of nature. This lie is the root of injustice and discrimination against those regarded as poor. The rich who get richer at the expense of the poor must be educated that such practice is injustice and against well being and therefore must be stopped.

2.3.2 The cause of poverty is fundamentally spiritual

This aspect of poverty argues that any theoretical concept of poverty must have a response. From a Christian perspective the biblical text provides us with an answer. Sin is the cause of division and injustice in our relationships. It stands between human beings and God. It causes us to separate inside ourselves into competing and conflicting voices. It divides us within society, one group rich and the other poor. It causes us to exclude and demonize the other. Sin is the reason why people abuse the earth. It works against human life and the practice of *shalom*.

When we put God aside or completely out of our understanding of who we are, we mistreat others. Poor people become limited and restricted and marginalized when relationships become deceptive and dominating, because people no longer love God and their neighbours, and the ultimate cause is sin. The fact here is that if a powerful theology of sin is not provided, an articulate and comprehensive understanding of poverty will be impossible. If sin is the underlying cause of poverty then there is good and bad news. The good news is that the way out of sin toward change is through Christ. The bad news is

that if this news is refused those who refused it remain in bondage of self-imposed limitations.⁷⁵

Summary

In this section Myers has attempted to provide us with a holistic understanding of poverty. First, he enlightens us on the cause of poverty and provides us with a solution. As such, two aspects were observed, firstly, the nature of poverty is fundamentally relational and secondly, the cause of poverty is fundamentally spiritual. In a nutshell Myers sees the cause of poverty in the poor and non-poor. That is all human beings are sinners and if sin is the cause of poverty then there is a solution and the solution is through Christ who saves sinners. But if this solution is refused the problem of poverty remains.

⁷⁵ Ibid. P.88

CHAPTER THREE

THEOLOGICAL AND BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES

3. INTRODUCTION

In chapter two we discussed three theoretical concepts of poverty. The three theorists we observed were Amartya Sen, Klaus Nurnberger and Bryant Myers. Each theorist provides us with a well-argued understanding of poverty. In this chapter, we will look at the biblical understanding of poverty.

3.1. POVERTY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

In view of the biblical perspectives, I propose here to give a brief outline of what the Bible has to say about poverty. The Old Testament side of poverty is quite enriching in that it provides evidence that the sharp gap between rich and poor in today's world is rooted in Israel's historical tradition. Embedded in the biblical narrative is a family of words used to describe the 'poor', 'poverty' or 'lack'. Emanating from the Hebrew Bible are these words: *dal*, which means the frail poor, the low, weak, down-trodden; *ani* – the wretched. It is used to describe poverty caused by affliction and oppression; *muk* – low, oppressed; *ebyon* – waiting, needy and dependent, deprived; *yarash* – dispossessed; *rush* – destitute, the impoverished through dispossession; *chaser* – to suffer lack of bread and water, to hunger.⁷⁶

It can be seen that all these words have as their primary meaning people who are poor materially. Most of these words convey a message of suffering and exploitation. Relative

⁷⁶ Giggs, V. *Companion to the poor* (Monrovia: MARC, 1990) p.25

to the explicitness of the Bible on the marginalization of the poor by the rich, Domeris writes:

One is given to understand that the poor suffer at the hands of the wealthy and unscrupulous. It is their thoughtlessness and greed, which contributes directly to the plight of the poor. Apart from two references in proverbs, which connect poverty with laziness, one is left with the impression that poverty and oppression go hand in hand.⁷⁷

The term 'the poor' in the Old Testament refers particularly to those people who are economically deprived, who have no status in society, who are mistreated by foreign rulers or their own people who rule over them. The reason behind their oppression is simple, because they are poor, and are therefore at the mercy of the rich. In addition to their oppression they are poor because they have been further impoverished by being robbed and deprived of their individual and national rights.⁷⁸ A 21st century student may rationally question when did this injustice begin in Israel and why? Was it in existence from the beginning of its formation? These questions are relevant because they investigate and discover the evolution of injustice, oppression and exploitation, which gives birth to the idea of rich and poor in Israel. Every problem has an origin. The origin of poverty in Israel is found in its history. It is within this context that I intend to discuss the evolution of poverty in the Old Testament.

The Old Testament depicts the birth and existence of Israel as a nation and its relation to Yahweh. On arrival into Canaan and settlement on the land Israel existed as a tribal community, "...a people of peasants, small holders, a coalition of clans. It was an egalitarian society... The people occupied relatively infertile lands, with uncertain rainfall, and they were poor."⁷⁹ Unlike the surrounding Canaanite States, premonarchial Israel did not have a King, instead, Yahweh, who emancipated them from Egyptian oppression through Moses was their King. However, tribal Israel was led by a legal assembly made up of elders. This legal assembly was established to settle disputes among the people and keep the community from suffering anarchy. They were referred to as

⁷⁷ Domeris, W. R. "Biblical perspective on the poor" in *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*. 1986. Nos. 54. Pp. 576

⁷⁸ Dorr, D. *Option for the poor* (Dublin: Colour Books,1983) P. 6

⁷⁹ Pixley, J. & Boff, C. *The Bible, The church & the poor* (Wellwood: Burns & Oates, 1989) P.30

Judges. The term Judge means to settle. These judges did not live in the city, instead they only visited the city, went through the gate to walk on the land (*nahala*) and finally assembled at the gate until evening. The legal assembly was established to reconcile the people. They gave the plaintiff and defendant a chance to justify themselves by means of at least two to three witnesses and material evidence in court. The case went on with speeches and counter speeches. Premonarchial Israel had no professional judge. The legal assembly depended on reliable witnesses who were protected and accredited. Thus it was impossible to lie. This early Israelite community, had no prison, punishment included thirty-nine lashes.⁸⁰

Relative to the military, tribal Israel did not have a well establish army on salary. They did not have sophisticated weapons like their neighbours. When they went to war, they combined forces drawn from the tribal links. These were foot soldiers. Chariots captured were destroyed while horses were made crippled and dysfunctional. In tribal Israel, the people did not pay tax or do force labour (*corvee*). They understood themselves to be a people liberated from forced labour in Egypt and now settled on the land as a free peasant community. Along this trend, Gottwald points out that with a powerful theology of liberation from Egypt, Israelites won the hearts of oppressed Canaanites and motivated them to revolt and helped them to expel the ruling class system and brought about a free agrarian community.⁸¹

Before the birth of the monarchy, these free peasants were referred to as '*am haaretz*' meaning 'people of the land' (Nehemiah 10:31). They were the people of the land because they ploughed the land. They had the land as (*nahala*) ancestral land. The land was seen as God given, and when it was shared it became a private property. It was the source of life. On the land was the house of the family and also the forefathers' tombs. Every family had land; to be without land was considered not a true Israelite. At this point in time there was no rich or poor. Land was the inheritance of the fathers and could

⁸⁰ Bright, J. *A History of Israel* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1981) P. 162ff.

⁸¹ Gottwald, N.K. *The Hebrew bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress press, 1985) P. 344

not be sold.⁸² Riches were blessings from God whereas poverty was brought about by some misfortune or through judgement of personal sin. The poor person was to be helped from his poverty.⁸³ Hence the jubilee year was introduced to release all people from the force that threatened human dignity.

Unfortunately, with the birth of the monarchy things would never be the same again. Four structural changes brought in by the United Monarchy and continued after Solomon's death in both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms included: (i) restructuring or reorganization of the army; (ii) taxation and conscription; (iii) forced labour (*corvee*); and (iv) the administration of justice.⁸⁴ In turn I will discuss each of these changes very briefly. Firstly, restructuring/reorganization of the army. To have a professional and sophisticated army like the other nations, land was needed as pastures for the hundreds of horses imported from the surrounding nations for the army.⁸⁵ Israelite Kings needed a lot of land not only for the army but for other purposes as well. They needed land to feed their large household at court and to reward their servants for loyal services they had performed.

As such, among others, farmers lost their land and entered into poverty.⁸⁶ . We saw that one of the purposes of the land was to farm to prevent people from living in poverty. In the wake of the monarchy, life became more and more difficult to ordinary peasants as they sank deep into poverty. The army in monarchical Israel was trained and used more sophisticated weapons. Instead of foot soldiers they used chariots and horses. Since Israel did not have these technologies they had to import them and the caretakers of these horses had to be paid as well.

⁸² Farisani, E. B. *Land in the Old Testament: the conflict between Ahab and Elijah (1 Kings 21: 1-29), and its significance for our South African context today* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal, 1993) P. 28

⁸³ Giggs, V. *Companion to the poor* (Monrovia: MARC, 1990) p. 26

⁸⁴ Bright, J. *A history of Israel* (London: SCM Press,) P. 198ff.

⁸⁵ Ibid. P. 216

⁸⁶ Farisani, E.B. *Land in the Old Testament: the conflict between Ahab & Elijah (1 Kings 21: 1-29), and its significance for our South African context today* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal, 1993) P. 52

To maintain such an army was very costly. In so doing the monarchy introduced the second structural change, taxation and conscription. Everybody had to pay tax, especially the peasants. These taxes were collected and paid directly to the King. Solomon's building projects, particularly the Temple, was constructed for taxation. The Temple became the centralized institution. The combined state tax and temple tax were paid to the King through the temple. To obtain those feasible projects the King employed the idea of force labour (*corvee*). I will elaborate on this idea as we proceed. This meant that the men in the villages, instead of working on their fields, had to become migrant workers and work for the king for several months in the year.⁸⁷

As a peasant community, Israelites farmed mainly for their own sustenance and not for selling on the market. If they needed money they had to borrow from the rich money-lenders in the cities, such as Samaria and Jerusalem. These moneylenders were mainly Canaanites merchants who controlled the corn trade. They charged very high interest rates, as was the custom of the Canaanite trading centres and Babylon. After periods of drought and misfortunes, a farmer would no longer be able to pay back his loans. The rich merchants in the city would then take over this land and he would have to work as a labourer on his own farm. As a last resort, he would sell himself and his children into slavery to evade starvation.

By the middle of the eighth century BCE, about a hundred years after Elijah, a growing number of Israelite peasants were losing their land (*nahala*) to the King and his officials or to the rich money-lenders in the cities.⁸⁸ This injustice and exploitation of ordinary farmers brought a system of social stratification, which resulted in a rich and poor gap. This very system led to a deep division in society between the rich and poor, between those who had lost their land and those who have become rich land owners.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Ibid. P. 37

⁸⁸ Ibid. P. 38

⁸⁹ Bright, J. *A history of Israel* (London: SCM Press, 1981) P. 243

The third structural change introduced by the monarchy was 'forced labourer' (*corvee*). Having succeeded his father David, Solomon became ambitious and so he set out to construct a temple for Yahweh. It took seven years to complete the temple (1 Kings 6:37). He immediately started to build his palace next to the temple to use religion to legitimate his power. To further entrench his power, Solomon also built many fortresses and store cities for his army in every part of his state. This development is listed in 1 Kings 9: 15-19. For all these building projects Solomon needed a large labour force. As such, he forced the people to work, 30 000 men from all Israel (1 Kings 5:13) had to labour on the building projects under the supervision of foremen together with craftsmen from the Canaanite city of Tyre (1 Kings 5:18). Also every person had to give one of his sons or daughters to serve the purpose of the king (conscription). As expected with an oppressive regime, people grew increasingly dissatisfied with Solomon's labor policies and with the many taxes they had to pay. After Solomon's death, the ten Northern Israelite tribes rebelled against his son Rehoboam (1 Kings 12).⁹⁰

Followed by forced labour the fourth change that took place was the restructuring of the 'administration of justice'. In monarchical Israel the administration of justice became a corrupt system. It became an instrument of oppression. In the law courts, at the city gates, the poor were no longer able to see justice done because their oppressors and exploiters ruled in the court and had money to bribe every witness. Also the king was seen as the Son of God and his administration considered legitimate and approved by God.⁹¹

This meant the oppression and exploitation of peasants were approved by God. But the idea contradicted the peasants' perception of God. For them Yahweh is the God who liberates oppressed people. It is based on this ground that the two theological trajectories found in the Old Testament and run through the New Testament developed. The theology of the peasants, which evolved from the Mosaic tradition and runs from the period of tribal Israel, speaks of the God who liberates oppressed and marginalized people. On the other hand, is the theology of the ruling elite, which evolved from the Davidic tradition at

⁹⁰ Ibid. P. 217ff.

the birth of the monarchy. It focuses on creation and Messianism while the Mosaic tradition focuses on criticism and liberation. In modern terms these are referred to as state theology and liberation theology.⁹²

Courts are much more than an opportunity for persecutors to enrich themselves. It should be a place where persecutors listen and understand the experiences of those who suffer from types of injustices and act on their behalf. In contrast, the fourth structural change, which took place shifted from administration of justice to administration of injustice.

Injustice in this sense became a major cause for the increasing poverty in early Israel. As Hanks argues “ people are made poor because of injustice and prejudice. People are poor because other people are rich.”⁹³ The oppressors and the exploiters of the poor who now control the administration of justice had a better chance to practice their evil deeds and make the ordinary people of society poor.

As we have seen the structural changes which took place led ordinary peasants into increasing debt and poverty. As a result they began to cry out for justice. It was at this point in time that God began to commission various prophets to confront the oppressors. Here are a few examples. One of the root causes of the confrontation between King Ahab and the prophet Elijah was the corrupt socio-economic policies and injustice of the king. We saw that for various reasons, land was not to be sold. In (1 Kings 21), the narrative tells of King Ahab's desire to purchase Naboth's vineyard, upon refusal Ahab's wife Jezebel ordered the execution of Naboth, the Jezreelite and confiscated his vineyard and gave it to Ahab. On this basis the prophet Elijah confronted the king and remonstrated against his practice.⁹⁴ Another prophet was Amos. He was sent to protest against

⁹¹ Ibid. P. 221

⁹² Brueggemann, W. “Trajectories in Old Testament Literature and the sociology of Ancient Israel” in Gottwald, N. K. & Horsley, A. R. (eds.) *The bible and liberation: political and social hermeneutics* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1993) P. 201

⁹³ Hanks, T. D. *God so loved the Third World: the biblical vocabulary of oppression* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1983) P. 8

⁹⁴ Farisani, E. B. *Land in the Old Testament: the conflict between Ahab & Elijah (1Kings 21: 1-29), and its signifance for our South African context today* (Pietermaritzburg: University, 1993) P. 49

oppression for example exploitation of the poor (Amos 2:6-8; 8:4-6); corruption of justice (5:7,10,12); violence (3:9-11).⁹⁵

The monarchy and its corrupt and oppressive administration led to an increasing poverty rate and slavery in early Israel. It can be seen then that the uprising and protest of the prophets was God's intervention to see the poor and oppressed liberated from their oppression and impoverishment. In spite of the cry of those affected by poverty and the prophet's protests against the policy of those responsible for its growing gap between the rich and poor, poverty became a generational struggle for the poor and continued into the time of Christ. And would continue until He returns as long as those responsible for it are in power.

3.2. THE NEW TESTAMENT PERSPECTIVE

In the Old Testament we began by looking at the Hebrew family of words that describe poverty and the poor. Herein we also begin by looking at some New Testament words that describe poverty and the poor. In the New Testament Jesus uses the word *ptochos*, for poor, which translates out of the word *anaw*, which in turn derived from *ani*. At times *Anaw* translates "the humble", at another place, as in Isaiah 61:1 from which Christ quotes, it carries the meaning of "the oppressed poor". We saw in the preceding section that oppression and injustice led many Israelites peasants into poverty causing them to cry out to God for help. God in turn answered them by sending prophets to protest against the oppressors. Unfortunately this practice did not stop. It continued after the fall of Israel and the Babylonian captivity into New Testament times. Thus, Hanks advises that:

...We must emphasize that the Romans were not the ones primarily guilty of oppressing God's people; the Jewish politico-religious oligarchy was the primary oppressors.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Carabine, D. & O'Reilly, M. *The challenge of poverty in the world: An African response* (Uganda: Martyrs University Press, 1998) P. 21

Luke shows in the prophetic songs at the beginning of his gospel that the people of God still spoke with the same awareness of being an oppressed people, as it had been in the Old Testament periods (Luke 1:51-55, 68-79). This community is still a poor, humble and oppressed people, crying for political liberation.

As Hanks has written, it is this cry for political liberation that Jesus has come to protest against the socio-political and religious structures of oppression and in turn establish the rule of God. But to speak for the poor, Jesus must identify with the poor. As such, Domeris observes that the birth story in Luke is sharply affected by the belief that Jesus was born in poverty. His birthplace in a stable, the offering of a dove in the temple, and the presence of the shepherds all point to this. The author contends that Luke's intention to show how Christ fulfilled the prophecy of (Zechariah 9:9). Behold your King comes, lowly" (poor or in Hebrew *oni*), and riding as an ass the foal of an ass.⁹⁷

Jesus was born into poverty, He knew and experienced it in full as well understood the implications of oppression. His message was in opposition to materialism and in support of the protection of the poor and other marginalized people. The Old Testament tradition of Yahweh, the God of justice, the just judge, the *Go'el* of the poor, the avenger of the oppressed is picked up by Jesus.⁹⁸ By identifying and associating with the downtrodden of society, Jesus sees himself as the protector of the weak and powerless. As such, the interpretation of Luke 4:18-19 gives a clear picture of two additional factors that help us comprehend the theology of oppression in the New Testament. In this passage, Christ defines his gospel as an announcement of the good news to the poor and oppressed.⁹⁹ In addition to this observation, Hanks has written:

These 'poor' or 'poor in spirit' (meek)... represent the socially oppressed, those who suffer from the power of injustice and are harassed by those who only consider their own advantage and

⁹⁶ Hanks, T. D. *God so loved the Third World: the biblical vocabulary of oppression* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1983) P. 51

⁹⁷ Ibid. P. 59

⁹⁸ Pixley, J. & Boff, C. *The bible, the church and the poor* (Wellwood: Burns & Oates, 1989) P. 111

⁹⁹ Hanks, T. D. *God so loved the Third World* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1983) P. 52

influence. they are however, at the same time those who remain faith to God and expect their salvation from his kingdom alone.¹⁰⁰

The poor of Luke 4:18 can be seen in the light of the fourth beatitude cited in Matthew's gospel, which was preached to those who hunger and thirst for justice. Having performed a comparative study between Luke 4:18 and the parable of the unjust judge (Luke 18:1-8), Hanks concludes that the 'justice mentioned here is nothing but the deliverance (from oppression) to which God's people (his elect) may claim as the salvation promised them by their king. In the New Testament theology, the poor continues to be a permanent category (*ptochos*, for example occurs 34 times in the New Testament, 10 times in Luke). ...in Luke 4:18 we clearly see the continuity with the Old Testament perspective: the poor are the oppressed; that is why they are poor.¹⁰¹

In this letter to the early Christian community in the Diaspora, James is clear on the continuity of oppression between the Old Testament and the New Testament. For James it is the rich who oppress the poor: "is it not the rich who oppress (*katadunasteuo*) you, is it not they who drag you in court?" (James 2:6). The apostle stresses that the churches he addresses identify with the lot of the poor, and in fact counts most of their congregants from the poor; "Has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith – and heirs of the Kingdom which he has promised to those who love him? (2:5; cf. 1:9).¹⁰² In my understanding James sets himself firmly in the office of the prophets who saw oppression as the basic cause of poverty (2:1-7; 5:1-6). There is not a place in this letter where James shifts the blame to the poor themselves, because of racial inferiority, laziness, vices or other reasons. For him the rich bear the basic guilt, because they exploit and oppress the poor: "Look, the wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord all-powerful (5:5). For the apostle the church is God's response to all forms of injustices that dehumanize people.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. P. 52

¹⁰¹ Ibid. P.53

¹⁰² Ibid. P. 45ff

Another significant factor is that in the context of Luke 4:18, Christ points to his ministry as the coming reign of God and this is manifested through proclaiming the good news to the poor. We saw clearly how the Old Testament analyzed and exposed the causes of poverty, showing oppression to be the primary one. Now, with Christ's announcement, the era to put to an end the causes of poverty has come. It is time to propagate the arrival of the solution – the Kingdom of God.¹⁰³ Luke pragmatizes the solution in his second volume – the book of Acts. As we have noted from Luke (Chapter 4), the evangelist seems to be a particular advocate for the poor (Acts 7). By the time Luke wrote, the gospel had spread all over the Roman Empire to all classes of people and the Christian communities were responding to socio-economic needs with different strategies of self-help. Acts 2:42-47 describes the community of the infant church. The narrative tells of the patterns of the Christian community immediately after Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost. Listed in Verse 42 are four features of the most primitive gathering: (i) the apostles' teaching; (ii) fellowship (iii) the breaking of bread; and (iv) prayer.¹⁰⁴

Although all four of these features have important implications, however, it is the second of these elements that interests me the most. 'Fellowship' from the Greek *koinonia* "has a broad semantic range, but... in this context is at least partially unpacked by verses 44-45: 'All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possession and goods, they gave to anyone who had need.'¹⁰⁵ Chapter 4:34a takes this further when it says 'there were no needy persons among them.' It is only in the New Testament that the word 'needy' (*endless*) appears. " This term can be synonym for *ptochos* in some Greek texts, but usually it points more on an individual who lacks certain needed resources, while not in a state of absolute poverty."¹⁰⁶

An interesting observation is that *ptochos* , often found in Luke's Gospel, never appears once in the Book of Acts. Probably Luke means that the early church saw to it not only that its conegrants were no longer left destitute but also that they lived above a poverty

¹⁰³ Ibid. P. 53

¹⁰⁴ Carson, D. A. *The sermon on the mount: an evangelical exposition of Mathew 5-7* (Cambria: Paternoster, 1998) P. 160

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. p. 161ff

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. P. 165

line. Verses 34-35 continue, 'for from time to time these who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.'¹⁰⁷

It is interesting the phrase 'from time to time' denotes the ongoing selling of property in order to provide material help for the poor, especially within the community of God's people. Also in Acts individuals are praised for giving to the poor. In 9:36 Dorcas is praised as one who was always doing good and helping the poor. In chapter 10:2,4 and 31, Cornelius too, is described as a model alms giver. "...your prayers and gifts have come up as a memorial offering before God." Also in 11:27-30, is Agabus' visit to the church in Antioch and his prediction of the expected famine in Judea, and they give, 'each according to his ability' (11:29).

In response to the prediction of their coming famine by Agabus, the Christian community decided to provide help for their fellow believer in Judea by sending gifts to the Jerusalem elders through Barnabas and Saul (11:29-30). The types of relief described in this text clearly vary from those chapters at the beginning of Acts. There is no sign of a communal treasury, every Christian simply has their own sources of income, with different levels of wealth and prosperity yet, and all are concerned to help the poor according to their ability. In our time and context, the Christian community must adopt such approach in its ministry to the poor. Churches must encourage their members to become concerned about those inflicted by poverty and help them according to their ability.

The biblical perspective provides us with two approaches to poverty. The Old Testament approaches poverty from a prophetic perspective focusing on its root causes and those responsible. It approaches the issue of poverty from a political point of view, challenging the structural changes of an early Israelite society. In contrast, the New Testament approaches poverty from a providential perspective. It focuses on the problem rather than

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. P. 65

its causes. It is interesting to see how this paradigm shift moves from a prophetic and political response on a societal scale to a handful of individual acts of almsgiving. The implication here is that there are several ways to approach a problem. One may choose to approach a problem from a multi-dimensional perspective, while another may apply a systematic problem solving approach. However, at the end of the day, what matters is a solution to the problem. That is what the early church did, although it was not responsible for the political situation of Israel run by Rome, yet it sought to reduce the poverty rate among the poor.

3.3. RESPONSES TO THE THREE CONCEPTS

The three theoretical concepts of poverty discussed above provide us profound insights to understanding what poverty is and what causes it. Although they seem to have some similarities yet, each concept observes poverty from a different point. With all due respect to these theorists, I would respond to each of them in an attempt to develop an appropriate framework for the church in its development ministry among the poor.

3.3.1 A response to Sen's concept

Sen's concept is profound and provides a new way to look at poverty. People are poor because their capabilities have been suppressed and will remain poor as long as their capabilities are not explored. As such, Sen is alerting governments of the world to include the principles of justice in their constitutions. This is to allow their citizens to explore their capabilities through freedom of choice. In other words, they must be given the rights to do what is good for them to lead a better life based on their choice. Sen also enlightens us that poverty is not just about the lack of material things but also has to do with wider relationships based on freedom and that freedom is so crucial. While I applaud Sen for his lucid contribution to this global phenomenon, my applause comes with a reservation. Unlike Myers who adds the spiritual side of poverty to his concept in an attempt to provide a holistic understanding, Sen approaches the problem from a human perspective

not denying the contribution of religion.¹⁰⁸ As such, like Myers I wish to add that poverty has a spiritual side – a broken relationship with God.

3.3.2 A response to Nurnberger's concept

Nurnberger also provides a coherent concept of poverty. His understanding of the causes of poverty from a socio-economic perspective is authentic. As we saw in his concept above, Nurnberger sees an imbalance in the socio-economic system in terms of centre-periphery relation. The centre is where the prosperity is and the periphery is where the poverty plight is.¹⁰⁹ However, there are reasons for this imbalance. (See Nurnberger's concept of poverty above in 2.3.)

His observation on basic human needs is substantial. Here he tries to relate all those needs, natural and religious to the idea of comprehensive wellbeing. Although he attempts to provide a holistic understanding of poverty, none the less, Nurnberger is passive in terms of the spiritual side of poverty. Speaking from a Christian point of view, poverty is spiritually relational as observed by Myers. I wish to say here that if poverty is to be eliminated from among the poor, it has to begin with sin and it is the church's responsibility to make people aware about sin and the effect of it. Both rich and poor must be told the consequences of sin, which results in a broken relation with *God*, neighbor, the universe and with oneself. Therefore an authentic relationship with God leads to a good relationship with the rest. In this sense, I would say that poverty eradication begins with relationship building.

In addition to the stated concepts and causes of poverty, to me there are still other causes such as early marriage and natural disasters for example, flood, earthquake, climatic erraticness, animal diseases (foot and mouth), and war the major cause for refugeeism

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. P87

¹⁰⁹ Nurnberger, K. *Prosperity, Poverty and Pollution: Managing the approaching Crisis* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publication, 1999) P. 5

which leads people into a state of desperation, a condition in which they have no voice and freedom of choice but to accept the decision of their masters. In poor countries particularly in Africa and Asia debt repayment becomes a major cause of poverty. Other neglected causes include environmental degradation, economic instability and unemployment, inequality and social exclusion.

3.3.3 A response to Myers' concept

Myers is sensible. As seen in his concept above, in an attempt to produce a holistic understanding of poverty he analyses four theoretical concepts just like I have tried to do in this paper. As a Christian development practitioner, having done his investigative study, Myers concludes that the nature of poverty is fundamentally relational and its cause is fundamentally spiritual. It is on the ground of those two factors Myers develops his holistic understanding of poverty.

Although his holistic understanding of poverty provides insights for the Christian developer, yet I would like to add that sin as a cause of poverty must be seen from two sides, those who inflict poverty on the poor due to broken relationships with God and their fellow humans and the poor themselves who break relationship with God. Although the biblical tradition indicates that the people who are poor and defenceless have nobody to turn to but God because He has care for those who are victimized by injustice and poverty. But they can also turn away from God because of bitterness and lack of hope. On the other hand, rich people can also turn to God if they do not rely on themselves and their wealth. But as long as they stay attached to their wealth and depend on their own power they may not enter heaven (cf. Matthew 19:24).¹¹⁰

In this sense both rich and poor have a responsibility to turn away from sin and turn to God. Not only turning to God but also remaining intrinsically connected to him. In so

¹¹⁰ Dorr, D. *Option for the poor* (Dublin: Colour Books, 1983) P. 7

doing both rich and poor will love one another and see each other in terms of Michael Taylor's understanding "...that we are all donors and recipients at the same time",¹¹¹ speaking in terms of Christian development organizations working among the poor in the Third World countries.

Summary

The biblical text provides us with an understanding that the major cause of poverty in Israel's context is oppression and injustice. Beginning with the Old Testament perspective we saw that at the beginning of Israel's existence in Canaan every family had land. The land was primarily used for farming to sustain a family and for family tombs. At this point of time in Israel's history nobody was really poor. Those who did not have were to be helped by those who had. In short early Israel was a poverty free society. Unfortunately, with the birth of the monarchy, things changed. (See the poverty in the Old Testament above). As a response to the cause of poverty God sent Prophets to protest against the structural system that kept ordinary people in poverty. Unfortunately, this practice continued into the New Testament.

During the New Testament period the Roman Empire ruled the world, and Israel was controlled by Rome. This meant that Israel had to pay tribute to Rome and the tribute was paid through taxes generated from poor peasants. This political situation of Israel caused poor peasants to sink deeper into poverty. It was in this context that the early Church found herself. As a response to poverty the early church employed a different approach, unlike the prophets in the Old Testament who used politics, the early church used almsgiving and the biblical text says that they succeeded "Nor was there anyone among them who lacked..." (Acts 4: 34).

¹¹¹ Taylor, M. *Not Angels but Agencies: The Ecumenical Response to poverty* (Geneva: SCM Press, 1995) P. 79

Having observed the various definitions of poverty discussed above I wish to say that all are helpful contributions to poverty reduction but the one I feel comfortable with is Myers' definition because it is holistic and includes the biblical understanding of the cause of poverty and the solution to it which relates to my understanding of poverty.

CHAPTER FOUR

TOWARDS AN APPROPRIATE FRAMEWORK FOR THE CHURCH IN IT'S DEVELOPMENT MINISTRY AMONG THE POOR

4. INTRODUCTION

Chapter three reflected on the theological and biblical perspectives on poverty, with an examination of poverty in the Old Testament and the New Testament, and my response to the three theoretical concepts of poverty discussed in chapter two. Chapter four is an attempt to develop an appropriate framework for the church in its development ministry among the poor. In addition some possible strategies for the church are provided.

4.1 TOWARDS AN APPROPRIATE FRAMEWORK FOR THE CHURCH

Subsidizing sluggards is the same as subsidizing evil. It is subsidizing dependence. It is ultimately subsidizing slavery, moral slavery, and then physical slavery. On the other hand, refusing to care for the oppressed is the same as endorsing evil. It is endorsing injustice. It is ultimately endorsing slavery again, moral and physical. It is not those who say, 'The poor ! The poor ! who will enter the kingdom of heaven, but those who actually put in place an economic system that helps the poor no longer to be poor.¹¹²

Interestingly the above quotation concludes with the phrase not those who say the poor will enter the kingdom of heaven, but those who actually put in place an economic system that helps the poor no longer to be poor.

This is the crux of the matter. There are those who speak of the poor and there are those who put into place a system that helps the poor live a better life. While I congratulate Grant for his interest in the poor, I reject the notion that by helping the poor would make them no longer to be poor. It is deceiving and indeed a utopian dream. So long as there is a divide between rich and poor there will always be rich and poor. Poverty is an age-old

¹¹² Grant, G. *In the shadow of plenty* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1986) P. 55

problem that has travelled throughout human history from one generation to another and with its widening gap, is likely to continue till the end of time.

Although we will always have the poor yet poverty can be reduced. In addition to my understanding of this debate Warburton observed that:

Humanity stands at a defining moment in history. We are confronted with a perpetuation of disparities between and within nations, a worsening of poverty, hunger, ill health and illiteracy, and the continuing deterioration of the ecosystem on which we depend for our well-being...¹¹³

They are exhausted of being deceived and treated as objects of development. Is it not time that we become honest with them by telling them the truth that the problem is complex and that all church and state are part of its complexity. The conditions of the poor have been approached with different intentions. Some approach the condition of the poor with self-interest and others with the attitude that they are the ones with superior ability to liberate the poor.

As we have seen, the various concepts of poverty discussed in this chapter provides us with an understanding of the problem, but does not provide us with a particular framework as a solution to the problem, probably because of its complexity. Similarly, herein, I do not claim to have the solution to the problem, knowing that there is no ultimate solution to it. However, as stated in the summary of chapter three, among the various definitions of poverty discussed above I feel comfortable with Myers' definition because it is holistic and relates to my understanding of poverty. At the same time I wish to say that primary rationale here is to provide a framework for the church in its development ministry to the poor. Although I accept Myers' view that the cause of poverty is spiritually relational yet I see poverty as a real problem faced by real people. It is on this ground that I have tried to evade the so-called notion of 'spiritual poverty'.

¹¹³ Warburton, D. "A Passionate dialogue: Community and Sustainable Development" in Warburton, D. (ed.) *Community and Sustainable Development* (London: Earthscan Publication, 1998) P. 6

The church is not passive when it comes to serving the cause of the poor. In the New Testament we saw how the infant church was actively involved in eliminating poverty and lifting the poor above the poverty line. Since then the church continues to serve the need of the poor at the same time becoming hopelessly frustrated in that the problem is not really getting better but worse. Is it because the church is serving as one running after the wind? Well I would think is simply because the church is operating out of the range of an appropriate framework.

In our study on the biblical perceptive of poverty we saw that its vocabulary of poverty and its usage shows that what the Bible mean by poverty is material poverty, the lack of 'the necessities of life'. As we saw in the life of the early church, the biblical approach to poverty can motivate believers to take up the truly effective, truly compassionate voluntary, private measures to fight poverty like those that dominated the early Christian community responses to poverty in the first century and are vividly depicted in the New Testament.¹¹⁴

A final point I wish to add is *Capacity building*. We saw this aspect in Sen's concept on capability deprivation. Capacity building plays an essential role in much sustainable development policy. This factor is one of the key strategies for enhancing the potential for a community driven approach to development that is sustainable. However, embedded in this idea are the questions: what is capacity? Who has it? And who can build it?

Capacity building by definition is "training and other methods to help people develop the confidence and skills necessary for them to achieve their purpose".¹¹⁵ As such, in its effort to meet the needs of the poor, the church must be able to identify the capacities of the poor and build those capacities as a response to poverty reduction among the poor.

This framework I have tried to develop is not an ultimatum for the church. Having reflected on various concepts of poverty, I doubt there is or ever will be a unified theory

¹¹⁴ Olasky, M. *The tragedy of American compassion* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1992) Pp. 41-54

¹¹⁵ Warburton, D. " A passionate dialogue: Community & sustainable Development (London: Earthscan, 1998) P. 24ff.

of poverty. As long as we live in a changing world and changing times, there will always be more to observe and learn from. I believe we cannot create a poverty free world but we can reduce it if we work harder and honestly as a collective body. At the same time we must bear in mind and accept the fact that until the final day of the Lord's return evil will be present throughout the world. While a perfect and poverty free world remains our vision and prayer, Christians must avoid the notion that such a thing can happen overnight. We should not go the extreme instead we must deal with what is before us one step at the time. It is a utopian dream to think we can create a perfect and poverty free world overnight. However, for the sake of those who are truly poor, I advise that the church returns to the biblical framework of poverty reduction among the poor. This step will make it far simple for the church in its development ministry among the poor.

4.1.1 Possible strategies for the Church

Having discussed various concepts of poverty and the need for an appropriate framework for the church, I feel obliged to add some possible strategies, which will enable the Church to respond to this growing crisis effectively as stated earlier on. From a Christian perspective I am convinced to say that through Christ, God has established his Church to be his agent or 'watchdog' in the world. By this I mean the means by which God monitors human activities and reaches human beings. One of these activities is human development. Parallel to this view Marty points out "the Church is the new will of God for human beings."¹¹⁶ In fact the whole question of Church and development is encapsulated in the theory which says that the mission of God to planet Earth is to bring peace, or *shalom* in Hebrew which translates the comprehensive well-being of humanity."¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Marty, M. F. *The place of Bonhoeffer: problems and possibilities in his thought* (New York: Association press, 1962) P. 29

¹¹⁷ Lwilla, S. N. *The challenge of economic development to the evangelical Lutheran Church in Makete, Tanzania* (Pietermaritzburg, 1999) P. 103

As God's agent and the means by which he reaches human beings, it is advisable that the Church be concerned about the alleviation of poverty among the poor, because through Christ, God entered into human history to reveal himself as the Supreme One who monitors human activities and to bring development to a people in need. As we saw in Chapter three, this concept is repeated over and again in the biblical tradition. Beginning with the creation story as narrated, God has been and is actively involved in the development of his creation and the comprehensive wellbeing of his creatures. This understanding is found in Process Theology which teaches that "there is a dynamic relationship between the creator and the created, that both Creator and created are in a process of becoming."¹¹⁸ For instance, at the fall, when Adam and his wife Eve realised they were naked it was God himself who clothed them: 'Also for Adam and his wife the Lord God made tunics of skin, and clothed them' (Genesis 3:21). In the book of Exodus we see the justice of God in the liberation of Israel from oppression in Egypt. We also see the providence of God when he provided bread for Israel in the desert. By day he protected them with a pillar of cloud from sun burn and by night a pillar of fire to keep them warmed from the cold breeze that blows in the open desert (Exodus 40:38).

This soteriological development is also perceived in the liberating work of God in and through the life of Christ in the gospels. But this time in a holistic context, a context that includes all human beings made in the image and likeness of God. One may say that the summary of Jesus' mission to the world is embedded in John's manifesto: "The thief has come to steal, to destroy and to kill; but I am come that they might have life and have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). The evangelist is quite precise. The thieves are the rich who enriched themselves by oppressing the poor. But Jesus, the one sent from God is the life giver and he does this by feeding the poor (John 6:1-14); healing the sick, raising the dead and giving comfort to the brokenhearted, setting the oppressed free (Luke 4:18-19). Along this trend, Villa-Vicencio argues that in locating the Church in development, "...a

¹¹⁸ Balcomb, T. "God in the Old Testament" in *Systematic Theology 310*, unpublished lectures notes. (Pietermaritzburg: university of Natal, 2002) P. 7

vision of God's Kingdom on earth is a vision of a society within which justice reigns."¹¹⁹ In this sense, as God's agent in a world of socio-economic injustice, poverty and other forms of injustice and deprivation, the Church is challenged to manifest the will of God, which includes the affirmation of human values and dignity in development.

In the same vein, in his reflection on the 're-appropriation of human values in development,' Megesa points out that:

the 'Church' should be concerned about development and engaged in it because, in the present world, provision and development of the quality of life necessitates a constant struggle against the ethos of exploitation, oppression, intimidation and contempt of any human being. Positively it entails the creation of a creature of liberty, of freedom of liberation. And this is only another way of saying: that economic development hinges upon, and is enhanced by human values, shaped and protected, most effectively, by political actions and behaviors.¹²⁰

I find Megesa's view interesting in the sense that his argument reflects basically on human values in development. This view is supported by the task of the Church, whose theological responsibility is to restore justice and affirm human dignity within the context of God's impending reign, and is to join with others to ensure a qualitative improvement in human life.

The Church's response to poverty in the light of biblical perspective can be found in the thoughts of Gutierrez. He observed that the issue of development does in fact find its place in the more universal, profound and radical perspective of liberation. It is only within this framework that development finds its true meaning and possibilities of accomplishing something worthwhile.¹²¹ Gutierrez maintains that:

the biblical message, which presents the work of Christ as a liberation, provides the framework for this interpretation. In the Bible, Christ is presented as the one who brings us liberation. Christ the Saviour liberates man (sic) from sin, which is the ultimate root of all disruption of friendship and

¹¹⁹ Villa-vicencio, C. *A Theology of reconstruction: Nation building and human rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1992) P. 30

¹²⁰ Megesa, L. C. "Theology of integral development in Africa" in Agbasiere, J. T. & Zabajungu, B.K. (eds.) *Church contribution to integral development* (Uganda: Spearhead, 1998) P. 116

¹²¹ Gutierrez, G. *A theology of liberation* (London: SCM Press, 1973) P. 36

all injustice and oppression. Christ makes man (sic) truly free, that is to say, he enables man (sic) to live in communion with him, and this is the basis for all human brotherhood.¹²²

If the Christian community declares itself a community for the poor like the early Church was 'poor-centred' in words and deeds, I see no reason why the Church should not be part of the process of development which purpose is to eradicate poverty. At the same time, while the debate that the Church must engage in development as a response to poverty remains, it should be known that the condition of the poor is not the Church's whole mission, because if this was the case the Church would come to be just another social institution totally committed to the eradication of poverty throughout history.

Some possible strategies for the Church to engage in development as a response to poverty relative to our definition are listed below. Others are not really related to our definition above but they can serve as helpful tools for the church.

- ***Focus on healthy relationship building***

Throughout its life, the church has been good at ministering to the needs of people from spiritual to physical needs. The church has been and is involved in comforting families in times of crisis for example death. None the less, one of the weaknesses of the church is building a strong relationship between families, couples as well as church and state. This for me is imperative. The church must develop programs that focus on strong relationship building, taking into account the time we live in stressing on commitment to healthy relationships as a response to unhappiness, frustration, disappointment, emotional disorder, psychological impact, and HIV/AIDS, which is one of the results of poverty. These factors are against comprehensive well-being in any human relationship and therefore need attention. According to our definition a relationship that is not enjoyable or successful is poverty related. A poverty free relationship must first begin with human and God, between human beings and humans and creation. By so doing the church will

¹²² Ibid. P. 35ff.

help to create a society in which people are able to live happily even if they do not meet all their material needs but satisfied with their relationships.

● *The pulpit*

The pulpit can serve as a possible strategy and a major channel through which the Church can apply other strategies. It can be used to conscientize, mobilize and organize people to engage in development as a response to poverty. The pulpit can also become a central oral medium for conveying new ideas and changing attitudes. The Church has been successful, for example during the colonial period missionaries used the pulpit for undermining the cultural values of African people. In the future, the same medium can become a viable instrument for restoration of the people's confidence, in the same way as it was used during the Reformation in Europe.¹²³ Such approach requires a semantic change. Such change requires the Church to move from an ambulance ministry to a ministry of involvement and participation.¹²⁴

● *The poor as agents of their own transformation*

The traditional method of development as a response to poverty has always been 'top down' in the form of aid or relief or a temporary project undertaken by a developmental institution that comes into the community with its professionals and machineries and leaves afterwards leaving the indigenous people out of the development process. Consequently, such projects do not last because the local people who should have been trained to manage the project after the departure of the developmentalists have been left out. Modern developers have come to know that 'top down' development is eccentric and has very little hope of survival. As such, in recent times the concept of 'bottom up' development has emerged. In spite of their poverty, as people made in the image of God

¹²³ Mugambi, J. N. K. *From liberation to reconstruction* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers Ltd, 1995) P. 225

¹²⁴ Cochrane, J. R. *et al.* *In word and deed* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster publication, 1991) P. 53

the poor have the capability to become instruments of their own transformation if they are given the opportunity to be. Similarly, Pixley and Boff observe that “in theory and in practice, from moral and analytical standpoints, they have to be recognised as human beings who, however, oppressed and repressed, are still worthy of respect, permanent holders of inalienable rights and agents of their own liberation.”¹²⁵

Although it is imperative that the poor be agents of their own transformation yet the Church must be wise as a serpent and harmless as a dove in the process. In other words, the poor becoming agents of their own transformation must not be an imposition rather it must be an option by themselves because being poor or weak or oppressed is no guarantee that one will be an agent of liberation. To do so the poor or powerless must make a deliberate choice which we may call an option for the poor by the poor.”¹²⁶ However, to become agents of their own transformation the poor must be processed to be effective. As such the following requirements are essential:

- **Education:** the opposite of the popular slogan ‘knowledge is power and belongs to the people’ is the lack of knowledge is to be without power. In other words, to hold back knowledge from the people is to keep them powerless or weak. Education empowers. A positive response to poverty reduction is to educate the poor of who they are and what they have. Along this line of thought, the United Nations and other global NGOs enlighten us with the observation that large parts of the poor countries of the world are presently in an educational crisis. Because of their impoverishment the marginalized poor usually seem to be so deprived that they are subnormal or half people, devastated by twin catastrophes - rapid social change, with its breakdown in family structures, and poverty itself.¹²⁷

As such in his reflection on *human resources development*, speaking from an African perspective, Mugambi says that, “the biggest difference... between nations arises from

¹²⁵ Pixley, J. & Boff, C. *The bible, the church & the poor* (Wellwood: Burns & Oates, 1989) p. 128

¹²⁶ Carabine, D. & O'Reilly, M. *The challenge of eradicating poverty in the world: An African response* (Uganda: Uganda Martyrs University press, 1998) P. 208

difference in the availability of know-how, that is why the rapidly industrializing nations of South East Asia have given great priority to educational reform. The key to Africa's economic, social and industrial transformation is educational reform." He defines education as the transfer and modification of 'knowledge', experience, skills and attitudes. This is what I mean when I say knowledge is power and belongs to the people. Again another popular slogan is "give a hungry person a fish and you feed him for a day, but give him a rod and teach him how to fish you feed him for life." If the poor are motivated and skilfully trained they will improve their own life. The Church is an influential institution and has the potential to educate the poor. As Mugambi argues "the Church has been the most influential agent for education in the past. It has to maintain its lead in the future, if it is to continue enjoying a respectable position in African societies."¹²⁸ But education here does not only mean sitting in the classroom to become a scholar. It also means helping the poor acquire knowledge of self-identification, skills, gifts and talents. This approach will help the poor develop a new mindset as they rediscover that they are intrinsically related to God because they were made in the image of God.

- **Assets based community development (ABCD)** is another expression of 'bottom up' development or 'grass root' development or development 'from within'. As we saw above that the poor have the capability of becoming agents of their own transformation and destiny if they are mobilized and educated. The assets based community development approach is conceived as efforts of people in the spirit of self-help and self-employment using their own local knowledge and resources.¹²⁹ The implication here is people's initiative. The poor themselves are perceived as subjects rather than objects of development. "Assets based community development is the process by which local capacities are identified and mobilized. This mobilization mainly involves *connecting* people with capacities to other people, local associations, local business, local institutions, capital and credit. Therefore, growing community power

¹²⁷ Giggs, V. *Cry of the urban poor* (Monrovia: MARC, 1992) p. 186

¹²⁸ Mugambi, J.N.K. *From liberation to reconstruction* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1995) P. 224

¹²⁹ Mammo, T. *The paradox of Africa's poverty* (Lawrenceville: The Red Sea Press, inc.1999) P. 173

requires local groups focused upon connecting people's capacities so they can be useful.”¹³⁰

This strategy is to help locals evade the dependency syndrome, which keeps people permanent poverty. Its aim is to promote self-sufficiency and sustainability. This community development strategy starts with what is present in the community not with what is absent, or with what is problematic, or with the community needs. I find this strategy interesting because it challenges the perception that only outsiders can provide authentic help. Every person has capacities, abilities and gifts. Living a good life depends on whether those capacities can be used, abilities expressed and gifts given. The purpose of these strategies is to enable the Church enable people. Thus it assumes that the potential to be different, to be better, already lies within the people.¹³¹ In the gospel, Jesus said, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit - fruit that will last” (John 15:16). It is quite clear in development history that the key to bearing lasting fruit is not in development programs. The key is in enabling people become developers. It was Jesus' strategy. It must be the centre of our strategy too.

¹³⁰ Kretzmann, J. P. & McKnight, J. L. *Building Community from the inside out* (Chicago: ACTA,1993) p.18

¹³¹ Samuel, V. and Sugden, C. *The church in response to human needs* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans publishing company, 1987) P. 55

CHAPTER FIVE

5. CONCLUSION

This study has attempted to investigate the concept of poverty. Within this scope three theoretical concepts were discussed, each providing us with a different understanding of what poverty is.

We observed Amartya Sen's definition of poverty as capability deprivation. We saw that the definition of capability deprivation stands in opposition to the traditional indicator, which identifies poverty in terms of low income. This school of thought understands poverty in terms of the deprivation of basic capabilities. It provides three ways by which one can understand poverty as capabilities deprivation. Firstly, through common sense; secondly, there are influences on capability deprivation as well as on real poverty rather than on low income. This means income is not the only instrument in creating capabilities; and thirdly, the instrumental link between low income and low capability changes between different families and different people. The underlying rationale is that when the capabilities of the poor are enhanced they become productive people and the more their deprivation and poverty can be reduced.

Following Sen, we saw that Nurnberger approaches poverty from a socio-economic perspective. Within this context the causes of economic imbalances were discussed in terms of centre-periphery relationship. Our study showed three causes of these imbalances, the massive growth of human population; social securities and biological factors. Different types of human needs such as basic needs, immanent needs and transcendent need were identified. With Bryant Myers' holistic definition of poverty, we learned that the nature of poverty is fundamentally relational. In other words, poverty is the end of bad relationships. Relationships that are not enjoyable; relationships that are not for life; relationships that are unsuccessful; it is the lack of shalom in all its meanings. We also learned that the cause of poverty is fundamentally spiritual. In other words, sin is the cause of division and injustice in any relationship. It stands between human beings and God. It causes separation between people into

competing and conflicting voices. It divides us within society, one group rich and the other poor. It causes exclusion and demonizes others.

Finally we saw that theology and the biblical text have a major role to play in the discussion on poverty. On this establishment we saw that the church's involvement in development is not an option but a mandate from God as part of its holistic ministry to humanity.

Having seen that poverty means many things to many people, our study proceeded to develop an appropriate framework for the church in its development ministry among the poor to direct her into effective development ministry. Our study concludes with some possible strategies the church can apply in response to the plight of poverty.

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